

2014-2015 Albemarle County Special Education Advisory Committee Annual Report

Recommendations:

1. Expand Professional Development for Teachers about Special Education

We recommend allocation of professional development time for all teachers and relevant staff (e.g., PE, art, library) that interact with students with special needs to provide 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. 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. Additional educational topics could include best practices for inclusion and curriculum based assessment. Dedicated professional development time needs to be allocated for the director of special education to work with teachers to achieve this goal.

2. Implement a Formal Social Skills Development Curriculum

We recommend 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 well being, 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.

3. Improved Transitional Services

We recommend the director of special education restructure the staffing allocated to the high schools for transition specialists to improve services and outcomes for students with disabilities at the high school level. SEAC also recommends the consideration of additional services to focus on vocational skills to create and expand partnerships in the community, optimize resources, and improve opportunity and achievement for students with disabilities. Transition specialists could help parents interface with agencies needed for transitions (DARS, CBS, Region 10). This attention on specific training is key for in helping students transition within educational environments and to the workforce or other vocational training.

4. Formalizing “Moving Up” Procedures

We recommend a face to face meeting or virtual face to face meeting of the IEP team including the current and future teacher(s) when students are transitioning between schools within the county. These procedures should be formalized into the format of existing checklists for special education procedures.

Transitions between elementary school and middle school, middle school and high school, and high school and beyond are particularly challenging for students with special needs and their families. For transitions between educational environments the SEAC intends to create an SEAC “moving up” checklist. Time prior to the first day of school for the student and parents to meet the new teacher(s) would facilitate seamless transitions.

5. Improve Communication and Integration of the Special Education Community

We recommend representation for the SEAC/special education PTO on the Superintendent's Parent council.

The special education community often feels that its voice is not heard within the ACPS and it is challenging for the SEAC to reach out to the broader special education community. The SEAC is also creating an SEAC Parent Brochure to be distributed yearly to families of all students with special needs, and is planning on expanding resources on the SEAC Website.

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, Occupational Therapy (1.0 FTE), Special Education Staffing (3.5 FTE). Additionally the SEAC recommends staffing an additional Psychologist (1.0 FTE), Special Education Coordinator (1.0 FTE), Assistive and Information Technology Support Professional, and Vocational Training specialist (2.0 FTE).

7. Increase Opportunities for Inclusion in Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)

We recommend increasing the number of ECSE slots within inclusion environments. This will require the director of special education to work with the administrators of other preschool programs (HeadStart and Bright Stars) to increase the number of potential inclusion slots to provide students with special services in the IDEA mandated least restrictive environment.

The state recommends that at least 38% of “children aged 3 through 5 with IEPs attend a regular early childhood program and receive the majority of special education and related services in the regular early childhood program.”

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 24, 2015 and finalized following the monthly meeting on March, 24, 2015.

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).