



**Fauquier County Public Schools**  
**Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)**  
**Minutes: March 2, 2023**

**Members Present:** Megan Burnham, Amanda Hazlehurst, Amy Hunter, Marilyn McCombe, Ryan Perry, Heidi Van Voorhis

**Member Absent:** Mandi Wooten

**Consulting Member:** Randy Corpening

**Consulting Member Absent:** Robin Verity

- I. Call to Order @ 6:03PM**
- II. Welcome and Introductions**
- III. Review and Approval of Minutes:** Minutes of the March 2023 meeting were approved following a motion by Marilyn McCombe, which was seconded by Megan Burnham.
- IV. Public Comment:** There was no public comment.
- V. Presentation: “Presentation of the Special Education Budget Report”**  
Randy Corpening, Director of Special Education
  - Mr. Corpening will share the presentation with SEAC after presenting to the School Board at the April meeting.
  - Local + State: \$28, 311, 865.17
  - Proposing \$64,000 increase from last year
  - Personnel and benefits take up the bulk of the budget
  - \$60,000 allocated to Speech-Language Pathologist to cover Individual Service Plans (ISP’s) for homeschool and private school students

**VI. Reports/Announcements:****• Chairman's Time**

- Mrs. Hunter recognized the role Robin Verity has played in SEAC for the last 8 years. She has stepped down from her current role as a consulting member. The SEAC thanks Mrs. Verity for her service and dedication and wishes her the best in her future endeavors.
- Mrs. Hunter shared the newly created brochure for Fauquier County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC). (Committee action is noted under Old Business below)
  - Brochures will be available at the Transition Fair on March 16
- SEAC Membership: It is time for the applications for the 2023-24 SY to be submitted. Applications should be submitted to Mrs. Hunter by May 31. She will compile them for submission to the School Board. Ms. Hunter will email the form to committee members. Anyone interested in becoming a new SEAC member should email Mrs. Hunter at [SEAC@FCPS1.org](mailto:SEAC@FCPS1.org) for more information.

**• Special Education Director's Time**

- The Inclusive Plan was presented to the School Board in February and has been submitted to the state for review. The FCPS Office of Special Education will be sending out invitations soon to join a committee to develop a county-wide vision.
- VDOE will be here next week for the onsite visits. They will visit Kettle Run High School, Taylor Middle School, and Pearson Elementary School.
- Mr. Corpening has been in contact with the ITRT regarding the best way to offer meeting availability via live stream. ITRT will be on-site and will be paid to attend.
- Mrs. Van Voorhis motioned for the 2023-24 SY meetings to be livestreamed, Megan Burnham seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

**• PRC (Parent Resource Center) Announcements**

- Disability and Transition Fair will be held on March 16 at Fauquier High School from 4:00-6:00pm

**VII. Old Business****• SEAC Policy Discussion:**

In preparation for the 2022-23 annual report to the School Board, SEAC members continued discussing policy recommendations. Mrs. Hunter presented a draft and members reviewed each recommendation. The following draft language was approved by the members. All policy recommendations and the full annual report will receive final consideration at the May meeting.

On a motion made by Mrs. Van Voorhis and seconded by Ms. Burnham, the SEAC agreed to instruct Mrs. Hunter to write a letter to the School Board supporting funding of a full-time social worker position (1.0 FTE) at each of the county's middle schools (see Recommendation #4 below). Funding for these positions is contained in Dr. Jeck's proposed budget.

### **DRAFT POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

#### **1. Inclusive Practices Self-Assessment and Action Plan:**

FCPS staff have completed the initial step in the Inclusive Practices Self-Assessment process required by Virginia Code § 22.1-215, which included staff surveys and development of an initial plan. The following elements are included in that plan: (1) development of a division-wide vision for inclusive practices; (2) development of training opportunities to give more formalized guidance for IEP teams; (3) incorporating state-provided forms into inclusive instructional planning; (4) offering inclusive best practices training opportunities to general education teachers; and (5) monitoring by the special education office through periodic IEP reviews. The SEAC looks forward to participating in the development of the division-wide vision for inclusive practices, as well as the ongoing process for reviewing and improving inclusive practices in the county.

The SEAC is especially pleased that training will be offered for general education teachers since general education classrooms are at the heart of inclusion. In addition, we recognize the vital role that instructional assistants (IAs) play in inclusion. IAs provide the instructional, physical, and behavioral supports needed for many students with disabilities to succeed alongside their non-disabled peers.

