

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

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## Business Meeting Minutes

March 15, 2023

*Followed by Friends of AB SEPAC 501(c)(3) Planning Meeting*

### I. Call to Order

Amanda Bailey called the meeting to order at 7 p.m. SEPAC Co-Chairs Amanda Bailey, Kara Lafferty, and Abe Gutierrez; Secretary Lynette Cassel; School Committee liaison to the SEPAC Adam Klein; and five community members were present.

### II. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made and passed to approve the January 11, 2023, meeting minutes as written.

### III. Organization/Business Issues

#### A. Updates from [Monthly Meeting With] the Director of Special Education

##### 1. Staffing

The district has started posting for ESY and many other staff to take over for long term substitutes and interim roles. There were no special education staff positions cut in the budget.

##### 2. Clarifying Length of IEP Meetings

IEP meetings should take as long as necessary to have meaningful parent participation. This may be over multiple meetings.

##### 3. The number of initial evaluations has been very high, requiring additional time and resources.

##### 4. The 504 coordinator for the district is Shannon Dandridge at the high school.

#### B. Recently Reported Accessibility Issues at Acton-Boxborough Regional High School

An ABRHS alum who is a wheelchair user posted on social media about inaccessibility at the high school, ableist comments by staff and students, and lack of disability representation in the curriculum. Health and sexual ed particularly omits physical disability and PE is not accessible. A parent noted that alternative writing assignments for PE can also be challenging. The SEPAC proposes to meet with the Director, the high school coordinator, and the principal to find out the status of these issues. A Co-Chair asked if the SEPAC would want the district to conduct an accessibility audit and if they would be required to implement any findings. There is a HS accessibility club that should allow for student input. A parent noted that the accommodation for moving between classes without stairs is to give more time, but then students miss class. There was a discussion about where to start requesting (which building) to review. The School Committee liaison suggested starting with the recent facilities review. Projects could be added on to the existing list of needs.

#### C. Disability Inclusion in K-12 Curriculums

This would be a conversation with the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Learning. There seems to be limited content during Disability Awareness Week. A more systemic awareness would have a wider reach. Examples include people advocating during IEP meetings to have education for a class about disability from the

school counselor. This would require support from the principals. There have been concerns about comments and questions other students have and asking individual students to process as they are still learning about their disabilities themselves. The district has brought in much social-emotional learning and curriculum but there is a growing edge on how to incorporate it. There is a cultural shift towards understanding with new leadership. There does seem to be some shift on the high school level in giving accommodations to everyone (e.g., typed notes and outlines in advance). How could the SEPAC consult to classroom teachers? This may be paired more often with DEI education. The way to be inclusive is not being modeled and/or taught by staff.

The turnover of the administration and staff prevents some of the quality professional development they are getting from being sustained and implemented with fidelity. Consultants are being utilized, like BCBA Jessica Minahan. There also seems to be much staff burnout. The SEPAC should continue to work to make connections with administrators. A parent was curious about models in other districts: having their own specialists do the trainings, have trainings in smaller parts, and putting it in policy or in IEPs. In A-B it seems that schools are trying to internally share information. The SEPAC could bundle requests through parent groups in different schools. Acknowledging the positive things that are being done already is important. There was a suggestion to say that in IEP meetings. There is an open SEPAC form for folks to acknowledge staff efforts.

A parent asked if the SEPAC could invite neurodivergent adults to share success with students. How can we highlight the many talents and skills (besides academics) that are important and useful in the world? The SEPAC could host an event to bring awareness (e.g., a movie screening and speaker). The high school has many career speakers; they could include neurodivergent presenters. Someone asked about how to include Out of District students in more programming. There could be a survey or public focus group about disability inclusion.

- D. Brainstorming Action Items to Address Ableism in ABRSD  
See above discussion.

- E. School Resource Officer Involvement With Students & Notification to School Communities Regarding Individual Behavior

The SRO sub-committee has just started asking about alternatives to the SRO program and getting data from the district. They hope to survey the community, then discuss how to proceed from consensus and bring it back to the ABRSC. There is a schedule and a deadline by the end of the academic year.

On Monday an entire school community was notified when a student left the grounds and the SRO was called to help. The district said there was a “safety issue” and they had to call. Members wondered if the student knew the SRO and other adults involved. How the incident was shared could be isolating and stigmatizing to the student. A parent shared in their experience their student did not know the crisis team. In their experience the school sent a school-wide email due to emergency vehicles being at school but not specific information other than a “medical issue.” The wrong support can be damaging long-term, and officers in uniform and some staff members may be considered a threat in students’ minds due to history. The parent also shared there was never a follow up with their family or an apology when an incident was not

handled well despite known triggers and supports. The parent would like to prevent this from happening to other kids.

How can caregivers hope to change who steps in to help when higher level staff don't always follow the plan that is in place? There is an unclear relationship between the special ed team and the general ed crisis team. During the time of crisis, the special education staff are most needed to prevent trauma. The protocols must be included in the behavior plan and the behavior plan included in the IEP. Someone suggested that IEPs should state that parents/guardians must be contacted with any change to a behavior plan. There is a need to differentiate crisis response and the SRO role in a response. Students should have established relationships with the crisis team and SRO. The question remains about communication with the community. There are questions about who is running a given incident (building coordinator vs. principal). Is there a practice in place about who is approving communication? A root cause seems to be that building coordinators are often so involved in many things that it becomes a time/staffing issue when they are unavailable.

#### F. Other AB SEPAC Priorities for 2022-2023

##### 1. Outreach & Community Building

- a. The SEPAC will contact the ABRHS Accessibility Alliance advisor.
- b. The SEPAC Early Childhood Program presentation will be rescheduled.
- c. Brendan Mahan will present on ADHD Essentials 4/10/23 at 6:30 p.m. online.
- d. The autism listening session is to be held at Sargent Memorial Library.

#### V. New Business

The SEPAC cannot endorse but encourages folks to ask questions of the School Committee candidates. The SEPAC has been invited to attend an ABRSC policy subcommittee meeting to review the district's efforts regarding gen ed progress reporting to families. There is consensus the School Committee policies regarding progress reporting should be reviewed and likely agreement that procedures should be developed.

Open Door Theater and the Miracle League have accessible programming. SPED Child Mass has a monthly newsletter with many events. CASE collaborative has a nice newsletter.

Superintendents around the state are pushing for additional state reimbursements for Out of District tuitions due to changing rates (14% increase instead of usual 3%).

#### VI. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:48 p.m.

#### VII. Next Meeting

Wednesday, April 12, 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](http://www.absepac.org)) for information regarding upcoming events.

*Respectfully submitted by Lynette Cassel, Secretary*