

**Business Meeting Minutes
January 12, 2022**

I. Call to Order

Amanda Bailey called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m. AB SEPAC Co-Chairs Abe Gutierrez, Amanda Bailey, and Kara Lafferty; Secretary Erica Abbruzzese; Director of Special Education Jennifer Truslow; ABRHS Coordinator Susan Bohmiller; Lucienne Schmidt from the DEI Family Advisory, and eight community members were present.

II. Approval of Minutes

Review of the December 15, 2021, meeting minutes was postponed due to the number of agenda items.

III. Organizational/Business Issues

A. Updates from Monthly Meetings with Special Education Director

1. Significant Disproportionality Update

The district is creating an action plan to address the significant disproportionality finding of Black students being over-identified with communication disabilities. The Director is partnering with the Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning. Data indicated lack of clarity around eligibility and identification. The Multi-Tiered System of Support process will identify the steps to intervene prior to a student being referred for special education evaluation. AB has a consultation with DESE December 16th to outline the plan. Certain grant funds will be used for work with Instructional Support Teams and look at “healthy responsive teaching,” classroom material with diverse representation, and utilizing tools such as iReady and vocabulary curriculum. The SEPAC asked if there is a limitation on IDEA funds being used toward general vs. special education. There are narrow parameters for utilizing the funds for students already identified as needing special ed support. The District is reviewing data and the action plan to identify a broader application of the funds.

2. Timing and Equity Issues RE: Elementary IEP Progress Reports

Some schools have three report cards and therefore three IEP progress reports; others have two. Some schools still haven’t received IEP progress reports. The Director will raise this with the coordinators. The delay until February wasn’t known. A parent asked what home/school reporting looks like districtwide. The Director will bring it up at the next coordinator meeting to achieve better alignment and communication.

3. Extended School Year (ESY) Summer Dates and Planning

The SEPAC has worked with the district to get the dates and programming descriptions out as soon as possible. Summer 2022 ESY will take place July 5th-August 12th (while still individualized for students). DESE guidance was needed regarding pandemic constraints.

Staffing will likely be difficult due to teacher retirements, fatigue, and general shortages. Another goal is to have an ESY coordinator so that parents know who to contact with questions or issues before the first day. A parent asked about COVID Compensatory Services (CCS). Parents should have conversations with their child's team because that's where CCS decisions and recommendations are being made. DESE will continue to update with guidance regarding CCS.

4. District Self-Assessment for Tiered Focused Monitoring.

Every six years districts go through a comprehensive review of special education, civil rights, and English learner policies and programming. The self-assessment looks at specific indicators such as proper documentation, reviewing written policies, and programming for English learners. It needs to be submitted just before the end of the school year. When DESE comes for their site visit they use the self-assessment to decide what they will focus on. There will be a survey sent to parents as part of this process. On the state website there is some guidance for parents around the site visit during the 2022-2023 school year. It will include interviews, including with SEPAC officers. The process is beneficial to not only identify areas that are exemplary but also areas that are either deficient or could use improvement.

5. Proposed FY23 Budget

The proposed budget will be presented to the School Committee 1/13/22. Special education-related items can be found in the SEPAC newsletter, on the SEPAC Facebook page, on the District's website, and through a link in the agenda for today's meeting. Specific to FY2023 the district will focus on disproportionate outcomes for students in the "high needs" subgroup, post-COVID recovery support, and services. The district ranks "must happen" vs. "would like to happen" (Tier 1 vs. Tier 2) budget asks. These are outlined in the proposal. The Director reviewed specialized program coordination and the need to have a 1:1 ratio at a particular school. Currently it is 2:1. A question was asked regarding caseload vs. workload with regard to the additional coordinator proposal. They are looking at the needs of the staff and students as well as the size of the school and the level of need at each specialized program. The schools will be staffed, not just the programs. A parent asked what the role is of the special education coordinator. They supervise staff, support the administrative team within the building, and manage the initial- and three-year evaluation processes. They also coordinate communication with families and support general education teachers. A parent asked the difference between coordinators vs. coaches. Special education coaches are focused on the general education curriculum or supporting a general education teacher to differentiate across all children in their classroom. A parent asked what the district is doing to have a systematic and consistent reading, phonics, and writing curriculum. A conversation regarding the consistency of availability and access to decodable texts ensued. There may be too much discretion at each school as to decodable book purchase and access. They are talking about this across the district and with Teaching & Learning.

6. Proposed Budget Reductions

Concerning reductions include eliminating the Assistant Superintendent for DEI. These responsibilities will need to be reallocated to other admins as they cannot be shifted to the Director of Special Education. Also concerning is the proposal to eliminate one full-time

special education teacher. Reductions are being proposed at the learning center level, not at the program level. The SEPAC noted in order to implement co-teaching, the district had hired more special educators. How does eliminating a special educator move toward that goal? The district is looking at groupings, placing more students in classrooms with similar profiles and similar needs to be more “efficient” with special educators. The SEPAC shared parents report supplementing through private services as students’ needs aren’t always fully met in school, particularly parents of students with dyslexia. The district believes they can still meet all students’ needs with this proposed reduction. There are ongoing conversations regarding ensuring programming is fluid at the secondary level as the elementary kids move up. They will continue to watch special education teachers’ burden with the quantity of evaluations as a result of the pandemic. The Director will follow up regarding the number of co-taught classes and a breakdown of certified staff to paras. Data on the number of students with disabilities is reported by DESE every October 1st.

B. ABRSD Protocols for Responding to Incidents Involving Hate or Bias

The SEPAC was not listed as a stakeholder and was not asked to provide feedback on the protocols. The SEPAC received an apology and has been asked for input prior to the 1/27/22 School Committee meeting. ABRSD explicitly includes disability as a protected category.

1. Re-establishing SEPAC Involvement in District Initiatives

There is a broader issue of the AB SEPAC not being brought in up front as a stakeholder. The district strategic plan is another example of this; SEPAC leadership requested the SEPAC (and the ELPAC) be noted in the plan. They were added after the fact. How can the School Committee help the SEPAC to re-engage? The DEI Family Advisory was told not to directly contact staff, which is concerning. The SEPAC requested and was denied a seat on the DEI Family Advisory. There used to be a SEPAC update at every School Committee meeting. The Student Advisory Council is on the School Committee agendas. Advocacy may take place regarding the SEPAC, DEI Family Advisory, and the ELPAC, requesting that all future district-wide initiatives include those stakeholders.

C. Facilitating Home-School Communication

Examples of communication logs were presented. Communication can be written into IEPs in accommodations, the delivery grid, and Additional Information. The SEPAC noted the importance of balancing staff demands with meaningful communication that will be a value-add to caregivers and the team.

D. Extended School Year FAQ

The SEPAC publishes its FAQ regarding ESY advocacy each year.

E. Acton Town Election - School Committee Seats (2)

Our families need representation and allies on the School Committee. Per our bylaws, the SEPAC does not campaign on behalf of or in opposition to candidates for public office.

IV. New Business/Questions

A parent asked what reading monitoring tools are being used in the district. iReady,

Fundations, and the Abound app were noted. The Director will reach out to the Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning to get a chart for feedback.

V. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:59 p.m.

VI. Next Meeting

Wednesday, February 16, 2022, at 7:30 p.m. Virtual Meeting Over Zoom

All AB SEPAC meetings are open to the public. We encourage caregivers of children with disabilities and others interested in special education to attend. Please check our website (www.absepac.org) for information regarding upcoming events.

Respectfully submitted by Erica Abbruzzese, Secretary