

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

Business Meeting Minutes

May 17, 2023

I. Call to Order

Amanda Bailey called the virtual meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. Co-Chairs Amanda Bailey, Kara Lafferty, and Abe Gutierrez; Secretary Lynette Cassel; Director of Special Education Jennifer Truslow; School Committee member Leela Ramachandran; and six community members were in attendance.

II. Approval of Minutes

III. Organization/Business Issues

A. Updates from the Director of Special Education

1. Assistant Director of Special Education Search

The screening committee is composed of an elementary principal, coordinators, a BCBA, special educators, the elementary psych chair, and a SEPAC representative. Only 7 of 20 applications had the appropriate education and experience. After interviewing 5, none were advanced. The application was reopened. Finalists will meet with special educators and the special ed leadership team. There will be no family forum for the Assistant Director position. The SEPAC hopes to consult with SEPACs from any finalists' districts.

2. Role of School Counselors in Pre-Referral Process

When families share a new diagnosis with the school, counselors may help obtain accommodations. The question is how to help the families and school counselor know when to use a 504 plan and/or to ask for an evaluation. At the elementary school level there is a clear process to determine when an evaluation may be needed, but this is not clear at the high school level. This is important so the needs are protected and documented. The Director will be talking to the high school counseling department. Clarity and communication are important. More info will be shared at the next meeting.

3. Post-IEP Meeting Feedback Form for Parents/Guardians/Students (14+)

The district used to send out a feedback form for families after IEP meetings. This was discontinued due to admin turnover. A new form is being drafted with the SEPAC and the Director. It could include seeking input from transition-age students (14+). This may be helpful with the new IEP form.

4. Staffing

There are a number of positions being interviewed and filled. Searches are progressing. There are more applicants this year. Right now the teaching positions have been posted but not yet the assistant positions (except through word of mouth). AB has been participating in some virtual job fairs.

B. Feedback from ABRHS Accessibility Alliance

Earlier in the year an alum shared some challenges with physical accessibility at the HS on social media. The Accessibility Alliance student group invited the

SEPAC to attend a meeting. Feedback included issues with staff not implementing accommodations and the need for support when advocating because they don't feel heard or are dismissed. Staff allies and training are needed. They didn't know who the 504 coordinator for HS was. Transition planning was split between counselors and the IEP team. The HS used to have a transition specialist. There is pervasive, rampant ableism, including standard notes on report cards. The whole community needs education about ableism. There should be disability representation in the curriculum. Students also shared concerns about de-leveling the courses. There is a plan to go back in the fall to determine what issues SEPAC can help bring forward together. Students can be general members of the SEPAC. There is a similar group newly formed at the junior high level. School Committee member Leela Ramachandran offered to also speak with students.

C. District Bullying Prevention Plan Review Team Update

The district team revising the current plan includes SEPAC representation. Advocacy includes ensuring IEP/504 accommodations are followed during investigations, defining teasing/harassment, determining staff to student ratios in unstructured settings, and linking to other guidance, policies, and procedures. The current plan and more resources are available online at abschools.org. The group also considered staff bullying toward students.

D. Autism Listening Session 6/3/23 & Feedback Form

The SEPAC's goals are to establish 1) what is working well and 2) what would help improve programming and services. The SEPAC will report findings and draft recommendations at a future meeting. The last autism focus group was in 2010.

E. Updates on SEPAC 2022-2023 Goals & Priorities

The SEPAC followed up on outreach and community building issues identified in the 2021 survey. The organization reestablished SEPAC meetings on the district calendar, hosted special ed coordinators, connected with coordinators and principals, is doing outreach to new School Committee members, has ongoing participation with joint PTO, presented to the early childhood program PTO, and met with ABRHS Accessibility Alliance. There is a pending listening session for parents/guardians of students with autism. The SEPAC participated in the Tiered Focus Monitoring process. The SEPAC did not issue a survey in 2022-2023. As for community education, there was an annual Basic Rights presentation on transition planning, the ADHD Essentials workshop, a presentation to the McT PTO, and ongoing resource sharing via the newsletter and social media with an emphasis on no-cost opportunities. Info on the new IEP form is pending. Other SEPAC activities included advocacy regarding sharing progress reports with families for all students. The School Committee policy subcommittee will take this up in the fall. There is SEPAC representation on the district Welcome Center committee and the Assistant Director search. The SEPAC also served on a MassPAC panel for new SEPAC members.

F. Officer Descriptions for 6/14/23 Annual Meeting & Elections

The SEPAC may have up to 3 chairs and 2 secretaries. Descriptions of these positions and their responsibilities can be found in bylaws. Contact abrsdsepac@gmail.com if you would like more info. Other positions on the executive board include Past PAC Chair and standing committee chair. There are

many informal opportunities to be involved: updating site resources, coordinating and advertising workshops, etc.

IV. New Business

No new business was forthcoming.

V. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

VI. Annual Meeting & Officer Elections

Wednesday, June 14, 2023, at 7 p.m. in the RJ Grey Junior High Library

To be followed by a Friends of AB SEPAC 501(c)(3) Meeting & Officer Elections

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