

2015-2016 Albemarle County Special Education Advisory Committee Annual Report
Recommendations:

1. Improved Awareness of the Needs of Special Education Students in the Inclusion Environment

We recommend dedicated time for the director of special education to address the general education teachers/administrators regarding special education programs (such as B.A.S.E.)

As more students are being educated within the regular education environment there is greater need for general education teachers and school administrators to understand the needs of students with disabilities and the programs and resources that are available to support them. It is important that professional development specifically related to special education and programs in the regular education classrooms be available to general education teachers and that they are encouraged to develop these skills. This will foster greater integration of special education students into the general education classroom. Dedicated professional development time needs to be allocated for the director of special education to work with teachers to achieve this goal.

2. Expand Professional Development for Teachers about Special Education

We recommend that professional development time for all teachers and relevant staff (e.g., PE, art, library) be made available focusing on their interactions with students with special needs, providing specific education about autism and other learning disabilities.

Albemarle Special Education has created a set of on-line learning modules to meet the state requirement for mandatory training of teaching assistants regarding autism. We recommend that all special education teachers, particularly those involved with the Autism B.A.S.E program, undergo the same training as that mandated for teaching assistants to insure a common knowledgebase and skill set. Furthermore, this educational opportunity should be extended to all teachers working with children with special needs. This training should be expanded to include education related to other disabilities. Direct teaching an interaction with both instructional coaches and special education teachers can broaden knowledge and awareness regarding best practices in the inclusion environment (e.g. how to provide visual supports, avoiding melt-downs, anticipate problems etc.)

3. Utilize Evidence Based Learning Programs for Specific Learning Disabilities (Reading and Math)

We recommend allocation of an LD instructional coach (1 FTE) with specific training in evidenced based practices in math and reading instruction to support Special Education Teachers in the provision of effective practices for students with disabilities.

Albemarle County is currently not meeting benchmarks for achievement in reading and math. Only 40% of students with disabilities are proficient in reading and only 44% for math (Addendum 1). To achieve greater success, an evidence-based team approach including math and reading specialists (1 FTE), an instructional coach, special education teachers and general education teachers should be employed. Enhanced opportunities for professional development in specialized math and reading skills are needed.

4. Support Expansion of the Autism B.A.S.E Program and Creation of Emotional Disabilities B.A.S.E Program

We recommend that the Autism B.A.S.E Program be extended to additional elementary schools, middle schools and high schools and support the expansion of this type of program to students with Emotional Disabilities.

An integrated special education environment with enhanced coordination between special education teachers/case managers, teaching assistants, and general education teachers, and a specialized location where students can receive intensive accommodations, crisis intervention, or even specific instruction in social skills etc. called B.A.S.E has been successfully implemented at a number of elementary schools in the ACPS within the past two years. The program seems to be an effective model for delivering special education services to students with autism. This concept should be extended to other elementary schools, middle schools and high schools. As this is a new program, it will require further evaluation and monitoring

to track and optimize the effectiveness of this program. To support the growth of this program, an additional BCBA/Autism Specialist (1 FTE) will be required.

Similarly, we support a pilot program of B.A.S.E services specifically targeting the needs of children with emotional disabilities, as proposed by the director of special education. This will require an additional clinical psychologist (1 FTE)

5. Adequate Funding for TA Resources and Utilization of allocated funding for a Transition Specialist

We recommend that funds dedicated for the transition specialist last year are used for this purpose.

Last year funds were dedicated to restructure staffing allocated at the high school level for a transition specialist, however due to the high need for additional TAs to meet growth demands in Special Education, the funding for this position was used to provide additional TA staffing. Transition specialists could help parents interface with other agencies (DARS, CSB, Region 10) and help students transition within educational environments and to the workforce or other vocational training. We recommend that adequate funding be available to meet both of these urgent needs.

6. Increase Resources to Support the Growth of Special Education in Albemarle County

The SEAC supports the Growth requests of Kevin Kirst which are essential for high quality special education in the ACPS including continued support for Piedmont Regional Educational Center including the Parent Resource Center. Additionally, the SEAC recommends additional special education staffing (7.5 FTE) to meet growth, a Special Education Coordinator for ECSE (1.0 FTE), an Assistive and Information Technology Support Professional (1 FTE), a speech and language pathologist (1.0 FTE), and an additional BCBA/Autism Specialist (1 FTE)

7. Restructure Early Childhood Special Education Program to Increase Opportunities for Inclusion

We support the initiative of the director of special education to create integrated preschool classrooms with Bright Stars.

An integrated preschool program with a 50/50 split of students from bright stars and ECSE would significantly increase the number of ECSE inclusion slots to meet the IDEA mandate of educating special education students in the least restrictive environment. This would require the addition of 3 classrooms each staffed with a Special Education Teacher and 2 Teaching assistants.

8. Extend Social Skills Development Curriculum to all Special Education Students

ACPS special education has implemented a social skills curriculum (Skill Streaming) for students in the Autism B.A.S.E program. We recommend expansion of this skills development program to all special education students. This will require training for teachers and relevant staff (e.g., Speech Language Pathology, Occupational Therapy guidance counselors) to support social skill development in the inclusion environment, increased uniformity and availability of social skills development across ACPS, and the creation of structured social skills classroom/resource classes and extra-curricular opportunities for social skills development.

Social learning is a challenge for many students with special needs but is critical for our students' academic growth, emotional wellbeing, ability to develop meaningful relationships with peers, and for later success in employment. The Virginia Standards of Learning include items that suggest an expectation of social learning. Social skills development currently falls under the broader Family Life Education Curriculum, which is inconsistently implemented and insufficient to address the challenges of students with special needs. Students need specific training in topics such as self-advocacy and anti-bullying.

9. Support Efforts to put a nurse at each school

It is imperative that each school is adequately staffed to respond to medical emergencies. As many special education students also have medical needs, the SEAC supports the broader effort to put a full time school nurse at each school in ACPS.

This report was prepared by SEAC chairperson Michael Salerno, MD, PhD with input from the SEAC membership. A draft of the document was sent to the SEAC membership on February 3, 2016 and finalized following the monthly meeting on February, 9, 2016.

The functions of the SEAC, as specified by Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia [8 VAC 20-81], effective January 25, 2010, are provided in the following link (http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/regulations/state/regs_speced_disability_va.pdf).

Links of Interest Related to this Report:

Special Education Report Card for ACPS (Addendum #1):

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/reports_plans_stats/special_ed_performance/division/2013-2014/albemarle.pdf

ACPS Special Education Advisory Committee Website:

<https://www2.k12albemarle.org/dept/instruction/sped/SEAC/Pages/default.aspx>

Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (VADARS)

<http://www.vadrs.org>

Virginia Association of Community Services Boards (VACSB)

<http://www.vacsb.org>