



# Fauquier County Public Schools

## Special Education Advisory Committee SEAC

2024-25

Annual Report

to the

Fauquier County School Board

Approved by the SEAC May 5, 2025

### **INTRODUCTION:**

In its 2023-24 annual report, the SEAC designated two policy areas as its priorities for the 2024-25 school year, including: (1) implementation of the FCPS Inclusive Practices Strategic Plan, and (2) implementation of the Virginia Literacy Act as it affects students with disabilities. During the year, the committee identified the need for revisions to FCPS policy and practices affecting

parent observations of students in schools. These and other SEAC policy recommendations appear in the final section of this report.

Collaboration across FCPS departments is crucial for seamlessly serving students with disabilities. The impressive cooperation among the Instruction, Special Education, and Student Services departments has been noted during several SEAC discussions this year and is worth noting in this report. FCPS administrators recognize that all students are general education students first, and that special education is a group of services rather than a place. While the SEAC recognizes the need for a continuum of placements to meet the unique needs of all students with disabilities, the committee reiterates its commitment to ensuring that all students are educated in the least restrictive environment.

The SEAC is grateful to the FCPS staff and administrators who presented to the committee and addressed members' questions. These presentations help the SEAC understand how policies on paper play out in our schools. The committee is also deeply grateful to every member of the FCPS special education team, including teachers, administrators, bus drivers, department chairs, instructional assistants, social workers, related service providers, psychologists, behavior analysts, diagnosticians, and central office staff.

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:

- The FCPS School Board members, for their leadership and support for students with disabilities, especially School Board chair Susan Pauling, who serves as the board's liaison to the SEAC.
- Superintendent Warner and Dr. Brill for their ongoing support of special education awareness and the work of the SEAC.
- Ms. Gum, Mr. Napolitano, and Mr. Spahr, who serve as the consulting members to the SEAC, for their time and support of the committee's work, and for their work every day supporting students with disabilities and their families.
- Ms. Victoria Moore and Mr. Brandon Giles for their logistical support throughout the year.
- Ms. Erica Yelland, who ensured that SEAC news was shared throughout the division, and who publicized the parent-support and disability-awareness activities throughout the year.
- Ms. Christina Yonkey, who coordinated the Elementary School Poster Contest and co-led the Youth Resources Fair.

- All general education teachers who worked diligently to ensure that students with disabilities in their classrooms received the accommodations and services they needed to succeed.

This annual report outlines the role and responsibilities of the SEAC, the committee's goals and accomplishments of the past year, objectives for 2025-26, and recommendations to the School Board and FCPS staff 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:**

SEAC members are appointed by the School Board and the Superintendent of Schools. State policy requires that the majority of SEAC members be parents of children with disabilities or individuals with disabilities. One member of the committee must be a teacher representative. Other FCPS employees serve in a consulting role and do not vote. It should be noted that a parent of a student with a disability is eligible to serve on the SEAC in their capacity as a parent, even if that individual is an FCPS employee. Members serve without compensation.

**SEAC MEETINGS:**

In 2024-25, the SEAC met at 6:00 pm on the second Thursday of the month during most months of the school year, at the Central Complex Building A. **In 2025-26, meetings will return to the 1st Thursday of each month during the school year (September-May).** Regular SEAC meetings were livestreamed, 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](mailto: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. Anyone may be added to the SEAC’s email distribution list by sending a request to [seac@fcps1.org](mailto:seac@fcps1.org).

**2024-25 SEAC MEMBERS:**

**Committee Members:**

Amy Hunter	Chair
Megan Monnahan	Vice-Chair
Anna Williams	Secretary
Amanda Hazlehurst	Teacher Representative
Katie Jefferson	Member At-Large
Marilyn McCombe	Member At-Large
Ashley Menwer	Member At-Large
Chelsea Racey	Member At-Large

**Committee Advisors:**

Angie Gum	Director of Special Education
Nicholas Napolitano	Executive Director, Special Education & Student Services
Dean Spahr	Transition Specialist & Parent Resources Center Coordinator

**School Board Representative:**

Susan Pauling	School Board Chair
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**2024-25 PUBLIC COMMENT:**

The SEAC received one public comment in 2024-25:

- The commenter, who is a middle school art teacher, requested additional training opportunities and instruction regarding the use of adaptive art tools. In addition, she noted the challenges for electives teachers when self-contained program classrooms move between schools. (Note: Ms. Gum reported that case managers are responsible

for working with all teachers to ensure that students receive appropriate accommodations and modifications based on each student's IEP. Also, occupational therapists are available to assist teachers with adaptive equipment.)

