



Fauquier County Public Schools
Special Education Advisory Committee
SEAC

2023-24

Annual Report

to the

Fauquier County School Board

INTRODUCTION:

The 2023-24 school year brought a change in special education leadership for FCPS. The SEAC would like to recognize Randy Corpening for his years of service to students with disabilities in Fauquier County, and for the guidance he provided the SEAC during his time as the director of special education.

The SEAC congratulates Angie Gum on her selection as interim director of special education. While new to this position, Ms. Gum has given presentations to the SEAC on several occasions in her previous role as special education supervisor, having been a frequent presenter at our meetings in her previous role as a special education supervisor. We look forward to working with her directly a consulting member of the committee.

We would like to thank every member of the county's special education team—teachers, administrators, bus drivers, department chairs, instructional assistants, social workers, related service providers, psychologists, behavior analysts, diagnosticians, and central office staff. Their dedication to students with disabilities is seen and greatly appreciated.

In addition to the special education staff, the SEAC would like to thank several other FCPS leaders, for their work on behalf of students with disabilities during the past year:

- School Board Chair, Ms. Pauling, Vice Chair, Mr. Campbell, and Superintendent Warner, who have all attended SEAC meetings during the past year, and all of our School Board members for their service to the students of our county.
- Mr. Napolitano, Ms. Guzman, Ms. Boring and Ms. Crane, who addressed the SEAC at various points in the year about general education issues that intersect with special education services.
- Dr. Brill, who attended SEAC meetings and led the Disability Awareness Month planning team, including serving as the featured storybook reader.
- Dr. Schlecta and Mr. Spahr, who promoted the work of the SEAC through Parent Resource Center events, and kept the committee informed of PRC activities.
- FCPS Communication Director Erica Yelland, who consistently ensured that SEAC news was shared throughout the division, and that poster contest winners were widely recognized.
- Family and Community Engagement Coordinator, Christina Yonkey, who co-led the Elementary School Poster Contest, and ensured that special education priorities were communicated to parents.

We are especially grateful to all the general education teachers who support the full inclusion of their students with disabilities.

The following annual report outlines the role and responsibilities of the SEAC, the committee's goals and accomplishments of the past year, objectives for 2024-25, and recommendations to the School Board and FCPS staff in order to meet the needs of students with disabilities in Fauquier County Public Schools.

PURPOSE OF THE SEAC:

The role of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) is defined by the Virginia Department of Education regulations. The State of Virginia has modeled its legal provisions after the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia (8 VAC 20-80-90 E.2). The SEAC's role includes the following:

1. **Advise the Fauquier County School Division** of needs in the education of children with disabilities.
2. Participate in the **development of priorities and strategies** for meeting the identified needs of children with disabilities.
3. Submit **periodic reports and recommendations** regarding the education of children with disabilities to the Fauquier County School Board.
4. Assist the Fauquier County School Division in **interpreting plans to the community for meeting the special needs of children** with disabilities for educational services.
5. **Review the policies and procedures for the provision of special education** and related services prior to submission to the Fauquier County School Board.
6. Participate in the **review of the Fauquier County School Division's Annual Plan.**

SEAC MEMBERSHIP:

The SEAC is composed of individuals selected by the School Board and the Superintendent of Schools. State policy requires that the majority of committee members be parents of children with disabilities or individuals with disabilities, and one teacher representative. Members serve without compensation.

SEAC MEETINGS:

In 2023-24, the SEAC met at 6:00 pm on the first Thursday of the month during most months of the school year, at the Central Complex Building A. In 2024-25, meetings will move to the **2nd Thursday of each month** during the school year (September-May). The SEAC began livestreaming its meetings in 2023-24, and recorded videos are available on the Special Education Department’s YouTube channel. SEAC meetings designated as “work sessions” are open to the public but are not livestreamed or recorded. All SEAC meetings are open to the public and begin with an opportunity for public comment. Public comments can also be submitted via email to the SEAC chair at seac@fcps1.org. All upcoming SEAC meetings are announced in the FCPS bi-weekly newsletter, which is emailed to all parents and staff in the school division.

2023-24 SEAC MEMBERS:

Committee Members:

Amy Hunter	Chair
Megan Monnahan	Vice-Chair
Marilyn McCombe	Secretary
Amanda Hazlehurst	Teacher Representative
Katie Jefferson	Member At-Large
Ashley Menwer	Member At-Large
Kevin “Ryan” Perry	Member At-Large
Anna Williams	Member At-Large
Amanda “Mandi” Wooten	Member At-Large (Resigned 3/13/2024)

Committee Advisors:

Angie Gum	Interim Director of Special Education
Nicholas Napolitano	Exec. Director, Special Education & Student Services
Randy Corpening	Director of Special Education (Retired 1/4/2024)
Haley Schlecta	Parent Resource Center (Resigned 5/31/2024)
Dean Spahr	Transition Specialist, and Acting PRC Coordinator

School Board Representative:

Susan Pauling	School Board Chair
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2023-24 PUBLIC COMMENT:

The SEAC did not receive any public comment in 2023-24. Soliciting parent input will be a priority for 2024-25.

