



Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council

Business Meeting

September 11, 2013

- I. Call to Order

Nancy Sherburne called the meeting to order at 7:40 pm. The following AB SpEd PAC Board members attended the meeting: Nancy Sherburne, Bill Guthlein, and Paul Murphy. Seven other members also attended the meeting.
- II. Approval of Minutes

Review and approve minutes – The meeting minutes from January and June 2013 were not ready for approval and will be reviewed at the next meeting.
- III. Organizational/Business Issues
 - A. Meeting schedule & contact list for AB SpED PAC & Friends

Organizations - Nancy passed out an annual meeting schedule including SpED PAC business and PAC-Pupil Services quarterly meetings for the 2013-2014 school year to all attendees. A contact list for the AB SpED PAC and Friends Organizations was also distributed. Julie Towell's and Paul Murphy's email addresses need to be changed to reflect the new school email convention: name@abschools.org.
 - B. Open Meeting Law Training for all Board members - Nancy sent an email to the officers about reviewing the Open Meeting Law Manual. Each year elected officers are to sign a receipt stating that they have read and understand the requirements of the rules/regulations. Nancy highly recommended that board members attend an Open Meeting Law training being offered by the district Sept. 18 or Sept 25, 2013 at 7:00 pm in the ABRHS auditorium. The district's training gives the highlights as well as any changes in the rules/regulations and there is also Q&A.
 - C. Recent special education staffing changes - The new early childhood coordinator is Joseph Gibowitz. He was described as professional, hands on, good at prioritizing, and someone who values parent involvement and feedback. The new Executive Director for CASE is Michael Baldasarre. There's been some friction between him and long-standing CASE Colebrook staff members.
 - D. Priorities for the year
 - Speakers & coordination of events with Maynard & Sudbury - Bonnie offered to arrange speakers for the year. We are cosponsoring several speakers with Sudbury and Maynard this year and don't want to repeat topics already scheduled in their communities, so will try to select speakers on complementary topics. Nancy shared a list of the topics that Maynard and Sudbury have so far with Bonnie. Julie said

that Jeff Bostic is willing to speak in the spring (he needs a few dates as well as suggested topics to speak on). He is a Pediatric Psychiatrist who will speak to mental health issues in children such as depression and anxiety. His fee is \$250/hr with a minimum of 2 hours. Bonnie also mentioned that we'd had good luck last year with speakers from the MA Neuropsychological Society Speaker's Bureau, which has a list of available topics and speakers. George Bamfo suggested it would be nice to bring in a speaker to share student success stories. Bonnie thought Dan Habib (a NH documentarian with two movies) might be a good presenter and wondered if other SpEd PACs might cost-share. Paul Murphy suggested a speaker related to medical interventions for autism. It was noted that medical information needs to be well researched before it's presented because there are many claims about effectiveness that haven't yet been proven scientifically.

- AB Special Education PAC Policy revision - Nancy said five to six years ago the SpEd PAC fought hard to get a policy created to define our relationship with the school committee in a formalized way because we can't do our jobs as elected officers without SC support. However, the current SC policy is too restrictive in that it limits (or can be construed to limit) the number of times and times of year in which the PAC can present to the School Committee. We need more freedom to present to the school committee whenever the need arises and not be limited to one presentation in the fall and one in the spring. We don't want to be artificially restricted if a time sensitive special education issue arises. No other organization has such restrictions imposed on them. Last year there was an effort to prevent the PAC from presenting MCAS findings related to Special Ed students. We need to revise the policy to remove artificial limitations. This is one of our priorities for the year. We will work with Liza Huber to revise the policy language and then take it forward to the SC policy subcommittee. Paul Murphy said that the timing is right to revise policies as they are being reviewed and modified to accommodate K-12 regionalization.
- MCAS analysis – Bill is interested in doing an MCAS analysis for special education students again this year. The school has data from the state but it is not publicly available yet. About the second week of October the school sends individual student MCAS results out to families. Our goal is to get the PAC analysis done quickly this year, as timing is everything. Last year the school committee didn't want to discuss MCAS results later in the year. Nobody likes criticism and the administration sometimes tries to isolate the SC from bad news; however, it's important to highlight areas that need improvement. Getting a 2013 MCAS analysis completed this fall is one of our PAC goals for the year. Nancy said it would be nice if we could reach out to Deb Bookis, Director of Curriculum, to see if we could include our

findings in her presentation to the SC this year. i.e., be part of a single, joint report and presentation to the SC.

- Dr. Yong Zhao’s summer presentation – Nancy explained that Dr. Zhao came to the district this summer and spent a full day working with school staff. That evening he gave a public presentation to the community, which was very entertaining and insightful, but less in depth than she’d hoped. Dr. Zhao is an internationally acclaimed author and educator with experience in both the Chinese and American education systems. He is interested in taking the most effective elements from both educational systems to design a model to prepare students for the global marketplace. He sees the strength of the Asian system as creating great test takers and masters/manipulators of rote information and the strength of the American system as creating critical thinkers and creative, entrepreneurial individuals.
- Continuation of Grade 4-6 specialized SpEd programs at Douglas & Gates – All schools have general special education coverage for students K-6; it is only the specialized SpEd programs that end at 3rd grade at Douglas and Gates. We have worked with Liza Huber to build a continuum of services at 3 of the 5 elementary schools; however, we still need to build out the specialized programs Gr. 4-6 at Douglas and Gates. Paul Murphy asked if we have any idea of the cost for these programs as regionalization may make it more possible. Nancy said Liza Huber would be the one who could identify the programmatic cost associated with these two programs.
- Other priorities for year – Nancy mentioned that we’re always looking to find ways to get more parents involved in the PAC. This year we’re working with other nearby towns to cohost speakers/presentations in hopes of getting more parents to attend. Someone asked if we have asked parents in our surveys about barriers to parent involvement. We haven’t but in future surveys we’ll try to add that question. Nancy said we seem to have the same number of people attend meetings whether they’re held in the evening or during the day. Bill reminded members that the vast majority of parents are very happy with the services their children receive and hence less motivated to participate. Our surveys have shown that there is also a small but steady percentage of parents who are afraid of repercussions from the administration if they actively participate. Nancy suggested that perhaps we try to do more parent outreach and education. Bonnie suggested perhaps we try more presentations that are less special ed. focused and more of a social venue for parents; perhaps we could tap Heidi Friedman to speak to parents and/or coordinate social events. Nancy said in the past we’ve had a SpEd PAC liaison to each of the school PTOs to share info at PTO meetings related to the special ed. community. Julie Towell offered that it is difficult to get volunteers across the board. Nancy said in terms of trying to get special ed. info shared through the individual schools the AB SpED PAC seems to be viewed as a non-school entity. Most schools won’t share our events/info with parents via their email

lists. Francesca Bamfo pointed out that unfortunately this year the PAC meetings conflict with the ABRHS PTO meetings; Nancy will look into the possibility of changing our meeting times to a different Wed. each month.

IV. New Business - other topics

The timing of MCAS analysis this year will be crucial - we need to deliver it early in the year. Nancy said not all school staff embrace the merits of standardized testing and seem to be moving away from that given the professional development this summer from Dr. Yong Zhao. The administration values formative testing more because the data can inform instruction throughout the year unlike MCAS where results are only available at end of the year. Bill stated that MCAS is really there to evaluate schools more than students and is concerned that our reporting of MCAS results hasn't effected much positive change in the district.

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

VI. Next Meeting – October 9, 2013, 7:30 pm at the R. J. Grey Library.

Respectfully submitted by Blossom Davies, Friends Secretary