



Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council

Annual Meeting & Election of Officers
Wednesday, June 11, 2014 at 7:30 pm

Agenda

- I. Call to Order
- II. Approval of Minutes
Review and approval of April 9, 2014 meeting minutes
- III. Organization/Business Issues
 - A. AB SpEd PAC By Law Correction
 - Review and approve By-Law correction re: annual elections
 - B. Election of New Officers
 - Seek candidates and elect new officers
 - C. Priorities for Next Year
 - New practice requiring all teachers to sign off on student IEPs and 504s within 5 days of receiving a signed IEP/504 and prior to the start of each year.
 - Revise Special Education Parent Handbook to reflect K-12 regionalization.
 - MCAS analysis of Special Education student performance
 - Create parent support group
- IV. New Business – Other topics on people's minds
- V. Open Issues
 - A. MCAS – 4th and 7th grade ELA performance for students with disabilities is weak
 - B. Futures Education findings that our student to assistant ratios are high by peer standards
 - C. Concerns about the process for combining outside specialists' recommendations with district evaluations/recommendations and appropriately incorporating those recommendations into the IEP
 - D. Mandatory special education training/professional development for regular and special education staff – hiring dual certified staff
 - E. Enhanced summer school and after school/extracurricular programming
 - F. Increased use of technology in IEP development/revision process
- VI. Adjournment

All AB SpEd PAC meetings are open to the public. We encourage parents of children with special needs and others interested in special education to attend. Please check our website: www.abspedpac.org for current information regarding upcoming events.

This meeting will be followed immediately by a brief Friends of AB SpEd PAC meeting.



Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council

Business Meeting

March 19, 2014

I. Call to Order

Nancy Sherburne called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm. The following AB SpEd PAC Board members attended the meeting: Nancy Sherburne, Carolyn Sprague, Bill Guthlein, Julie Towell and Paul Murphy. Four other members also attended the meeting.

II. Approval of Minutes

Review and approval of February 2014 minutes – Meeting minutes for February 25, 2014 were reviewed. A motion was made to approve the minutes as written and was passed unanimously.

III. Organizational/Business Issues

A. Upcoming presentations and meetings

- March 26, 2014 (7 pm) – ‘CASE Planning Post 22’ with Michael Weiner
- March 30, 2014 (10 am – 2 pm) ‘Special Needs Resources Fair’ Merrimac Valley, free admission, will have vendors, assistive technology, providers, and summer camps
- April 9, 2014 (7:30 pm) – Next AB SpEd PAC meeting in the Junior High Library
- May 5, 2014 (7:00 pm) – Cyber Safety presentation at the new Maynard High School
- May 27, 2014 (7:00 pm) – Children’s Mental Health presentation by Dr. Jeff Bostic in the Junior High Library, on the topic of anxiety and depression in children, co-hosted by Pupil Services and the SpEd PAC

B. 2015 Budget Concerns

There is considerable concern over the loss of a SpEd Coordinator from the 2014-15 School budget. This position was designed to give relief to the two SpEd Coordinators currently in place, but particularly to the Elementary SpEd Coordinator whose workload expanded with the K-12 regionalization with Boxborough. She is now responsible for overseeing 120 staff positions in six separate schools across two towns.

The budget reduction was particularly disappointing given that a nearly \$1 million surplus was found by the town that same week and applied to reduce the tax levy to Acton residents rather than to offset the needs for essential services such as fire, police, and education. School committee members contacted were unaware of the town budget surplus and where those monies came from.

Nancy and others discussed possible contributing factors to the last minute budget reduction. Some of those included timing of new Superintendent hiring (concurrent with final budget deliberations), K-12 regionalization of the school district, restructuring of the CASE Collaborative payment structure, which increased special education expenses unexpectedly, pressure from the Finance Committee to reduce the education budget, ideas surrounding the exiting superintendent's legacy, and apparent communication disconnects between the school and town budget processes.

Bill and Nancy are working on a letter(s) for distribution to the Superintendent, School Committee, Finance Committee, Board of Selectmen and possibly the Beacon newspaper. They wish to identify the PAC's concerns with the 2015 budget process, lack of warning regarding last minute budget changes, and the impact of those changes on special education students, as well as ask the various boards what plans exist to address those concerns.

SpEd PAC members are encouraged to attend Financial Committee and Acton Leadership Group meetings to increase the flow of information between town boards and the SpEd PAC and to increase community understanding of special education needs and the Pupil Services' budget. For example, few people appreciate that Pupil Services handles all civil rights issues (bullying, harassment & 504 implementation), the education of English language learners, and physical and mental health services (nurses and psychologists) in addition to special education services.

