

## **2018-2019 Albemarle County Special Education Advisory Committee Annual Report**

We are fortunate to have a talented, passionate Special Education community in Albemarle County. Our Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) is grateful for our Special Education faculty and staff. We support lifelong learning for students and teachers and have identified several target areas where continuing improvements would benefit students and school personnel.

### **1. Budget for Growth**

Our special education population is expanding quickly in Albemarle County. Mr. Kirst's report shows a continuing upward trend over the last several years. We sincerely hope this is because of the exceptional quality education and other resources available in our area. To maintain our standard of education for our special education students, we respectfully ask the School Board to proactively plan and budget for this continuing trend.

### **2. Provide Continuing Professional Development for Mental Health**

The governor has proposed a budget that includes a significant increase in school counselors over the next few years. We respectfully ask that Albemarle County go one step beyond this and offer more professional development and continuing education for school personnel. Quoting from the Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction memo from April 2017- "According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness as many as one in five adolescents' ages 13 to 18 has a mental health disorder. So in a classroom of 25 students, five of them may be struggling with issues such as anxiety, depression, or substance abuse."<sup>2</sup>

We see educating all ACPS employees in recognizing and assisting students experiencing mental health crises as a priority. Both special education and general education students need this additional support.

### **3. Provide Training for Teachers and Staff to Better Accommodate Executive Function Areas of Need**

The executive system is responsible for goal-direction, task-oriented behaviors, self-regulation, behavior inhibition, planning, working memory, impulse control and more. Executive function disorder impairs a student's ability to analyze, plan, prioritize, schedule, initiate and complete an activity. These students need constant reminders, are unable to change behaviors or plans, and have difficulties creating a new plan when presented with new situations or tasks. They do not deal with contradictions well and cannot adapt to changes or changing situations quickly. They can react excessively or go to a shutdown mode when confronted with social situation beyond their understanding.<sup>3</sup>

While executive function skills can be a challenge for all students, executive function disorder is strongly associated with many diagnoses, including autism spectrum disorder, ADHD, and anxiety. Training teachers to better accommodate executive function areas of need will benefit all students, especially those with special education needs. Helping students gain executive function skills can reduce behavior issues in the classroom allowing more time for academic instruction.

#### **4. Expand and Enhance the Anti-bullying Programs**

According to the 2017 Indicators of School Crime and Safety, fourteen percent of 15-year-old students in the US reported that student learning is hindered to some extent or a lot by students intimidating or bullying other students.<sup>4</sup>

The proposed increase in the number of school counselor in Virginia would be a solid step toward decreasing bullying issues, but we feel Albemarle County needs to be a leader here, too. Special needs students are reportedly about three times as likely to be bullied as their typically developing peers. Protecting all students, especially our more vulnerable population, needs to be a top priority for our entire school system.

The Special Education Advisory Committee appreciates the consideration of these recommendations in discussion of funding priorities and programming for the next academic year. We would like to thank Kevin Kirst and his staff for their outstanding efforts on behalf of our students. Thank you also to the school board for allowing us to share this report.

This report was prepared by SEAC Chairperson Stephanie Hicks, with input from the SEAC membership. A draft of the document was sent by electronic mail to the SEAC on December 12, 2018, and finalized following the monthly meeting on January 8, 2019.

Respectfully Submitted,

Stephanie Hicks  
Special Education Advisory Committee, Chairperson

Sources:

1. ACPS Special Education Annual Report
2. [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/superintendents\\_memos/2017/137-17.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/superintendents_memos/2017/137-17.shtml)
3. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3413474/>
4. Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2017 <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018036.pdf>

Attachments:

Albemarle County Special Education Annual Report