

Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council (AB SEPAC)

Business Meeting Minutes January 11, 2023

I. Call to Order

Amanda Bailey called the Zoom meeting to order at 7:07 p.m. AB SEPAC Co-Chairs Amanda Bailey, Kara Lafferty, and Abe Gutierrez; Secretary Lynette Cassel; Director of Special Education Jennifer Truslow; School Committee Liaison to the SEPAC Adam Klein, and seven community members were present.

II. Approval of Minutes

Reading and approval of the October 19, 2022, meeting minutes was tabled.

III. Organizational/Business Issues

A. Updates from Monthly Meeting With Director of Special Education

The district continues to work on hiring. There was one potential finding from the Tiered Focus Monitoring (TFM) process regarding consolidating documentation for Out of District progress monitoring. An action plan has already been submitted to the state. The district received positive feedback regarding its use of Prior Written Notice (the Narrative Description of School District Proposal or N1 form). The working relationship with the SEPAC was also noted as a strength; A-B has one of the most functional SEPACs in Massachusetts. Parents should be aware that the official TFM report will not include all feedback provided through interviews as the state looks at a specific set of indicators. They will review other indicators when they return in three years.

B. District Literacy Update at 12/15/22 School Committee Meeting

The Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, the Director of Special Education, and others gave an update on district literacy initiatives and student performance to the School Committee. The SEPAC celebrated the district's work while noting that there is a group of late elementary/junior high students who missed the new emphasis on early identification and remediation of reading issues. The SEPAC asked for a plan to address their needs. The SEPAC also requests tracking for older remediated dyslexic students to maintain awareness and support as needed. The Director continues to work with coordinators about how information is conveyed as students move up. Some students at the high school receive intervention, but many services are more focused on social emotional and executive functioning skills.

1. Subgroup MCAS & iReady Performance

MCAS performance for Students With Disabilities continues to lag although there are pockets of growth. The district shared data on the fall iReady assessment with the School Committee. The SEPAC asked if it has been shared with families of the 377 individual students in grades 1-8 who are 2-3+ years behind in reading. This was broken

out by High Needs subgroups and race. The Director is having conversations with other members of the leadership team.

2. Multi-Tiered System of Supports Notification to Families

Staff are working together to figure out how to better communicate the MTSS process to families. There is a website and parents are sent a letter at the beginning of the cycle. No progress monitoring is shared unless requested by parents. There should be communication from reading specialists if students are being removed from the classroom for intervention; this is inconsistent across schools.

3. General Ed Progress Monitoring

There is a difference between elementary schools in the number of gen ed report cards that are issued (Merriam and McCarthy-Towne do not issue report cards; Blanchard has three per year). IEP progress reporting is linked to the timing/frequency of gen ed report cards, resulting in disparities. Without standardized progress reporting or homework at the elementary level, parents are often unclear about their students' performance. This has implications for Child Find and referrals for special education eligibility evaluations. iReady scores should be readily available upon parent/guardian request.

C. FY24 Preliminary District Budget—Superintendent Presentation to the ABRSC 1/12/23

The ABRSC meeting packet with budget information is available online at abschools.org. Priorities include “ensure effective supports for students with disabilities and students from underserved populations.” There has been a massive uptick in ELL students and thus two full-time educators to meet their needs are requested. There is a tight fiscal reality. Cuts will be presented to the ABRSC tomorrow without time for discussion. Any concerns or questions about staff cuts should be sent to the Superintendent for discussion at a future ABRSC meeting. All-day kindergarten will be discussed. The SEPAC previously voted to support universal all-day K given issues with students not being placed in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Students with IEPs should be placed based on individual education needs, not a default placement in half day gen ed/half day resource programs (thereby avoiding the district paying for their tuition). The Director confirmed this is the case.

D. School Resource Officer (SRO) Program Status

The new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) from the state for districts to use with police departments contains language specific to students with IEPs/504s. There are six parents who volunteered to be on the School Committee subcommittee to explore 1) whether or not to retain the SRO program and 2) adopting or adding to the MOU if warranted. The SEPAC can send input at any point regarding the MOU to the Superintendent and/or subcommittee chair, Adam Klein.