Further to budget discussions, the addition of 3.5 assistant principals was raised. These positions were introduced to oversee increased requirements of the new state teacher evaluation law, which are quite labor intensive. Assistant principals also attend to safety issues such as bullying and increased mental health issues in the student body. Nancy welcomes the additional attention to these issues, particularly the bullying because she has spoken with a number of parents who feel their children's bullying experiences are not being labeled as such, appropriately reported or responded to by the schools. It was also pointed out that assistant principals could be helpful in promoting cultural integration within the schools. At the recent Chinese New Year celebration one participant noted that very few Caucasians attended the event. Parents are hearing about and experiencing tension in the community arising from different cultural values and work ethics. Regarding the addition of 3.5 assistant principals, Nancy would like to request that the hiring committee seek assistant principals with special education background to help mitigate the loss of the special education coordinator position in the budget.

C. Request for new district procedures to enhance communication between regular and special education staff – Nancy and Bill talked with Liza Huber about instituting new district procedures to reduce disconnects between regular teachers and special education teachers and to enhance the consistent implementation of IEPs by:

- Requiring all teachers to sign off on student IEPs within 5 days of receiving a signed IEP and prior to the start of each school year to ensure that all staff are working to the current educational plan.
- Ensuring that professional development is open to all staff. Inviting education assistants to participate in all reading and math workshops with teachers and providing opportunities for outside training in special education. Special Education assistants are critical to implementation of IEP's and communication with regular teachers.

IV. New Business – Other topics discussed included the drop in enrollment, post-secondary outcomes, and a review of Dr. Nadine Gaab's talk on Dyslexia.

The town has predicted a significant drop in enrollment for a number of years and used this anticipated event as a rationale for restraining/reducing budget growth. However an actual drop in enrollment has only recently begun in a very modest way. One contributing factor to steady enrollment is the new housing that's been built in Acton. Another is the Acton-Boxborough School District's reputation for both a strong overall education system and a greater continuity of services for students with autism than neighboring districts. (Sudbury, for example, refers its autism students to NEC.)

Regarding post-secondary outcomes it was noted that the Massachusetts State Performance Plan asks schools to track 20 performance indicators for students one year post graduation per the Office of Special Education Programs. No data is collected for five-year outcomes. Related to post-secondary outcomes was mention of a "Planning Post 22" talk through CASE. One member also expressed interest in a presentation on "Considerations Prior to Turning 18" so that services such as Social Security could be discussed.

Dr. Gaab's Dyslexia and Reading presentation was well attended and focused mainly on diagnosis and early intervention for young children. Her research indicated that it was important to intervene while the developing brain retained its plasticity. She is clearly an excellent resource with connections to colleagues who could come speak about their research on ADHD and autism.

There followed more free-roaming discussions of various other topics including independent evaluation strategies, budget support at town meeting, reasons why the Selectmen may not support the school budget, continuation of the summer program and funding for assistant teachers.

V. Adjournment – the meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm.

VI. Next Meeting – April 9, 2014 at 7:30 pm in the R. J. Grey Library.

Respectfully submitted by Carolyn Sprague, Secretary



By-Laws: Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council

As amended June 11, 2014

Article 1: Name

The name of this organization shall be:

The Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council (AB SpEd PAC).

Article 2: Purpose

The purpose of this Organization shall be to:

1. Improve communication among parents/guardians, staff, administrators (both within and outside of the district), and the School Committee on special education issues.
2. Serve as a resource and support network for parents/guardians of children with special needs regarding procedures, educational, and non-educational issues.
3. Advise the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee/district on issues related to the education and safety of special education students and participate regularly in the planning, development and evaluation of the districts' special education programs.
4. Serve as advocates for equal educational opportunities for all special needs children.

Article 3: Membership

1. General membership shall be open to the public.
2. Voting memberships shall be any general member who is a parent or a guardian of a child with special needs, with or without an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan who resides in or whose child attends school in Acton or Boxborough. Voting membership is required to vote in annual officer elections and all other business that comes before any AB SpEd PAC meeting.

Article 4: Executive Board

Section 1: Membership

1. Officers of the AB SpEd PAC shall be the Chairperson and Secretary. The Secretary position may be shared by two individuals and the Chairperson position may be shared by three individuals. (All fundraising and financial activities are now conducted by the "Friends of AB SpEd PAC, Ltd." organization. See Article 8 below for further information.)
2. The Executive Board shall consist of voting and non-voting members. The voting members will include all officers of the AB SpEd PAC, one chairperson of one standing committee, and one Past PAC Chairperson. Non-voting members may include representatives from each of the following: Special Education Administration and Regional School Committee.