2023-24 SEAC GOALS:

1. Policy Background Presentations:

The SEAC will continue to have presenters at its monthly meetings. These presentations will provide background on SEAC priorities, and emerging issues affecting students with disabilities in our schools. In addition, the SEAC would like to host speakers with disabilities to share their personal experiences and insight. The SEAC works closely with the Parent Resource Center to suggest topics to be addressed in parent workshops.

Following are topics that the SEAC has identified for discussion in the coming year:

- a. Overview of the Special Education Structure and Process in Fauquier County Schools at the County and School Levels
- b. Progress on the Inclusive Practices Initiative, and Inclusion of Students with Intellectual Disabilities
- c. Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Including and Supporting Students with Severe Speech or Hearing Impairments
- d. Update on VESOL-Aligned Curriculum for High School Students on the VAAP

2. Support the Inclusive Practices Review and Implementation:

Participate in a county-wide stakeholder group to develop the Inclusive Practices Vision for FCPS. Monitor and support inclusive practices initiatives, including the development of inclusive practices plans, in schools throughout the county.

3. Communication and Collaboration:

Implement livestreaming of SEAC meetings beginning in September 2023. Distribute the SEAC brochure to parents and schools to build awareness of the SEAC and its role. Continue to encourage collaboration between general education and special education staff, especially in the context of inclusion. Provide input to the PRC regarding topics of interest to FCPS families for future PRC programming.

4. Membership:

Continue working to increase SEAC membership and utilize individual members' areas of expertise. Distribute the SEAC brochure to build awareness and recruit new members.

5. October Disability Awareness Month:

Collaborate with FCPS staff on October 2023 activities, including the Elementary School Poster Contest and the countywide event for 6th graders featuring performers with disabilities. Help identify and support expanded programming, including an activity for high school students. Help coordinate online resources for teachers and schools at all levels.

6. 2023-24 SEAC Meeting Dates:

September 7, 2023
October 5, 2023
November 2, 2023
December—No Meeting
January 4, 2024
February 1, 2024
March 14, 2024 (2nd Thursday)
April—No Meeting
May 4, 2024 (Work Session)
May 30, 2024 (Work Session)

2023-24 ACTION ON SEAC GOALS:

- 1. Presentations:** The following presentations were given at SEAC meetings during the past school year:

September 2023

“Overview of Special Education Services and Staff in Fauquier County Schools”

Randy Corpening, Director of Special Education

October 2023

“Virginia Tiered System of Supports (VTSS) and the Interface with Special Education”

Donna Guzman, Student Services Supervisor

November 2023

“A Parent’s Perspective on Virginia’s ‘I’m Determined’ Program: Helping Teens Build Self-Determination Skills for Post-Secondary Success”

Kyo Dolan, Parent of a Current “I’m Determined” Youth Leader

December 2023

NO MEETING

January 2024

“Update on N2Y Curriculum Implementation in ID and Autism Classrooms”

Angie Gum, Special Education Supervisor

Kristen Ott, Assessment Resource Teacher

February 2024

“Special Education Department Update and Q&A”

Nicholas Napolitano, Executive Director of Student Services and
Special Education

**“Update on ‘All-In Virginia’ and Its Application to Students with
Disabilities”**

Whitney Boring, Director of Instruction

March 2024

**“Presentation of the Special Education Annual Plan (IDEA Part B),
Including the Budget for use of Federal Funds”**

Angie Gum, Interim Director of Special Education

**“Update on Implementation of the Virginia Literacy Act in Fauquier
County”**

Kathy Crane, Elementary Language Arts Supervisor and Title I
Coordinator

April 2024

NO MEETING

May 2024

Committee Work Sessions to Develop Annual Report

2. Support the Inclusive Practices Review and Implementation:

There was no action by the Special Education Department on the Inclusive Practices self-assessment and planning process during the 2023-24 school year. Despite repeated requests by the SEAC, a division-wide team was not convened. Ms. Gum has assured the SEAC that there will be progress in 2024-25. This will continue to be a top priority of the SEAC.

