



Broward ESE Advisory Council general meeting, April 16th 2025, Indian Ridge Middle School

MINUTES

Call to order: 6.20pm, Jacqui Luscombe (JL), Chair

- Welcomed guest Dr Jeff Holness, School Board Member for District 5
- Acknowledged National Sign Language Day; American Sign Language counts as a world language and is available through Florida Virtual School if your school doesn't offer it as a course

Roll call:

School Board members' appointees present:

- Maria Torrealba (for District 1, Maura McCarthy Bulman)
- Melissa Ramos (for District 2, Rebecca Thompson)
- Stephanie Salisbury (for District 4, Lori Alhadeff)
- Nakisha Sucarichi (for District 7, Nora Rupert)
- Anabelle Rivera (for Seat 8, Dr Allen Zeman)

Apologies for absence received from:

- Jenn Valliere (for Seat 9, Debbi Hixon) due to a Special Olympics event

Note:

- No appointee all year for District 6 School Board member Brenda Fam
- Danilo Gutierrez (for District 3, Sarah Leonardi) & Sheilynn Carrasco (for District 5, Dr Jeff Holness) were present later in the meeting.

ESE Advisory exec board members present:

- Jacqui Luscombe, Chair
- Bach Todaro, Recording Sec

Note:

- Exec board members at large Christina Gaskill & Lucia Candiotti were present later in the meeting

Chair's Report:

- Acknowledged ESE dept's work organizing the Just Do It awards for students w/disabilities
- Still awaiting for answers from Supt/staff re parent who was accused of 'bullying' in retaliation for making a discrimination complaint on behalf of her child.
- Parent portal in Focus still not built out. Parents have not received printouts of IEP progress reports from their school in lieu of them being in the portal. Still no response to requests made over a year ago for a gap analysis and timeline for buildout of the Focus SSS module for ESE
- Updates on student laptop access (one for every student coming 2025/6); inclusive playgrounds advocacy (awaiting responses from Facilities dept); school calendar planning (early release days are coming back in 2025/6)
- BCPS customer service campaign; look out for QR code in your school's front office through which to submit feedback on your interactions with staff.
- Supt quote at District Advisory: *"For us to be held accountable to the highest degree, we have to make sure parents have access to all and any information. Transparency is our best friend."*

Committee reports:

- Autism Committee (ACE) - Chair Melissa Ramos: Next meeting April 17, 10am Glades Middle. Topic: preparing you and your child for transition to the next grade/school.
- Down Syndrome Committee – Chair Bach Todaro: Concerns re schools not sending out five-day draft IEPs ahead of IEP meetings. Parents are reporting that it is not happening.

Closure of AM/PM speech program:

- Pre-K AM/PM half-day speech program provides specialized instruction with speech/language focus, social skills, emotional wellbeing, independent functioning, communication.
- BCPS cut it from 13 of 16 sites last year; three left were in the far west of the district. Inequitable, plus transportation not provided for those displaced so they could continue at other sites.
- Parents raised concerns about loss of services, lack of transparency, lack of data shared
- Testimonials from parents not in attendance were read out. Concerns over communication practices (parents were told program is closing but now waiting weeks for IEP meetings to discuss next steps), IEPs being changed, impacts on student development, and students being considered in dollar terms rather than as academic investments.
- Stories were shared of success in AM/PM program and students learning to speak, going on to achieve academic excellence. Asked why not work on promoting the program better rather than keep it quiet and then close it? Some parents now pursuing private options instead.
- Letter from an SLP: *"It's critical to maintain the excellence of these services to prevent further delays and disruptions to speech/ language development among our youngest pupils. Without this program, we're denying our most vulnerable future students the opportunity to gain skills, to allow them to achieve excellence while catching up to their non-delayed/ non-disabled peers. BCPS has already been under the microscope about denials of FAPE (free appropriate public educn) especially in the area of speech/language therapy. Closing this program is truly showing a further disregard and lack of faith of the hard work we do as speech and language experts."*
- No cost breakdown presented to illustrate savings, performance data, academic gains/losses
- Concerns whether enrollment into AM/PM was deliberately strangled to justify closure and transportation promises broken for students ousted from 13 programs last year
- Discovery Elem AM/PM SLP Elisia Cartagena stated concerns including:
 - ESE dept said it would send students displaced from Pinewood Elem last year to Discovery; that did not happen. One student who did transfer did so only because the parent learned for themselves that Discovery Elem was an option
 - Students come into the program non-verbal and leave it talking and reading; walk-in services and integrated preK will not provide same intensity of support for students
 - Invited School Board members to visit class and see data supporting its value; none came.
 - Was told that if students are non-verbal "they can just go on a device" to speak
 - BCPS pledged transport for some students to move programs but did not deliver
 - Suggested BCPS make the program either AM or PM to consolidate numbers & reduce cost
 - BCPS never accounted for the inequity of last year's 13 closures and the only remaining programs being located in the far west of the district
- Use Medicaid money to directly support the students that are bringing it into the district. BCPS also rolled over \$10.9m of federal funds last year; why not use to support programs?
- Closure puts bigger burden on SLPs who already have large caseloads

