

**Business Meeting Minutes
February 16, 2022**

I. Call to Order

Amanda Bailey called the meeting to order at 7:34 p.m. AB SEPAC Co-Chairs Abe Gutierrez, Amanda Bailey, and Kara Lafferty; Secretary Erica Abbruzzese; Director of Special Education Jennifer Truslow; and nine community members were present.

II. Approval of Minutes

Meeting minutes from December 15, 2021, and January 12, 2022, were reviewed. A motion to approve the minutes as written was voted and passed unanimously.

III. Organizational/Business Issues

A. Updates from Monthly Meetings with Special Education Director

1. Extended School Year Information

The district continues to plan for summer ESY. Programming, particularly for specialized programs, is under review. Summer 2021 services for Compass and Connections were three days per week; this is being increased to four days per week for summer 2022. Shawna Young will be the ESY summer coordinator. The confirmed start date is July 5th. The district will follow state guidance regarding COVID protocols. The SEPAC stressed that ESY should be determined on an individual basis and not limited to a set number of hours, days, or weeks.

The district is seeking to fill several positions, including a BCBA for Conant and Gates and a school psychologist for Conant. They are also advertising for a school counselor for Conant in the hope of filling the support role more quickly. An interim BCBA is in place. The district continues to struggle with transportation issues. Staffing shortages are not unique to A-B. Nurse monitors and van monitors are always difficult to staff. The district continues to use Indeed, SchoolSpring, and other means to recruit.

The district is working with DESE on an action plan due at the end of April to respond to the significant disproportionality finding regarding Black students overidentified with communication disabilities.

The Director shared the district is in the middle of the required Tiered Focus Monitoring self assessment. This includes records reviews to ensure IEPs have all components, gathering information from teachers regarding specialized equipment (Assistive Technology, e.g.), and verifying compliance with instructional grouping requirements. Data will be submitted to the state by the end of the school year. Civil rights, English learner, and special education data is submitted at the same time. Families can access previous Tiered Focus Monitoring and older Coordinated Program Review reports on the DESE site. The SEPAC will be part of next year's site visit and a survey will be

distributed from DESE to families.

The Director continues to work on clearly defining specialized programs, entry and exit criteria, program profiles, staffing, and transitions between schools (if necessary). The district will use grant funds over the summer to examine all programs, including the language based program at Douglas. A parent asked how programs matriculate students. The Early Childhood Program feeds some students into programs based on needs and service levels in the IEPs.

B. FY23 Acton-Boxborough Regional School District Proposed Budget

1. Summary of Advocacy to Date

The SEPAC has been advocating hard with the School Committee against any special education-related cuts to the budget. The proposed reduction of a special educator is not in alignment with the district's expressed values of:

- a. prioritizing student needs per the ABRSD Strategic Plan and Goals, including increased co-teaching;
- b. addressing disproportionate outcomes for students in the High Needs subgroups;
- c. and ensuring effective post-COVID recovery services and supports to address the social emotional and academic needs of those disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and school closures.

Building caseloads are a stated rationale for the special educator cut. The SEPAC urges the district to shift resources rather than cut them. The percentage of Students with Disabilities (IEPs) relative to the overall student population *has* been in decline, from 17% in 2014-15 to 14.7% in 2021-22. This percentage should remain steady even with an overall decline in the general student population. Importantly, implementation of districtwide general education Multi-Tiered System of Supports should not result in a further decline in the percentage of students with IEPs. A-B is behind the state average.

C. Staffing by Program/Building (See Acton-Boxborough FY23 Budget Binder)

The SEPAC leadership reiterated that tier 1 and tier 2 urgent and strategic needs are prioritized. Proposed budget needs were discussed by the Director of Special Education. A parent asked which school would be impacted by a staff reduction. Based on caseload, the reduction is slated to occur at Gates. The SEPAC leadership encourages all parents to take an active role engaging with the School Committee, the towns' finance committees, and other boards about how special education priorities matter for all families. Staffing by program can be found in the budget binder on the School Committee site.

A parent asked when co-teaching would be fully implemented. Co-teaching is still a goal although it was interrupted by the pandemic. The process of training and rolling out implementation is ongoing. The district continues to offer opportunities for teams to become familiar with strategies and how to use them in the classroom. This can take a couple years to become truly proficient. The Director shared they may bring back the consultant used for training prior to the pandemic.

D. IEP Progress Reporting Consistency

Some elementary schools have three general education report cards and others issue

none. This results in an equity issue where some parents receive three IEP progress reports and others receive only two. This was the compromise determined by previous special education directors. There has been a significant lag in issuing IEP progress reports in the buildings without gen ed report cards this year. A timeline had been established in the past. The SEPAC advocates for consistency across schools and to make IEP progress reporting more clear and useful. A parent expressed general difficulty navigating the PowerSchool portal and frustration at only being able to view progress one goal at a time through the platform.

E. Health Occupation Students of America (HOSA) Club Request RE: Student/Family Autism Experience Interviews

The SEPAC received a request from a high school club to interview families of students with autism and the students themselves. No interest was expressed. The SEPAC may want to develop a policy regarding these kinds of requests for research data or external survey participation, perhaps in line with the district policy/procedures.

IV. New Business

The Conant PTO has requested the SEPAC speak at a meeting. There is a basic rights workshop TBA. The Federation for Children with Special Needs has support available to families in a variety of languages. The Federation annual conference is upcoming; the SEPAC has three tickets through MassPAC Plus membership if parents, students, or staff are interested in attending.

V. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

VI. Next Meeting

Wednesday, March 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