Section 2: Duties

Duties of officers of the Executive Board shall be as follows:

1. Chairperson(s)

- a. Set the agenda and preside at all meetings of the organization and meetings of the Executive Board.
- b. Act as primary liaison to the Superintendent, School Committee and Director of Pupil Services.
- c. Execute and supervise responsibilities related to contracts and agreements in the organization's behalf, and sign any such contracts and agreements on behalf of the Executive Board.
- d. Oversee the functioning of the AB SpEd PAC committees, special projects, and events.
- e. Oversee management of the AB SpEd PAC website: ensure that content is kept current, meeting minutes are posted in a timely manner and website hosting services are renewed annually.

2. Secretary(s)

- a. Record, disseminate and file the minutes of the meetings of the Executive Board and general PAC meetings.
- b. Maintain the organization's records, including a current membership list.

3. Standing Committee Chairpersons

As needed for such topics as Program Development, Parent Support, Resource/Information, Legislative Issues and/or Liaison Coordinator.

- a. Recruit members and hold committee meetings, as necessary.
- b. Provide annual objectives to the Executive Board at the beginning of the year.
- c. Report committee activities to the Executive Board and the full membership.

6. Past PAC Chairperson

- a. Advise PAC Chairperson(s) on ongoing issues of organizational concern.
- b. Provide continuity and support to the PAC Chairperson(s).

Article 5: Elections

Section 1:

All AB SpEd PAC officers are elected by the voting membership at the Annual meeting held in the Spring. If an officer position becomes vacant mid-term, a special election may be held at any time throughout the year to fill that position. All officers' terms will expire on June 30th of the subsequent school year.

Section 2:

In the event that the Executive Board members have a concern about the actions or behavior of another Board member, the AB SpEd PAC Chair(s) will give the individual in question written notice of their concerns and an opportunity to make the appropriate changes prior to initiating action to remove the individual from office. A member of the Executive Board may be removed by a majority vote of the Executive Board for behaving in a manner unbecoming a representative of the organization or for taking actions counter to the goals/purposes of the organization. The Executive Board members may appoint an Interim Board member to fill the resulting vacancy until the next election is held at which time a permanent replacement will be elected by the voting membership of the PAC.

Article 6: Meetings

Section 1:

A schedule of meetings shall be determined and published by the Executive Board.

Section 2:

At any PAC meeting, five voting members must be present to constitute a quorum for business requiring a vote.

Section 3:

In accordance with the School Committees' policy, File BDFB, the Director of Pupil Services and the SpEd PAC Chairperson(s) will meet quarterly to discuss planning, development and evaluation of the districts' special education programs. Other staff, SpEd PAC Board members and the School Committee liaisons(s) may also be included at these meetings.

Section 4:

The SpEd PAC may upon invitation present formally to the School Committee two times a year to:

- Report to the School Committee on the goals of the Special Education Parent Advisory Council for the upcoming year; and
- Report to the committee on the progress on the goals of the Special Education parent Advisory council during the year.

The Special Education Parent Advisory Council presentations to the School Committees shall be made at the September or October meeting and the June or July meeting, subject to the Special Education Parent Advisory Council's consultation with the Chair of the respective School Committees.

Article 7: Amendments

These By-Laws may be amended by a vote of two-thirds of the voting membership present at any Business Meeting, provided that written notice of the proposed amendments is given prior to the meeting.

Article 8: Grants, Donations and Fundraising

The AB SpEd PAC has decided not to pursue grants and donations or engage in fundraising. Instead it has decided to create a separate 501(c)(3) organization called "Friends of AB SpEd PAC, Ltd." for the sole purpose of raising funds to support and advance the mission of the AB SpEd PAC. By conducting fundraising through the "Friends of AB SpEd PAC" organization, monies may be raised and dispersed independently without needing to deposit funds with the town Treasurer and/or submit requests for disbursement through the School Committee or any other Town body.

Article 9: Non-Permissable Activities

The AB SpEd PAC does not participate in political campaigning on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office, nor does it attempt to influence legislation.

Notwithstanding any other provision of these articles, the organization will not carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on (a) by an organization exempt from federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code, or (b) by an organization, contributions to which are deductible under section 170(c)(2) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

Article 10: Parliamentary Authority

In the event that the AB SpEd PAC's By-Laws are silent on an issue, the rules contained in the current edition of "Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised" shall govern the AB SpEd PAC.

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