ESE exec director Diane Eagan & ESE Director of Specialized Instruction Andrea Ciotti:

- Reasons included low enrollment, financial constraints, and a shift to inclusive models
- Need to better meet state expectations on preK academic achievement & performance
- Only 21 students currently enrolled for AM/PM next year.
- No figures available to present here but estimated per-classroom costs of approx. \$120,000–\$130,000 for AM/PM staffing of one SLP and one paraprofessional in each of the three schools.
- Alternatives: full day VPK inclusion model w/pullouts, specialized preK, or walk-in SLP services at boundary school
- Aligns with goal on Best Practices in Inclusive Educn (BPIE) assessment re preK inclusion
- Students will still get their allocated minutes of SLP related services
- (Q: Was Supt involved in the discussion around closing this and Board members aware?) Mrs Eagan: *"I can't remember exactly who we talked to when, but we certainly involved the Supt in the conversation... can't remember the timeline.."*

- Difficult decision; not taken lightly.

Motion: We recommend that the Supt and School Board review the closure of the AM/PM program, provide a financial breakdown of the justification for its closure versus its benefits to students, and conduct an assessment of its potential growth if supported by comprehensive awareness of its existence. All students being displaced from it should be provided transportation to their new school.

- Proposed: Jacqui Luscombe. Seconded: Danilo Gutierrez. Passed unanimously.
- Chair role was passed to Advisory Board member Christina Gaskill for the duration of motion/vote
- Agreed to include in the written background context provided to the School Board a concern from one member that if a program is removed, another should be provided in its place

Nursing services: guest Dr Jodi Washington, Exec Director, Student Support Initiatives, BCPS

JL provided context for this discussion:

- Some student who are medically fragile have had their one-on-one nurses or health aides removed by BCPS Coordinated Student Health Services (CSHS) dept without explanation. IEP process breached in doing so. Some students off school for weeks as a result. Parents not given communication and answers.
- Some students with Type 1 Diabetes have been refused cellphone accommodations to communicate with their parents for the purposes of managing their condition. Staff have reported that they were instructed by the director of CSHS to refuse this accommodation in all 504 meetings, as a predetermined refusal not based on student's individual needs.

Dr Washington said there has now been a "comprehensive review" of the nursing removal problem:

"There's there's been some changes in staffing that have contributed to some miscommunication and some actions that maybe weren't as informed as they could have been..."

- Nursing staff who attend IEP meetings have over the last month undergone new training *"to include topics such as predetermination, procedural safeguards..."*.
- Also working on *"narrowing down the team...who will be representing the CSHS as the medical expert when we're considering the related services that the student will need to access their education"* and to ensure effective communication w/families.
- Declined to say how many cases there have been, what prompted the removals and what the "mis-steps" were that Chief Academic Officer Saemone Hollingsworth admitted had occurred when asked about this issue at the last School Board meeting.

