



Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council

Business Meeting
Friday, Jan. 20, 2012

MEETING MINUTES

I. Call to Order

Nancy Sherburne called the meeting to order at 10:07 am. The following Board members attended the meeting: Bill Guthlein and Nancy Sherburne. Also in attendance was School Committee member Paul Murphy as well as three other AB SpEd PAC members.

II. Approval of Minutes

The approval of November 15, 2011 meeting minutes was deferred until February due to an unexpected death in the Secretary's family.

III. Organizational/Business Issues

A. Release of New Parent Handbook– Nancy shared that the “Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Handbook” has been completed and published electronically on the AB SpEd PAC's website. Due to its size it was too expensive to publish and distribute in hard copy. However, eventually a few copies will be printed and placed in each school building as well as in the Pupil Services Lending Library at the Admin. Building. However, we are waiting for MassPAC to finish vetting the content before we print those hard copies. Nancy passed around a copy of the Handbook she had printed at home for parents to look at. It is available to all families at www.abspedpac.org. She mentioned that the challenge is making it visible to parents on an ongoing basis. We are exploring adding a link to the Handbook from Pupil Services home page as well as from each school's website to increase its visibility.

B. Secretary and Treasurer Positions Open – Currently the PAC has openings for both the Secretary and Treasurer positions. Nancy shared that one of our officers has recently taken a teaching position in the district, which unfortunately makes her ineligible to continue on as an officer in the PAC. In addition, another officer has had a recent death in her family and increased family responsibilities that require her to step down at this time. So, if anyone present is interested in volunteering for either of those positions or knows anyone who might be interested, please have them contact Nancy or Bill. One member asked about the responsibilities of the Treasurer's position and generously offered to fill that vacancy. Nancy said we'd need to publicize the openings and ask for any other interested

candidates before we could vote on a new officer. Hopefully we can do that at our next meeting.

C. Summary of School Committee & Admin. Meetings –Updates were given on new integrated summer programming for students with social pragmatic IEP goals, district use of new assessment tools, and relocation of one kindergarten section from Gates to Merriam.

1. Summer Programming - Nancy updated the group on summer programming efforts for students with social pragmatic IEP goals, specifically students on the autism spectrum. Liza had shared at the last PAC-PS monthly meeting that she was working with Erin Bettez in Community Education to develop some summer offerings for these students around drama, cooking, etc.
2. New Assessment Tools – Deb Bookis gave a presentation at the last School Committee meeting on assessments, highlighting some of the new assessment tools the district has recently implemented. She spoke about the difference between summative (cumulative/end of year) and formative assessments (periodic assessments to gauge progress throughout the year). The district is incorporating more formative assessments at all grade levels and in all subjects to inform teaching throughout the school year.
3. Relocation of one section of Gates kindergarten to Merriam – Due to the space limitations at Gates (Art and other specials are conducted in the hallway) the School Committee is discussing the possibility of moving one section of kindergarten from Gates to Merriam, which has more space available.

D. FY '13 Budget Implications for Special Education – Nancy and Bill expressed concern that the FY'13 Level Service budget Dr. Mills proposed actually includes a \$105,000 reduction in funding for special education assistants from FY'12. They don't believe the district can continue to provide the current level of service to special education students while cutting the budget this significantly especially since the district cut \$150,000 from this line item in FY'11. A student's need for special education assistant support is a documented IEP mandatory service, so the only way to determine if we could realize these savings would be to have done a comprehensive assessment of both Districts' IEPs. It's not clear to us that any such analysis was done. Nancy and Bill sent a letter to Dr. Mills regarding their concerns and have a meeting set on Monday, Jan. 23rd to discuss this issue. Paul Murphy shared an email with the PAC that he had received from Don Aicardi in response to an email request for greater clarification on this topic. Unfortunately, the email didn't provide greater clarity on the decision making process that led to reducing this line item in the FY'13 budget.