**Recommendation 1.1:** Ensure that development of the Division-Wide Vision for Inclusive Practices is truly division-wide—not merely a special-education initiative. Participants should include stakeholders from throughout the division, representing all levels of administration, teachers, parents, and staff with various responsibilities throughout the county.

**Recommendation 1.2:** Develop a detailed training/reference manual for instructional assistants, including best practices for supporting inclusion and independence, information about the general characteristics and needs associated with various disability categories, examples of positive behavioral supports, and other best practices.

**Recommendation 1.3** Continue the school division's commitment to October Disability Awareness Month, including programming for students of all ages. Look for opportunities throughout the school year to build disability awareness, and to include students with disabilities, their families, and community members with disabilities in FCPS activities. **Adopt the new theme "Choose to Include" to replace the theme "More Alike than Different," which was used in previous years.**

#### **2. Inclusion in the Least Restrictive Environment:**

State and federal law require that students with disabilities be educated in the **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**, meaning that "to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and that *special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.*"

Over the past ten years, FCPS has made incredible progress on inclusion for most groups of students with disabilities, cutting the percentage of students who spend 40-60% of their days with

their non-disabled peers from 35% in 2012-13 to only 17.5% in 2021-22. At the same, the percentage of students with IEPs who were included more than 80% of the day increased by approximately the same number of students. The shift to more time in general education significantly improved SOL scores and other outcomes for these students. The value of educating students with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers has been documented in countless studies over the past 40 years.

In 2017, the U.S. Supreme Court clarified that when grade-level advancement is not a reasonable prospect for a particular child, the IEP for that child “must be appropriately ambitious in light of his circumstances, just as advancement from grade to grade is appropriately ambitious for most children in the regular classroom. The goals may differ, but every child should have the chance to meet challenging objectives.” The Supreme Court also reiterated the requirement in IDEA that every IEP must “set[s] out ‘a statement of measurable annual goals ... designed to ... enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum,’ along with a description of specialized instruction and services that the child will receive..” [ellipses in original] *Andrew F. v. Douglas Cty. Sch. Dist. RE-1*, 137 S. Ct. 988, 1000 (2017)

The SEAC recognizes that while a continuum of placements is required to meet the unique needs of all students with disabilities, the first placement option that all IEP teams must consider is the general education classroom with supplemental aids and services. Placement can never be based solely on which statewide assessment a student will take (SOLs or VAAP). While formal state assessments do not begin until 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, students who do not receive exposure to the SOL curriculum in kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade will likely be far behind their peers in general education.

According to VDOE, “Participation in the VAAP should only be considered after the SOL participation has been discussed and all possible accommodations have been fully examined. ... ***It is absolutely critical that parents understand that agreeing to modifications of a child’s curriculum means that their child will not be receiving the same instructional content as his peers. This means that the child will not be adequately prepared to take standardized assessments (such as SOL assessments) that lead to verified credits. Without these verified credits, the child will be unable to earn either a Standard or an Advanced Studies Diploma.*** ... An Applied Studies Diploma is not equivalent to a Standard Diploma, and it may not qualify a child for post-secondary opportunities for which a regular high school diploma is required, such as higher education, financial aid, and some employment opportunities.” [Emphasis in original.] (VDOE, *Critical Decision Points for Families of Children with Disabilities*)

**Recommendation 2.1:** Support the implementation and consistent use of a district-wide LRE decision-making tool, to guide IEP teams in ensuring that students are placed in the least restrictive environment with appropriate supplementary aids and services.

**Recommendation 2.2:** Ensure that general education teachers understand that the Virginia Essentialized Standards of Learning (VESOLs) are derived directly from the Standards of Learning (SOLs), while being reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity, and encourage schools at all levels to explore inclusive learning opportunities with differentiated instruction to allow students on both assessment tracks to collaborate with one another.