E. Access & Inclusion at PTO and School-Based Events

The SEPAC has representation at the district monthly joint PTO/PTF/PTSO leadership meeting. There are increasing questions about how to make PTO events more inclusive. Any entity using a district resource like a school building is required to provide reasonable accommodations. Staff have been collaborative, with student support during fun runs cited as an example. Students may be excluded by the nature and design of some PTO events (Gates spelling bee, e.g.). Ideas are welcome. The Blanchard dance has allowed access half an hour early for a less sensory-intensive environment. This is

the case for some cultural festivals. Physical access isn't always guaranteed, like doors being unlocked at the tops of ramps. There needs to be avenues for parents to request accommodations and concerns without needing to disclose disability status for their students. All staff—including special ed coordinators, BCBAs, and principals—are aware of the need for an equitable and inclusive lens. More consistent information to PTOs will be required due to annual turnover in their leadership. The new DEI coordinator is open to these conversations and may be helpful. Administrators should be reminded to ask these questions of PTOs. More opportunities are wanted for recreational and social opportunities in the broader communities, including SEPAC families meeting outside school.

F. Extended School Year Information

Program dates are July 5-August 11. ESY eligibility should be determined annually for each student. Programming should be individualized and not bound to predetermined dates/hours. Documented regression toward IEP goals/benchmarks is not required for eligibility. Anecdotal reporting matters following vacations. An ESY FAQ from the SEPAC will go to the mailing list. Alternative camp info will also be shared.

G. AB SEPAC Priorities for 2022-2023

1. Outreach & Community Building

a. McCarthy-Towne PTO Supporting Students Presentation Recap

Knowledge sharing was helpful for caregivers to understand the many acronyms and options. The principal attended to help explain as well. Ten parents/guardians attended.

b. Basic Rights: Transition Planning Workshop Recap

Thirty people registered and twenty-one attended. Slides and resources are available.

c. Autism Listening Session February 2023

This will have a solution-focused lens. The purpose is developing a list of recommendations regarding autism-specific programming. There will also be an online feedback form. Recommendations will be summarized and reviewed by the SEPAC in a parallel process to the previous dyslexia listening session.

2. Board Recruitment for Friends of AB SEPAC 501(c)(3)

The SEPAC continues to try to recruit officers for the Friends of organization. These roles must be filled. If the 501(c)(3) dissolves, funds would be dispersed to the district. The district would control the SEPAC's spending moving forward, with approval left to the School Committee.

IV. **New Business**

The current School Committee is very friendly to special education. Five seats are turning over in the upcoming election (3 in Acton and 2 in Boxborough). Caregivers of students with disabilities are encouraged to run. Cultivating relationships with the School Committee is critically important for the SEPAC. The last date to obtain papers is March 3 for Acton and March 24 in Boxborough. Per its bylaws, the SEPAC does not campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate.

Someone asked about a 14% mandatory increase from the state for Out of District

(OOD) tuition and transportation costs in the coming year. The Director shared that not every private program will increase; some may ask for more. There will be an intense process to show any increases are appropriate. The state has a formula to help districts with some costs (Circuit Breaker). The district financial team is discussing long-term implications. The SEPAC will not tolerate blaming special education for budget challenges. The Superintendent has done a good job monitoring the tone during budget discussions. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has been working with the network of private special education schools to be more consistent in provision of services during an event such as the COVID shutdowns of 2020. Schools are now more aware of how they can respond and give services. People often ask how to get OOD students back in district to mitigate costs. Sustainable programming must exist in-district that can meet student needs and be able to support them with a transition. Families have stay put rights on placements. There will not be pushback from the district or School Committee regarding the need for these placements. The discussion is how funds will be procured/allocated.

V. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

VI. Next Meeting

Wednesday, February 15, 2023, at 7 p.m. Over Zoom (Meeting ID: 882 1639 6903)

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

Respectfully submitted by Lynette Cassel, Secretary