



Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council

Business Meeting

May 14, 2014

- I. Call to Order

Nancy Sherburne called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm. The following AB SpEd PAC Board members attended the meeting: Bill Guthlein, Nancy Sherburne, and Carolyn Sprague. Seven other members also attended the meeting.
- II. Approval of Minutes

Review and approval of the April 2014 minutes was postponed until the next PAC meeting scheduled for June 11, 2014.
- III. Organizational/Business Issues
 - A. Upcoming Presentations & Meetings

Nancy reminded parents of our upcoming May 27th presentation on Children's Mental Health by Dr. Jeff Bostic and our final PAC meeting of the year, our June 11th Annual Meeting & Election of Officers.
 - B. By-Law Changes

The following By-Law Changes were discussed and agreed to as follows.

 1. Article 1 - Going forward the SpEd PAC for the fully regionalized Pre K-12 Acton-Boxborough school district will be known as: The "Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council (AB SpEd PAC)."
 2. Article 3 – The By-Laws will be modified to reflect the more specific wording of the Boxborough SpEd PAC ByLaws. Bullet 2. will be modified to read, "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."
 3. Article 4 – The following changes were made in Section 2: Duties to clarify some of the duties of the Chairperson and Secretary.

Changes in the duties of Chairperson include:

 - "Set the agenda and preside at all meetings of the organization and meetings of the Executive Board."
 - "Act as primary liaison to the Superintendent, School Committee and Director of Pupil Services."

- “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.”
All other duties remain the same.

Changes in the duties of the Secretary include:

- "Record, disseminate and file the minutes of the meetings of the Executive Board and general PAC meetings."

All other wording to describe the roles of Chairperson and Secretary remains the same.

4. Article 5 - Section 1 has been revised to state that:

"All AB SpEd PAC officers are elected by the voting membership to serve a two-year term. Elections will be held every other year at the Annual meeting held in the Spring. If an officer position becomes vacant mid-term, a special election may be held at anytime throughout the year to fill that position. All officers' terms will expire on June 30th of the same year so as to maintain a consistent two-year election cycle."

A motion was made and seconded to approve the changes to the By-Laws as written above. The motion was unanimously approved.

C. Pupil Services Quarterly Meeting Update

Mental Health Issues – There has been an increase across the board in the number of concussions AB students have experienced K-12. Students are missing school as a result of these injuries and having problems as they return to school, including anxiety and school avoidance as they try to catch up with peers. In terms of general mental health school initiatives have been introduced including S.O.S. (Signs of Suicide – a national evidence-based program to help peers and staff recognize the signs of suicide.) There have been 55 hospitalizations this academic school year FY 2013-14 at the AB region. Of those 55 hospitalizations 60-65% were general education students and 40-45% were special education students. Programs are in place to individually service students upon their return to school. Understandably, school staff are concerned by the growing number of students impacted by mental health concerns. In addition, to educational initiatives like S.O.S. the district has brought in speakers on the topic of mental health. Last spring Kevin Breel came to Acton to speak to students, families and staff about his personal struggles. He was a great speaker and the event was well attended. The administration is seeing a lot of staff exhaustion and frustration regarding trying to provide services and referrals to students and students are expressing a lot of academic stress.

Pilot of Therapeutic Referral Service by Interface – To try to relieve some of the stress staff are feeling around the time required to research mental health referrals for students and families, the district is going to pilot a

new therapeutic referral program provided by a private company called Interface. This company will provide direct referral services to students and families in the FY 2014-15 school year for students aged 0-25 years old. This two-year pilot program will be funded in partnership with United Way and the school PTOs.

K-12 Pupil Services Programming Update – The Bridges program at the high school for students on the Autism Spectrum and those with related diagnoses is holding monthly parent night presentations for the families of students in the program. The monthly meetings are intended to foster a sense of community within the program and inform parents on various topics. Bridges is also providing a meta-cognitive class for all students in the program, which is a credit-bearing course. In addition, the district has purchased new transition assessment tools and all students in the program will be assessed and provided appropriate transition services. There is also a Summer Bridges program that meets three days/week from 8:30-1:30.

