



Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council

Business Meeting

June 11, 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, Bill Guthlein, Julie Towell, Paul Murphy, and Carolyn Sprague. Five other members also attended the meeting.
- II. Approval of Minutes

Meeting minutes for March 19, 2014 were reviewed. A motion was made to approve the minutes as written. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.
- III. Organizational/Business Issues
 - A. Discussion of SpEd PAC Budget Concerns letter

Nancy and Bill sent a letter on behalf of the PAC expressing serious concerns about the 2015 budget process and outcome to the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee, the Acton Board of Selectmen, and the Acton Finance Committee. The PAC received no response or acknowledgement of receipt from any of the Boards. Kristina Rychlik, Chair of School Committee, reported to Nancy that there was a unanimous SC vote in favor of the final budget. The SpEd PAC letter was not included in the agenda April 3rd School Committee packet. Nancy has asked that the letter be included in the addendum so it is part of the public record, and she has requested dialogue on the topic. She is disappointed with the lack of acknowledgement from any of the committees we reached out to with special education budget concerns.
 - B. AB SpEd PAC By-Law Correction

Nancy clarified that regular AB SpEd PAC officers are elected to a one-year term, whereas officers for the Friends of AB SpEd PAC are elected to a two-year term. At our May meeting we accidentally changed the PAC By-Laws to include the Friends' By-Law language. Nancy recommended that we correct the AB SpEd PAC By-Laws by returning Article 5, Section 1 to its original language. See below:

“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.”

A motion was made to approve this By-Law change. The motion was seconded and unanimously approved.

C. Election of New Officers

Nancy briefly reviewed some of the accomplishments of the AB SpEd PAC during the last eight years. She shared that when she first became PAC Chair the AB SpEd PAC was not really active. She shared some of the organization's accomplishments over the last eight years, including:

- Improved working relationship/partnership with the district,
- Development of a district policy to formally define the PAC – district relationship and create an opportunity to communicate with the School Committee on a regular basis
- Publication of the PAC's *Special Education Parent Handbook*,
- The design and launch of a new AB SpEd PAC website,
- Creation of the Friends of AB SpEd PAC organization to raise and manage funds in support of AB SpEd PAC goals and initiatives
- Introduction of family picnics, movie nights and holiday gatherings
- Annual MCAS analysis of Special Education student performance, including measures of student growth and achievement
- Donation of almost 1000 books to the Acton Public Library to expand the community's special education resources
- Presentation of the PAC's first Teaching Excellence Award

These and many other positive successes were made possible by building open, constructive relationships with the district. It has been a positive change from the often antagonist relationship of the past. The successes were made possible by a dedication to partnering with Pupil Services and to mutually better understanding each other's perspectives, goals and interests.

Nancy thanked Bill for his dedication and support as Co-Chair, all of the officers and members for their invaluable contributions, and recognized Julie Towell for the time, energy and strong commitment she has invested in developing a constructive partnership between Pupil Services and the AB SpEd PAC. Nancy further commented that as an organization we are at a pivotal point, with a new Superintendent beginning on July 1; it's an important time to establish a strong positive working relationship with him and continue to grow our partnership with the district.

Nancy is stepping down as Co-Chair, and we are in a strong position for transfer of leadership. In encouraging the next generation of parent involvement, she reflected that what worked so well for her was having a co-chair and a core group of active participating members sharing with her their perspectives as well as the burden of responsibilities. These elements will continue to be strong, and there is much to look forward to.

Nancy will continue to support the PAC as the Past PAC Chair, Bill will continue with the MCAS analyses, Jen Brown has offered to help with

website updates, including looking into adding a blog, possibly moving the Parent_2_Parent electronic parent support group to a new venue, and expanding the Friends of AB SpEd PAC website. We hope to file for 501(c)(3) status for the “Friends of” organization soon.

Nancy went through the list of officers in both organizations and asked for people to step up for a seamless transition of leadership with a view of continuing the organization’s positive forward momentum. In particular she noted that, in her experience, the PAC Chair is a position respected by the district. The role of the Chair is to represent the needs of all of the special education families in the school district – over 900 families. The Chair position involves organizing monthly meetings, attending School Committee meetings, interfacing with the Administration, maintaining the website and fielding phone calls from parents.

Nancy also encouraged us to think about establishing PTO Liaisons for each school, and asked all members to consider attending school, financial and town committee meetings. There is a real need to raise awareness and understanding of issues that impact students with special needs. A vital SpEd PAC helps everyone understand our common interests.

Nancy discussed the current difficulty in publicizing SpEd PAC events at the elementary school level (principals require that publicized events be specific to their school) and cited a need for the Superintendent to encourage principals to share special education events with their school communities.

Nancy asked for nominations for board positions for the coming school year. The following slate of officers was presented. A motion was made to nominate this slate of officers. The motion was seconded and unanimously approved. The new AB SpEd PAC Officers and Board members for 2014-2015 are:

Co-Chairs – Bill Guthlein and Amanda Bailey
Past PAC Chair – Nancy Sherburne
Secretary – Carolyn Sprague
Standing Committee Chair – Jeanne Hobbie

D. Priorities for Next Year

We discussed priorities for the 2014-2015 school year. They included:

- Working with the district to establish a 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.
- Revising the Special Education Parent Handbook to reflect K-12 regionalization and other programmatic updates.
- Completing an MCAS analysis of Special Education student 2014 performance
- Creating a parent support group

IV. New Business

Following the election of officers we engaged in a discussion about student transitions from one school to another. Nancy recommended that parents meet with the Team to talk about the transition process for their student. For example, the Team could arrange for the student to meet with the new teacher and visit the new classroom prior to school starting. Jeanne pointed out the extensive transition section in the Parent Handbook. Paul commented that the ODP (Occupational Development Program) transition program is excellent.

There is a statewide initiative to support special needs and a continuum of support to stay in district. Paul offered to write a letter to share with parents/PAC community and urged folks to send letters of general encouragement to our representatives (Jen Benson, Cory Atkinson, and Jamie Eldridge). Paul can adapt a letter he wrote a few months ago, which the school committee endorsed. Nancy suggested we could share this letter with other districts through MASSPAC, and more directly through surrounding district's PAC Chairs like Maynard, Sudbury, and Littleton. It was noted that their letters might need to go to different representatives. Paul urged us to move forward with this because nothing will happen without constituent support.

Carolyn proposed that the PAC start a parent book group in the fall, and will approach the library to see if they can provide space. Carolyn offered to lead the book group and solicited book titles that might be of interest to parents.

V. Adjournment – the meeting was adjourned at 9:00 pm.

VI. Next Meeting – in September 2014, date and location TBA.

Respectfully submitted by Carolyn Sprague, Secretary