3. Collaboration:

The SEAC achieved its annual goals in this area. Beginning in September, SEAC meetings were live streamed with recordings available on the Special Education Department’s YouTube channel. The SEAC brochure was updated and distributed at several events for parents, including the Transitions and Disability Fair in March, where committee members hosted a table and spoke with attendees. Communication and collaboration between the SEAC and FCPS departments outside of special education was stronger this year than it has been for many years.

4. Membership:

This year marks the first time in several years that all nine SEAC seats have been filled. Since one member resigned near the end of the school year, and another will be leaving

the county this summer, the committee anticipates entering 2024-25 with seven members unless additional applications are received over the summer.

5. October Disability Awareness Month:

At the request of the administration, Disability Awareness Month was moved to March this year. It featured the SEAC's recommended new theme: "Choose to Include." Planning was done by a team of administrators and SEAC representatives including Dr. Meaghan Brill, Donna Guzman, Christina Yonkey, Erica Yelland, Amanda Hazlehurst, and Amy Hunter. The elementary poster contest was again a success, and the winners were recognized at a School Board meeting. The SEAC prepared a resource document with recommended books for various age groups, as well as short videos recommended for use in classrooms. This document was distributed to school librarians and administrators, and it was posted to the SEAC webpage. A highlight of the month was the release of a video featuring FCPS senior administrators, led by Dr. Brill, reading the picture book, *Just Ask: Be Different, Be Brave, Be You!*, by Supreme Court Justice Sonja Sotomayor.

6. 2023-24 SEAC Meetings:

The SEAC voted to make a distinction between regular SEAC meetings and "work sessions." Work sessions, like all SEAC meetings, are open to the public and include time for public comment. However, work sessions focus on committee business, do not feature a presentation, and are not live-streamed. The SEAC held two work sessions in May to develop the Annual Report.

2024-25 SEAC Goals

1. Priority Issues: In 2024-25, the SEAC will focus on **Inclusive Practices**, and **Literacy Instruction and Interventions for Students with Disabilities**. Both of these issue areas are emerging as the result of changes in state-level policy, and the SEAC will refine its focus during the coming year. Committee members have previously expressed interest in the following topics:

a. Inclusive Practices

- i. FCPS's Self-Assessment and Planning Process (State-Mandated)
- ii. Disability History Awareness: Why Inclusion?
- iii. Paraprofessionals (Job Titles and Roles, Training, Recognition, and Opportunities for Professional Development and Advancement)
- iv. Use of Assistive Technology
- v. Transportation
- vi. Co-teaching (Models and Benefits)
- vii. Inclusion of Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities (Impact of the New VAAP Tool, LRE for Students on the VAAP, and Supports for General Education Teachers)

- viii. Universal Design for Learning and Its Benefits for All Students
- ix. Supports for Twice Exceptional Students: Meeting the Needs of Gifted Students with Disabilities

b. Literacy Instruction and Interventions for Students with Disabilities

- i. Tier I Literacy Instruction for Students on the Alternate Assessment
- ii. Tier II Literacy Interventions and Individualized Reading Plans for Students with IEPs
- iii. Tier III Literacy Interventions (Integration with Tier I Instruction, Individualization and Data Collection, Professional Development for Teachers, Service Delivery in the LRE)

2. Support for Inclusive Practices Review and Implementation: The SEAC is committed to supporting inclusive practices self-assessment by individual schools and to development of countywide policies and practices that promote inclusion. SEAC members are eager to participate throughout this process to support the work of individual schools and the division as a whole.

3. Seeking Parent Input: For several years, SEAC outreach to parents has focused on recruiting members for the committee. In 2024-25, the SEAC's priority will be soliciting parent input regarding the needs of students with disabilities. The SEAC has identified the following action items:

- a. Work with the Special Education Director to develop and distribute a survey to parents of students with IEPs and/or 504 plans in FCPS to identify what is working well and where improvements are needed in the education of students with disabilities.
- b. Produce a brochure that can be distributed to parents at IEP meetings, including information about the PRC, the SEAC, the FCPS Special Education Department, PEATC, and the State Ombudsman.
- c. Identify opportunities to solicit public comment and other parent input to the SEAC that can inform the committee's work and future priorities.

4. Communication and Collaboration within FCPS: Building on the success of 2023-24, the SEAC will continue to support collaboration between special education and other FCPS departments. Collaboration with the following departments and individuals has been specifically mentioned:

- a. Connecting with the Gifted Advisory Committee to discuss the possibility of a joint meeting or forum on the needs of Twice-Exceptional Students.

