MINUTES OF ESE ADVISORY COUNCIL GENERAL MEETING JANUARY 15th, 2025
Lauderdale Manors Early Learning Center, 6.15pm.

Call to Order

Chair Jacqui Luscombe (JL) called the meeting to order at 6:32pm and welcomed attendees. Due to the absence of a microphone, she requested that participants speak loudly for recording purposes and clarity in the room.

Roll Call

Four of the nine School Board members' appointees present:

- Sheilynn Carrasco (appointed 1/14/2025 for Dr. Jeff Holness, District 5)
- Jen Valliere (for Debbi Hixon, At-Large Seat 9)
- Stephanie Salisbury (for Lori Alhadeff, District 4)
- Nakisha Sucarichi (for Nora Rupert, District 7)

Quorum was not met, meaning no formal votes or motions could be passed.

Presentation/discussion: An Autism charter school for Broward?

JL: Brief overview of the Redefining Schools process. Supt/Board looking for innovative ideas. This is "exploratory, no strings" discussion led by parents interested in more educational options.

Presenter: Parent Anna Corujo

- Overview of South Florida Autism Charter Schools (SFACS) model.
- Current absence of a free, Autism-specific, district-managed school in Broward
- There is parent interest in BCPS partnering with SFACS to establish a similar model.
- The model would complement existing services rather than replacing them.
- For students and parents whose needs & preferences go beyond traditional BCPS inclusion models
- Palm Beach has one SFACS, Miami-Dade has two. 96 Broward students attend Miami-Dade.
- Highlighted benefits:
  - More individualized support and education for students with Autism than currently offered.
  - Structured curriculum with integrated ABA and other therapy services
  - Parental support and community involvement.
  - Potential cost savings for the district while keeping a share of funds within the public system.
  - Innovative hybrid model that puts district in mgmt. role not a for-profit company

Guests: Dr. Tamara Moody, Executive Director, SFACS & Glenn Pierce, co-founder & board chair, SFACS:

- Discussed the SFACS model, funding structure, and long-term benefits
- Provided insight into the success of SFACS in Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties.
- Addressed questions regarding student eligibility and enrollment criteria.
- SFACS staff are mandated to undergo specific trainings BCPS cannot mandate: example - elopement
- For students who are off standards and have significant cognitive disability/IQ of 67 or below

Parent & community feedback:

Several parents shared personal experiences highlighting challenges in Broward ESE programs, including:

- Lack of individualized support.
- Training gaps for teachers and staff.

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- Long commutes to Miami-Dade for appropriate educational settings.

BCPS ESE department feedback:

- Diane Eagan (Executive Director, ESE), Sabrina Sheib (ESE Curriculum Director), Andrea Ciotti (Director of ESE Specialized Instruction), provided insights.
- Broward County offers two K-22 day schools for students with intellectual disabilities (Quest Center and Bright Horizons) plus traditional schools that provide time with non-disabled peers, buddy programs, transition programs. IEP team places students in the least restrictive environment. Pine Ridge and Cross Creek provide for students with more severe behavioral/emotional needs. Similarities between current programs and SFACS model.
- BCPS accommodates students with multiple disabilities but does not have a solely Autism-specific school.
- Overview of the ESE middle school VE program pilot, which aims to provide increased support for students transitioning from elementary to middle; for students who fall between gen ed and SVE model
- Discussion of teacher training and support services in Broward's ESE programs, highlighting ongoing efforts to improve staff training and parent involvement.
- Potential expansions of specialized programs to meet increased demand for Autism-focused education.
- Acknowledgment of parent concerns and commitment to ongoing evaluation of services and potential improvements within BCPS.
- ESE team visited Miami-Dade SFACS at Supt's request. No write-up, report or feedback given to Supt.

Next steps:

- JL asked Central Regional Supt Dr Ted Toomer to take Advisory feedback to the Supt. She will also do so.
- Communicate back that there is interest that many would like to see explored. Need to recognize there is demand but also that some have misgivings re segregation, and that the district has a responsibility to provide a level of service for all students. BCPS losing students because some parents lack confidence in the models available.
- Attention needed to funding and resource allocation to enhance existing ESE services and infrastructure.

Chair's report

- Cameras in ESE Classrooms draft policy going before School Board workshop January 28. Will post info on ESE Advisory FB page about how parents can contact Board to urge support.
- Reminded ESE team of previous request for email to go out to parents providing update on cameras.
- Parents from Baudhuin Preschool asked why their school would not be included. ESE team: because it's a run by a third party agency under contract to BCPS; suggests parents speak to the principal.
- Baudhuin parents said they don't receive BCPS emails despite repeated requests for a year. Fix needed. Parents didn't know about ESE Advisory and other meetings as a result.
- Focus SSS continues to have heavy impacts for ESE Specialists due to loss of capabilities that EDPlan had. How will lost functionalities be developed in Focus, where is plan/timeline/collaboration on fixing concerns? ESE Specialists not reporting all issues "because they've just been told this is how it is." Parent portal: IEPs etc 'jumbled up'/unfindable. Issues raised in May 2024 report by JL unaddressed. ESE Specialists overwhelmed with added work. Asked again for written clarity to parents re process for annual and interim IEP meetings, as some have been refused interims and no-meeting amendments unless annual review is held. ESE Exec Dir Diane Eagan said 600 interims held so far: "*I have not received trend data of something that needs to go out districtwide to staff or parents...Parents are not asking us for that. You are*." Comments from floor: "This is an ongoing issue...Focus has lots of issues" and "parents are stressing out and aggravated."

District update:

- Update on ESE Advisory's formal recommendation to the Supt and School Board to consider adopting the *Lives In the Balance/Collaborative & Proactive Solutions* model of care for behavior challenges: Kelly Fisher, Asst ESE Dir said staff have looked further into it and will meet with Meaningful Inclusion committee chair Ellen Kay to learn more. Will report back at next Advisory meeting.

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- Bureau Chief for Florida Dept of Education resigned last week; awaiting new appt.
- District-level Best Practices in Inclusive Education self-assessment next week.

Close: The meeting concluded at 8:47pm.

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