- E. Central MassPAC Meeting Summary – Nancy shared that she had recently attended a meeting of multiple SpEd PACs from surrounding towns. Leslie Leslie, the new FCSN Coordinator for MassPAC, spoke at that gathering regarding the need to work more closely together, co-sponsor events, and share resources and lessons learned to further opportunities for all special education students/families in neighboring towns. It was a great networking opportunity and Nancy hopes we can co-sponsor more events with Maynard and Littleton in particular. She also mentioned that Leslie was very complimentary of the AB SpEd PAC Parent Handbook that we just released.
- F. PAC Survey Report – Bill shared highlights from the PACs draft Survey Report. One of the key findings was a disconnect between regular and special education progress reporting. Special education progress reports document student progress towards a student’s IEP goals while report cards document student progress towards mastery of grade level curriculum standards. Progress in these two areas can be highly divergent. A student can be making great progress toward their IEP goals while not making adequate progress in the general curriculum. The PAC would like to see all student progress information connected for parents and students through a common framework. Another issue the survey feedback revealed was a continuing parent fear of retribution towards either parent/child if parents are open/honest with the district. About 20% of families surveyed seemed to feel this way, which is a significant percentage. The PAC and Pupil Services want to try to find ways to reach this group of families to better understand and hopefully alleviate their concerns. A third issue, which continues to be raised by families is the need for better summer/extended year programming, particularly for students on the autism spectrum. Both the fear of retribution and need for better summer programming were raised by our previous Parent Survey.
- G. MCAS Report and Meeting with Administration – Bill shared highlights from his 2011 MCAS analysis. At the elementary level McCarthy-Towne’s school wide SGP is lower than the district average and in some cases below the state average. This applies to both general education students and special education students. At Conant there was an enormous drop in SGP from the previous year for special education students in ELA (65 students in grades 4-6). At the Junior High this year special education students’ SGP scores in Math jumped after the interventions the district put in place last year to now show solid progress for this group of students. Bill noted that Gates seems to perform very well on MCAS year to year. One parent observed that there seems to be a big difference between how Gates handles MCAS preparation and how Conant does. Her child at Conant is constantly bringing home MCAS packets while she

doesn't see this from her child at Gates. It appears that Gates may cover MCAS preparation within its curriculum very effectively.

- H. Website Design Update – Nancy shared that she and her husband, Karl, are getting very close to being able to launch the new AB SpEd PAC website. They have reorganized the information to make the site easier to navigate, added lots of new resources, including the new AB SpEd PAC Special Education Parent Handbook, specialists and local support groups and services.

IV. New Business

- A. Peer mentoring – Several parents expressed an interest in opportunities for peer mentoring within the elementary schools. One parent had a child who wanted to tutor other students and others had children they thought would benefit greatly from peer mentoring.
- B. Social groups – Parents expressed a desire for more social groups in Acton instead of having to travel to surrounding towns. One suggestion was to create a games night once/week modeled on the Saturday night activities at the High School this year.
- C. Lack of gifted/talented programs in Acton/MA – Parents expressed a need for gifted/talented programs within the Acton and Acton-Boxborough school systems. There was discussion about other states like CA and MD who have these programs and what the general requirements are for qualifying for these programs in those states.
- D. News article request – One parent requested that the PAC write an article on regular and special education supports available in the schools, the role of the Child Study Team and the requirements to qualify for special education services. Nancy shared that this information is covered in the new Special Education Parent Handbook that the PAC just released.
- E. Concerns at the Integrated Preschool – One parent expressed concerns about the new section of the Integrated Preschool held at Acton Children's Center. Concerns center around whether or not there are enough general education students attending the program for it to qualify as an integrated program vs. being a substantially separate classroom; whether direct service time to students is being negatively impacted by travel time to ACC from other school campuses; and that Early Intervention staff are feeling disrespected by APS staff in Team meetings regarding service recommendations for students entering APS.

V. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:45 am.

Next Meeting: AB SpEd PAC Board Meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 8, 2012 at 7:30p.m. in the R.J. Grey Junior High Library.

Respectfully submitted by Nancy Sherburne