

Calvert Special Education Citizens' Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes: January 19, 2021

Attendees

LaShonda Scott, Camille Miller, Sue Rafalowksi, Kara Muffley, Joe Cormier, Christy Harris, Kathleen Porecki, Ashton Nelson, Nicole Maldonado, Theresa Kuhns, Shelley Miller, Inez Claggett

Welcome and Introductions

Joe Cormier, SECAC Chairperson, welcomed attendees and everyone introduced themselves. Joe welcomed LaShonda Scott as the Calvert SECAC newly elected Member-at-Large.

Approval of November minutes

The November meeting minutes were approved as written.

SECAC Executive Board Vacancies

No nominations were received prior to the meeting or at the meeting so there is still a vacancy for SECAC Vice-Chairperson.

Special Education Staff Appreciation Awards

Joe explained that we are planning the 5th year of the SECAC Staff Appreciation Awards, which is scheduled for Thursday, April 1, 2021 with space reserved at CHS but realistically it may be held virtually again this year. Anyone who wishes to help score nominations email Joe at joseph.somd.leaders@gmail.com. Joe also asked the group if anyone thought any changes were needed to the nominations but it was agreed upon that the categories were still approach even with learning in a virtual environment.

Budget Update

Christy announced that the Superintendent is working on the local budget and he collaborates with the County Commissioners on school system needs. Student enrollment has decreased this year as many students have been withdrawn for parental instruction or to attend private schools due to the pandemic which may negatively impact the budget as the budget factors in the number of students enrolled. To her knowledge, Dr. Curry keeping the budget level with our current school year's budget. Christy explained that the special education Kirwan funds are not going to be available for the 2021-2022 school year so any staff funded with Kirwan funds will be reallocated. A parent asked how many special education staff are paid with Kirwan funding. Christy didn't have the exact number of staff at that moment, but said it is approximately \$700,000 worth of special education staff which includes teachers, instructional assistants, behavioral support staff and a behavior technician and a behavior specialist that was not filled this year which allowed those funds to be used in other places.

Joe encouraged attendees to reach out to County Commissioners about funding and supporting special education and robust summer programs.

Open Table Discussion- Suggestions for how CCPS can best support families

Christy asked parents to respond to “What can the Special Ed. Dept. / CCPS do to best support families?” One parent shared that she had 2 children with IEPs and even though one of her 3 children is medically compromised she believed the benefits of being in school outweighed the risk of Covid-19. She shared her struggles with having to help 3 children at a time access their education and suggested in-home aides to help students like hers who are unable to independently access virtual services. She also mentioned the Cares Act and asked if it could help provide a more robust summer program supported by with less of a gap in services and/or a longer day of ESY (Extended School Year) for students with IEPs. Christy agreed that extending ESY would be helpful. She shared that she has a state directors meeting with MSDE upcoming and will bring up these topics for discussion to see what other local school systems are doing to support families.

Another parent asked if it could be considered to open/expand the criteria for summer programs, knowing that some are based on income or other criteria which excludes many students. Christy said that Title One summer programs are based on income eligibility for the school, but not individual students. Last year CCPS offered a summer school program for at-risk students which also included students with IEPs. Christy explained that the school system is currently in the planning phase for summer school programs and exploring a lot of options. The parent also expressed concern about the grading standards being the same as an in-school model when this virtual model is not the same. She expressed concern that many students may fail and her experience is that schools are not being understanding about the difficulty that families and students are having. The message she is hearing is that students will not be given mercy and they will fail. Christy said that our grading policy has some things in place that other systems previously did not (ie. being given 50% instead of 0's or any grade below 50%) but that she believes our school system will not “mass fail” students and efforts will be put into place to help set students up for success. Christy said school systems will be getting additional relief funding that will be used for recovery efforts and summer school which will have a wider targeted audience than in past years. Christy reminded attendees they can always have conferences with teacher, school administrators and ask for an IEP team meeting to discuss concerns and brainstorm solutions with the whole team.

A parent shared they heard that special populations may be returning and asked Christy if she could shed any light on that. Christy responded that she believes Dr. Curry is looking for about a 5-6% positivity rate and the current rate is about 12%. The parent suggested that something be put in writing about what the return plan is and stated they believe the lack of services and not having in person instruction is far more detrimental than the risk of Covid even for those with medical concerns. Christy explained that at this time our health department isn't advising our school system to bring students back to school, but Dr. Curry is committed to bringing students back to school as soon as it is safe and students with disabilities are at the top of that list. Christy shared that Dr. Polsky considers many factors, not only numbers relating to positivity rates. Additional parent comments included that students who cannot engage with virtual learning at all are experiencing significant educational gaps with no discussion/plan of how this will be addressed even when we are back in a state of "normalcy". Additionally, the change to being all day synchronous for elementary students has made the day even more difficult to navigate. Another concern was voiced over the number of different platforms, programs, schedules and assignments students are required to manage and suggested that providing a checklist of expectations would be helpful because students with executive functioning difficulties are really struggling with all that is expected of them. A parent asked if there is a list of tutors available or teachers willing to tutor and Christy said she wasn't aware of one in the school system but the library used to have one. Joe encouraged parents to not “suffer

in silence,” let teachers know of concerns because most are willing to work with you. Christy said she will pass along the information/feedback shared to Dr. Curry and the CCPS administration.

Joe noted that he has been pleased with the Board of Education’s response to the pandemic by taking the safety of our staff and students seriously. Christy agreed that our school system has taken safety seriously by providing protective equipment, air quality monitoring and air scrubbers as needed to ensure the safety of those working in buildings and for students to return. Other participants also expressed appreciation of the safety measures that are in place.

Community Comments/Calendar Events:

The next SECAC meeting will be March 16, 2021

Northern Calvert Resource Fair – Feb 24, 2021; 5:30-7:30; contact [K Barlow Email Address](#) with questions

Parent Connections- Starting this month will be doing a monthly series called Family Strategies. The same information will be provided Thursday evening and Friday morning. Futures sessions will include Natural Environment Teaching, Toileting, Understanding Behavior and more. Contact 443-550-8375 or parentconnections@calvertnet.k12.md.us for more information.

Meeting adjourned at 7:48PM