### **3. Multi-Sensory Literacy Training:**

As the Virginia Literacy Act is scheduled to take effect in the 2024-2025 school year ([SB 616 Virginia Literacy Act; early student literacy, evidence-based literacy instruction, etc.](#)) Fauquier County continues to move forward in general education literacy instruction, and in providing targeted research-based interventions to students with reading-related disabilities. With more than two-thirds of Virginia’s 8<sup>th</sup> graders lacking reading proficiency, the SEAC urges FCPS to

provide evidence-based Multisensory Structured Language Teaching (MSLT) based on the Science of Reading throughout all FCPS schools, including high schools. A student's level of reading proficiency is a key factor in determining future academic and vocational success, as well as the ability to function independently as an adult. This is true for students with even the most severe disabilities. According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, "[w]hen individuals with severe disabilities are provided with access to comprehensive instruction, they can develop conventional reading and writing skills." It is crucial that IEP teams consider including reading goals based on MSLT principles for all students. The reading progression of a student with significant disabilities will likely require specialized instruction in elementary-level reading skills, such as decoding, vocabulary, and fluency, in addition to the high-school grade level comprehension skills. Therefore, high school special education teachers who teach students with students with significant reading delays should receive training in MSLT, in order to provide comprehensive reading instruction at each student's reading level.

**Recommendation 3.1:** Continue to provide full administrative support and endorsement for investment in successful science-based literacy instruction using Multi-sensory Structured Language Teacher Training for all teachers in kindergarten through middle school, as well as for high school special education teachers who teach students with cognitive disabilities. Continue encouraging Administration and Literacy Leads to promote training opportunities for both General Education and Special Education staff until all appropriate teachers and administrators are fully trained. Ensure that new teachers are trained as soon as possible.

**Recommendation 3.2:** Develop and implement a process for providing middle and high school literacy assessment results for ALL students to their former elementary schools. Encourage elementary school administrators and their teams to use this data in evaluating the long-term effectiveness of their schools' literacy instruction. In addition, for students who received literacy interventions or special education, elementary schools should use this data to evaluate the effectiveness of that instruction.

#### **4. Mental Health and Social Emotional Learning:**

The SEAC continues to support the county's focus on student mental health and social emotional learning. We believe it is important to ensure that every Fauquier County school has sufficient mental health professionals readily available to meet the needs of every student experiencing mental health challenges as soon as they arise. This is especially vital for students receiving special education services who need ongoing mental health supports. The SEAC also supports initiatives aimed at improving staff mental health and resiliency.

**Recommendation 4:** Establish a 1.0 FTE Social Worker position for each county Middle School.

#### **5. American Sign Language (ASL):**

American Sign Language (ASL) is an excellent world language alternative for students with language-based learning challenges and/or disabilities. It is also important for increasing the number of people in our community who can communicate using ASL. In Virginia, ASL is mandated by law as acceptable in fulfillment of high school foreign language graduation requirements. ASL III is critically needed to allow students to fulfill the three-year world language requirement for an Advanced Diploma without having to take an additional two years of a second language. The SEAC strongly supports the current plan of FCPS administration to offer ASL III in the 2023-24 school year.

**Recommendation 5:** Follow through with plans to implement ASL III in 2023-24, and consider offering ASL IV in 2024-25 if there is sufficient student interest.

**2. May 4 is the final 2022-23 meeting date. The SEAC will review and approve the Annual Report.**

**3. 2023 Disability Awareness Month Planning**

- Poster Contest: School Ambassadors from each school will upload the entries from their school.
- Mr. Corpening suggested Mrs. Hunter and Mrs. Hazlehurst set up a meeting with Mrs. Helkowski and Mrs. Yonkey to discuss how the Family and Community Engagement department can support Disability Awareness Month. Mrs. Hazlehurst will contact Mrs. Yonkey to schedule.

**4. March 16 FCPS Disability and Transition Fair at FHS**

- SEAC will host a table at the event.
  - Ms. Burnham will represent. Mandi Wooten and Ryan Perry also expressed interest and availability in attending.
  - SEAC Brochures will be distributed. Mrs. Van Voorhis made a motion that the SEAC approve the draft brochure with minor edits noted at the meeting. Ms. Burnham seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

**VIII. New Business**

- Ms. McCombe made a motion to adopt the following meeting dates for the 2023-24 SY. The motion was seconded by Megan Burnham and passed.

SY 2023-24 SEAC Meeting Dates:

September 7, 2023

October 5, 2023

November 2, 2023

December 2023 – NO MEETING

January 4, 2024

February 1, 2024

March 14, 2024 (2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday)

April 2024 – NO MEETING

May 2, 2024

**Adjourned @ 7:52PM.**

Prepared by: Amanda Hazlehurst, Secretary