

## **2017-2018 Albemarle County Special Education Advisory Committee Annual Report**

We are fortunate to have a talented, passionate Special Education community in Albemarle County. While our Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) is grateful for the tireless commitment of our Special Education faculty and staff, we have identified several areas worthy of attention in order to best support and serve our students.

### **1. Extend Professional Development on Special Education to All Teachers**

Special Education students occupy many different educational settings over the course of their school day. We continue to advocate for providing professional development time to general education teachers, Specials teachers, and after-school program supervisors that will help to support them in the time they spend with special needs students. We would like to see a Special Education Orientation offered to all teachers and staff during the early part of each school year. This will provide faculty with information about the Special Education evaluation process and awareness of available support services. Additionally, bringing in Special Education teachers and staff to provide professional development on topics that benefit ALL students (Dyslexia Awareness, Nonviolent Crisis Intervention, etc.) provides insight into challenges of the Special Education student population and strengthens connections between general education teachers and Special Education faculty. We feel that our Special Education students are best served when general education teachers are knowledgeable about support services and empowered to consult with specialists, thereby creating a collaborative team approach for every student.

### **2. Address the Special Education Achievement Gap**

The Special Education Performance Report of June 2017 indicates an ongoing discrepancy between English/reading proficiency and math proficiency between Special Education students in our county and state targets - 42% vs. >66% and 42% vs. >65%, respectively. (See Addendum 1) It should be noted that our county proficiency rates have improved (and the state targets increased) compared to the previous year. After delving deeply into some of the complexities of this topic, we also acknowledge that the importance of this statistic is perhaps less about the actual number and more about keeping a spotlight on which populations in our community are at greatest risk and most in need of support. We are grateful for the work of the Equity and Diversity Committee and our Special Education Department in researching and teasing apart the risk factors that feed into these disparities. Reducing disproportionate suspensions for Special Education students, prioritizing early literacy, and ensuring consistency in application of Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) across the county are some meaningful areas of focus.

**3. Promote Social Learning for All Special Education Students**

We continue to support the implementation of a social learning curriculum for all Special Education students. Currently, Skills Streaming is incorporated into the B.A.S.E. classrooms, and some schools have embraced the Responsive Classroom model. Social skills competency is critical for success academically, in relationships, and in the workplace; and yet, many Special Education students struggle in this area. Since only a fraction of our special needs students access the B.A.S.E. classrooms, we recommend that a social learning curriculum be included in ALL school classrooms. Evidence suggests that broad implementation of social skills programs in schools leads to decreased incidences of bullying, decreased disciplinary referrals, and improved academic achievement. (See Addendum 2 and 3)

**4. Expand the Autism B.A.S.E., Behavioral B.A.S.E., and Curriculum B.A.S.E. Programs**

The B.A.S.E. concept (Building Appropriate Supports with Evidence) was developed initially for students with Autism, to provide them with dedicated space to focus on their individual needs – specialized instruction, accommodations, or crisis intervention. This model has grown over the years and been modified for children with behavioral or learning challenges. We feel this successful model should be continued and expanded where needs are identified. Currently, we feel that a B-B.A.S.E. classroom should be added to serve the Northern Feeder Pattern. We would also like to see options that would allow students to access B.A.S.E. classrooms in different schools if that resource, or space, is not available in their own.

**5. Create Special Education Orientation to Improve Parent Involvement**

Our committee continues to see a need for better communication with and involvement of families in the Special Education process with their children. We believe that the journey from initial evaluation to negotiation and delivery of services is most productive when all parties are well-informed. From that point, parents, teachers, and administrators can focus more efficiently on meeting the needs of each child. We recommend developing orientation seminars for families that might be new to the Special Education process, or those in need of review. The Director of Special Education, Kevin Kirst, will work to develop a basic Special Education Overview curriculum that can be presented in several locations in the county at the start of each school year. We recommend that language interpreter assistance be made available at these presentations, if possible, when requested.

The Special Education Advisory Committee appreciates the consideration of these recommendations in discussion of funding priorities and programming for the next academic year.

This report was prepared by SEAC Chairperson Jennifer Schaeffer, DVM, with input from the SEAC membership. A draft of the document was presented to the SEAC on December 5, 2017, and finalized following the monthly meeting on January 9, 2018.

Addendum 1:

[http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special\\_ed/reports\\_plans\\_stats/special\\_ed\\_performance/division/2015-2016/spp-app/albemarle.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/reports_plans_stats/special_ed_performance/division/2015-2016/spp-app/albemarle.pdf)

Addendum 2:

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x/abstract;jsessionid=AA3C8099F15F1603FD804E923145CBBC.f02t03>

Addendum 3:

[http://crisisresponse.promoteprevent.org/webfm\\_send/1668](http://crisisresponse.promoteprevent.org/webfm_send/1668)