From the floor:

- Parents shared concerns about lack of info and worries about student safety; also high turnover of school nurses in some schools, lack of nurse training for managing Type 1 Diabetes (T1D), and refusal of cellphone accommodation for parents to support their children's T1D mgmt
- Three parents have reported that they had false claims of negligence/abuse made against them by BCPS staff, to Child Protective Services/Dept of Children & Families (DCF), in retaliation for their persistence in trying to address mismanagement of their children's T1D by school nursing staff.
- Parent reported on the complexities of managing T1D and critical need for parents to co-manage it with their children; cited situations in which school nurse training has been inadequate and high turnover has created "unsafe" situations.
- Advocate Beverly Provost (BP) stated that: 1. BCPS's refusal of cellphone accommodations for students with T1D to communicate w/parents to manage their condition was deemed unreasonable by the state, which overruled BCPS on this in a recent state complaint brought by a parent. 2. Cases are also open with the Dept of Justice's Office of Civil Rights. 3. State House of Representatives also passed a bill today containing a requirement that if a doctor states in their medical orders that a student requires a cellphone accommodation for parent communication in order to manage a medical condition, schools must honor it. 4. Three cases in which BCPS staff reported parents to DCF were all found by DCF to be baseless claims. 5. Nurses calling 911 because they do not know how to handle T1D situations per medical orders.

Motion: *We recommend that BCPS: 1. Conduct a customer satisfaction survey for parents of children who use nursing services in Broward schools. 2. Provide notification to parents when there is a change in school nurse for*

their child. 3. Understand and accommodate - rather than deny, challenge or seek to change - doctors orders. 4. Allow parents to communicate with their students by cellphone during the school day for the purposes of the management of their Type 1 Diabetes. 5. Ensure that staff do not call DCF on parents, and 911 on students, when known to be unnecessary or as a retaliatory action.

- Proposed: Beverley Provost. Seconded: Melissa Ramos.
- Friendly amendment proposed: Jacqui Luscombe. Accepted: Beverley Provost, to add:

We recommend that the Superintendent bring to a School Board workshop discussion of a Board policy relating to cellphone accommodations for students with diabetes. This should include professional input from the American Diabetes Association, and discuss other issues relating to the care and management of Type 1 diabetes in Broward schools and other nursing issues, in order to set in place comprehensive policy, procedure and protocols to ensure best practices.

- Passed unanimously

From the floor:

- What is the justification for denying parents the right to communicate with their children at school for the purposes of managing T1D?
- Dr Washington: If medical orders indicate that the student is not independent, it is school's responsibility to provide personnel that can meet their needs and parents need to collaborate with the nurse, not directly with the child. *"I realize that there have been situations where a nurse. May have been difficult to get in touch with, might not have been in the clinic, the front office wasn't able to make that connection. In those cases, we've made sure nurses have been provided with a district cellphone. The parents have the number to that cellphone that they can contact.."*
- BP: This is unrealistic; doesn't work. State bill aims to change this.
- What happens if staff report a parent to DCF for abuse/neglect knowing it to be false – who is the investigating jurisdiction? Dr Toomer to establish answer.
- What are the prerequisites for an RN position at BCPS? Answer: vast majority of nurses in schools are from agencies *"so whatever the requirement of that agency is what we receive in our schools."* Dr Washington stated that all school nurses in BCPS are RNs; this was disputed from the floor.
- Melissa Ramos and Nakisha Sucarichi expressed disappointment at questions not being answered by staff, esp. when we were told last month we would get them at this meeting. Ms Sucarichi: *"The Supt has pledged transparency and I feel as a parent we are not getting that. Every meeting I come here...you can't answer our questions...I am just so disappointed."*

Election nominations committee:

- Advisory election in May: Chair, Vice Chair, Recording Sec, Corresponding Sec, three 'at large' board members. Nominating committee: Bach Todaro, Christina Gaskill, Lucia Candiotti

Cameras in ESE Classrooms update: Steve Moyer/Jacqui Luscombe

- ESE Advisory made recommendation in April 2024 for BCPS to implement its own Cameras in ESE Classrooms program, to replace the state pilot program that was expiring in June 2024.
- Supt agreed and policymaking process has been under way since August 2024; taking longer than the original one month that was pledged.
- Policymaking process was then suspended in Feb 2025 to await outcome of draft legislation at state level
- State bill passed House but not yet Senate. Minimal chance now as only one week left in legislative session
- Agreed to ask Supt for this to go back on a School Board agenda ASAP for forward progress

District updates:

- IDEA funds: On track to spend all of restricted funds. May be a rollover of some of the non-restricted funds, esp for private schools due to spending requirements. Been meeting monthly to oversee every expenditure

Close: 8.50pm. Chair acknowledged National Volunteer Month; thanked all volunteers.