- b. Continued coordination with Ms. Yelland to ensure that the redesigned SEAC webpage is up-to-date, accessible, useful, and contains all the information required by law.
- c. Ongoing communication with the Department of Instruction regarding support for general education teachers on inclusive practices, including Universal Design for Learning, and implementation of student IEPs.
- d. Coordination with FCPS administration to plan and implement October Disability History Awareness Month and March Disability Awareness Month activities and educational resources.
- e. Ensuring that the PRC and SEAC continue their close working relationship to support parent education and involvement, including their input to the SEAC regarding the needs of students with disabilities.

5. October Disability History Awareness Month and March Disability Awareness Month: For October, the SEAC will develop a list of age-appropriate resources to help educate students about the history of people with disabilities in Virginia and throughout the United States. For younger students, the focus will be on the efforts of students with disabilities and their families to gain admission to public schools. For older students, resources may also address the institutionalization of individuals with disabilities, and the impacts of the Eugenics movement. Resources for all students will explain the evolution from institutionalization to community integration and will emphasize the importance of school inclusion now that the segregated adult system has been eliminated. For March 2025, the SEAC looks forward to building on last year's success, continuing the poster contest, expanding the resources list, and, hopefully, reinstating a live event for all 6th graders in the county like the performance by A Place to Be held at Fauquier High School in 2019.

6. School Board Policy Review and Recommendations: One of the required duties of local SEACs is to review school division policies and practices affecting the education of students with disabilities. This is not an area where our SEAC has had a consistent process, although the SEAC has provided input on individual policies such as the Restraint and Seclusion Policy adopted a few years ago. In 2024-25, the SEAC plans to implement a consistent process for identifying and providing input regarding proposed changes in School Board Policies and relevant Regulations that could have a disproportionate impact on students with disabilities. Since the School Board is currently reviewing all of its policies for reoption, SEAC members will begin reading through these policies to identify any that may be of interest to the Committee.

7. **2024-25 SEAC Meeting Dates and Work Sessions (2nd Thursdays):** The SEAC will meet on 2nd Thursdays in 2024-25. This change from previous years was made to avoid conflicts with State SEAC meetings. The SEAC will hold an organizational work session in place of a regular meeting in September. In April and May, the SEAC will hold work sessions to develop the annual report. The SEAC will meet on the following dates in 2024-25:

September 12, 2024 (Work Session)

October 10, 2024

November 14, 2024

December 12, 2024

January 9, 2025

February 13, 2025

March 13, 2025

April 10, 2025 (Work Session)

May 8, 2025 (Work Session)

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE FAUQUIER COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION:

1. **Special Education Staffing:**

Special Education Teacher Caseloads: The SEAC urges the School Board remain cognizant of its unique legal and ethical obligation to students with disabilities. It is vital that FCPS always employ a sufficient number of special education teachers to remain at or below [Virginia's mandated caseload limits](#). This is especially important for special education case managers working in the general education setting, where caseloads are not as obvious as they are in self-contained special education classrooms.

Special Education Instructional Assistants (IAs): These staff members play a vital and unique role in supporting students with disabilities. Their support is key to ensuring that students with the most significant disabilities are successfully included in general education settings, and the IA's consistent presence is especially important for students

who struggle with change and transitions. As class sizes grow, and veteran gen ed teachers are replaced with new and provisionally licensed teachers, instructional assistants help ensure that students with disabilities in those classes receive the instruction, accommodations, and support that they require. Without this vital resource, both teachers and students with disabilities will be set up to fail. Many FCPS instructional assistants have worked in the county for more than a decade and have extensive experience supporting students with disabilities (in many cases, their own children). Special education instructional assistants should be recognized for their valuable role, and they should be given opportunities to grow in this career that they have chosen. In 2024-25, the SEAC will focus on the role of IA's, and opportunities to enhance their professional growth and their value to the school division.

Special Education Administrators: Special education is unique in the degree to which it is governed by state and federal laws and regulations. Every step in the process, from evaluation and eligibility determination through development and implementation of the IEP comes with its own set of deadlines, definitions, and requirements. Building administrators depend on the special education director and the four supervisors (three K-12 and one preschool) for expert guidance and technical support on these issues. Supervisors frequently attend lengthy and complex IEP team meetings throughout the county, including any meeting where a change in a student's placement is being considered. Supervisors also attend meetings when a student is placed in a facility outside of the county, when there is a significant conflict between the school and parents, or when a student needs unusual supports or services as part of the IEP. Attending IEP meetings is just one way that supervisors help their assigned school meet the needs of students with disabilities. A vacant supervisor position means that the other supervisors and the director are stretched thin. Despite the diligent efforts by the Executive Director of Student Services and Special Education to recruit and fill the open supervisor positions, FCPS has had at least one supervisor opening since November 2023 and, for several weeks in Spring 2024, the Director was the only special education administrator actively at work. Fortunately, it appears that the Department is now on track to be fully staffed by summer.