Preschool Regionalization Update – Joseph Gibowitz, the new head of the Carol P. Huebner Public Preschool, is focusing on building relationships with Early Intervention (E.I.) as well as with families. The enrollment of special education preschool students is growing. Currently the Acton preschool maintains a 50/50 ratio of special education Pre-K students and typical peers, whereas, the Boxborough preschool only has about 10% special education students per class. These numbers will be equalized over the next few years hopefully resulting in a smaller percentage of special education students per class for most schools. In addition, the Carol P. Huebner Public Preschool will be moving premises next year to the Blanchard Elementary School in Boxborough.

- D. Pupil Services Support of Request for new district procedures to:
- Require all teachers to sign off on student Independent Education Programs (IEPs) within 5 days of receiving signed IEP and prior to the start of each year.
 - Ensure professional development is open to all staff & invite education assistants to participate in all reading and math workshops with teachers.

Nancy Sherburne and Bill Guthlein shared their discussion with Liza Huber around these issues. Liza is fully supportive of instituting these procedures. She is strongly supportive of strengthening the communications and partnership between general and special education to meet children's needs. Liza recommended that we speak with Deb Bookis about these initiatives as new procedures that involve general education teachers would fall under her purview.

- IV. New Business – Other topics discussed included:
Whether a parent of a special needs student could continue to be a voting member of the SpEd PAC after their child had graduated from high school. The general consensus was that any parent of a child with special needs who

lives in town should be eligible to participate as a full voting member of the SpEd PAC. Parents of older children bring valuable experience and knowledge to the organization. We reviewed and modified the language in Article 3 of the By-Laws as written above to ensure that it allowed for the full continued participation of such parents. A motion was made to modify the By-Laws as written above. The motion was seconded and unanimously approved.

A parent asked why there were a smaller number of special education students in Boxborough than in Acton. Nancy explained that there was a tremendous population difference. Boxborough only has one elementary school whereas Acton has five.

A parent raised concerns about physical accessibility issues at Douglas Elementary school. It was observed that there are no ramps for wheelchairs, etc. The question was asked about whether or not this has forced students with physical disabilities to attend other schools. Nancy said that just as some students with disabilities only have the option of attending one or two elementary schools that have the necessary special ed. programs to support their specific disability, she imagines that students with physical disabilities are steered towards one of the other elementary schools that is better equipped to meet physical needs. She suspected the reason why Douglas hadn't been renovated to include ramps was that it would be expensive to renovate an older school building that had limited space availability.

In an effort to encourage wider SpEd PAC membership, Carolyn Sprague suggested starting a book club that would read and discuss books related to special education. She offered to run the book group, which she hoped would serve two functions: 1) to encourage new parents to join the SpEd PAC and 2) to foster a greater sense of community. Susan Campbell from CASE said she'd love to be involved in this and help spread the word. Possible meeting venues discussed included school and town libraries. The group hoped that parents from other nearby SpEd PACs might like to be involved as well.

Summer programming – Someone asked if special education students are integrated with typical peers during summer programming. Nancy said it depended on the disability. For the last two years Acton had provided an integrated summer program for students with pragmatic social skill goals in their IEPs. This particular program offers non-integrated academics in the morning followed by integrated afternoon programs through Community Education with special education support/assistants.

PARCC testing – a parent asked if accommodations would be provided for special education students taking the PARCC assessment. It was shared that yes, some accommodations like extended time would be provided just like with MCAS; however, not all current accommodations may be available since it is an online, not paper test.

Post-Secondary outcomes – a parent raised concerns about post-secondary outcomes for student with Autism and related diagnoses. The Asperger Association of New England (AANE) did not have any statistics on students with this disability completing college. Susan Campbell from CASE said she had a great packet to help parents visualize what it is like to have autism and the difficulty of transitions such as finishing high school and heading off to college.

Credence given to recommendations by outside specialists – Concerns were raised in the meeting about how much the school district values and implements the recommendations provided by outside specialists in diagnostic reports. It was stated that recommendations made by outside specialists MUST be considered in an IEP meeting. Nancy suggested that parents encourage specialists to attend the Team meeting to lend weight to their recommendations.

- V. Open Issues – Nancy discussed plans for the Friends of AB SpEd PAC to finish applying for 501(c)(3) status. The process and paperwork are underway, but it is a lengthy and time-consuming application process.
- VI. Adjournment – the meeting adjourned at 9:45 pm.
- VII. Next Meeting – June 11, 2014 at 7:30 pm in the R. J. Grey Library.

Respectfully submitted by Caroline Jarvis