School Psychologists and Social Workers: The SEAC actively supported the hiring of a social worker at each middle school during the last budget cycle. Recent resignations by FCPS psychologists and social workers raise concerns about whether the necessary professionals will be in place at the beginning of the 2024-25 school year. In addition to their important mental health roles, these professionals are vital in the eligibility and IEP processes.

Recommendation 1.1: Closely monitor special education teacher caseloads to ensure compliance with [Virginia's mandated caseload limits](#). Ensure that any open special education teaching positions are filled as quickly as possible, and consider options to

ensure that outcome, including establishment of a separate pay scale and/or employing other incentives to recruit and retain special education teachers.

Recommendation 1.2: Recognize the important role that special education instructional assistants (i.e., paraprofessionals) play in our schools and communicate their value to those individuals and the FCPS community as a whole. Prioritize these positions for future hiring.

Recommendation 1.3: Prioritize training of new special education administrators to ensure that they are up-to-speed as quickly as possible. Ensure that training covers the most recent state and federal developments. Make a contingency plan to ensure continuity in special education administration.

Recommendation 1.4: Prioritize hiring of school psychologists and social workers to fill vacancies following resignations to ensure that these positions are filled prior to the start of the school year.

2. **Inclusive Practices Self-Assessment and Action Plan:**

FCPS staff 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 were 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 Interim Director of Special Education is reviewing the status of this plan and will be submitting a revised version to VDOE.

The SEAC is especially pleased with the plan to offer training for general education teachers since general education classrooms are at the heart of inclusion. In addition, we recognize the vital role of instructional assistants (i.e., paraprofessionals) in the inclusion of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. They provide the instructional, physical, and behavioral supports needed for many students with disabilities to succeed alongside their nondisabled peers.

Recommendation 2.1: 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 2.2: 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 for supporting students with disabilities.

Recommendation 2.3 Continue the school division’s commitment to Disability Awareness Month in March, including programming for all students. 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.

3. **Inclusion in the Least Restrictive Environment:**

State and federal law requires 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.*”

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 3rd grade, students who do not receive exposure to the SOL curriculum in kindergarten through 2nd grade will likely be far behind their peers in general education.

It is vital that messaging about the Applied Studies Diploma by FCPS staff consistently reinforce that it “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 3.1: Support the implementation of the new VDOE VAAP Decision-Making Tool with training for all IEP team members, including general education teachers.

Recommendation 3.2: 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.

4. **Multi-Sensory Literacy Instruction and Intervention:**

As the Virginia Literacy Act moves to the implementation phase in the 2024-25 school year, 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 8th 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 significant reading delays should receive training in MSLT, in order to provide comprehensive reading instruction at each student's reading level.

Recommendation 4.1: Provide full administrative support and endorsement for investment in successful science-based literacy instruction using Multisensory Structured Language Teacher Training for middle and high school special education teachers who teach students with cognitive or reading 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 4.2: Skills in the area of reading comprehension are critical to developing literate students who can access their community outside of their education. Consider implementing additional approved comprehension intervention programs, recognizing that a single approach to comprehension intervention cannot meet the diverse needs of all students.

5. **Mental Health and Social/Emotional Growth:**

The SEAC continues to support the county's focus on student mental health and social emotional growth. It is important to ensure that every school in Fauquier County has sufficient mental health professionals readily available to meet the needs of every student experiencing mental health challenges as soon as they arise. The addition of a dedicated social worker at all FCPS middle schools was an important step toward this goal.

Recommendation 5: The school division must ensure that it hires and retains enough qualified school psychologists and social workers to fulfill its obligations under IDEA, and to meet the mental health needs of students. If the county is unable to hire a sufficient number of these professionals, contracted professionals should be hired to work in schools, rather than exclusively providing services remotely.

6. **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. The SEAC congratulates FCPS for meeting its commitment to provide three years of ASL. We remain concerned by the fact that these courses are all provided remotely with only some of the class time being spent live with an instructor. The SEAC strongly supports the continuation of the three-year ASL track as an option for fulfilling the advanced diploma world language requirement.

Recommendation 6: The SEAC urges FCPS administration to provide as much live instructional time as possible during ASL online class time. We also urge the administration to seek options for giving ASL students hands-on practice with ASL. While it may not be realistic at this time to have ASL instructors at all four county high schools, the SEAC recommends that FCPS consider hiring a qualified ASL instructor to spend time at each of the high schools to give students experience with in-person ASL communication and to coordinate other ALS learning opportunities.