The SEAC will work to increase public comment and parent input in 2025-26.

**2024-25 SEAC GOALS (from the 2023-24 Annual Report):**

1. **Priority Issues:** In 2024-25, the SEAC will focus on **Inclusive Practices**, and **Literacy Instruction and Interventions for Students with Disabilities**. Both 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.

- 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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 re adoption, 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 (2<sup>nd</sup> Thursdays):** The SEAC will meet on 2<sup>nd</sup> 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)

**ACTION ON 2024-25 SEAC GOALS:**

**1. Priority Issues:** The SEAC addressed several topics related to the two priority policy issue areas identified in the committee’s goals:

**a. Inclusive Practices**

- i. FCPS has submitted the required Inclusive Practices Self-Assessment Report and Plan to VDOE. Ms. Gum provided updates to the SEAC on implementation of this plan in October 2024 and March 2025.
- ii. The SEAC updated its *Disability Awareness Resources* document with additional books and video listings. Internet resources that are no longer available have been removed. The updated document was distributed to school librarians and is available on the SEAC webpage.
- iii. The SEAC heard a presentation, “Paraprofessionals in Special Education,” at the January 2025 meeting, given by Dr. Jennifer Walker, Associate Dean in the College of Education at the University of Mary Washington. Dr. Walker addressed several issues regarding paraprofessionals including their role, training and supervision, and training resources available from the state and other organizations.
- iv. In November 2024, FCPS occupational therapist, Jennifer Rockefeller, presented “An Overview of Assistive Technology in Fauquier County Public Schools.” She shared several exciting developments in AT that are benefitting all FCPS students. Many of the accessibility features that students are using are features of Google Docs that have been made available to all students. The implementation of a 1:1 device program in FCPS means that most students with disabilities use the same devices as their non-disabled peers.
- v. Inclusive transportation was not addressed specifically by the SEAC this year and may be discussed in the coming school year.
- vi. A discussion of co-teaching was postponed and will be on the committee’s agenda in 2025-26.
- vii. Implementation of the VAAP decision-making tool has resulted in several students no longer qualifying for the alternate assessment. As a result, there is an increased emphasis on ensuring that IEP teams carefully consider the placement of kindergarten students to ensure that students who are unlikely to qualify for the VAAP are placed in general education kindergarten classrooms with appropriate supports and services.

- viii. A discussion of Universal Design for Learning and its benefit for all students will be addressed in conjunction with co-teaching issues in 2025-26.
- ix. Supports for “twice exceptional” (2E) students has been mentioned as a priority for the past couple of years. While there was not an opportunity to address it this year, the SEAC will reach out to the gifted programs administrator to discuss possible collaboration on this topic.

**b. Literacy Instruction and Interventions for Students with Disabilities:**

The SEAC heard a presentation in March, “Language Arts Update on Elementary, Middle and High School Tier I Instruction, and Tier II and III Interventions,” given by Whitney Boring, director of instruction, Kathy Crane, elementary language arts supervisor, and Sherron Bodie, secondary language arts supervisor. Much of the information about implementation in the middle and high schools is dependent on guidance that is being developed by VDOE. This includes specialized programs for students who need specialized instruction. Ms. Gum shared that she is working closely with the instructional staff to ensure coordination between special education and general education instruction. It was noted that VDOE has not yet developed essentialized standards that correlate with the VLA for students on the VAAP. The SEAC will continue to monitor VLA implementation as it affects students with disabilities.

2. **Support for Inclusive Practices Review and Implementation:** Ms. Gum presented the Special Education Department’s Inclusive Practices Plan at the October SEAC meeting and provided an update at the March meeting. The SEAC expressed its strong support for the plan and encouraged Ms. Gum to involve parents and students in ongoing discussions about inclusive practices. Additional SEAC activity on inclusive practices is outlined above.
3. **Seeking Parent Input:** This has been a priority for several years, with limited success. The SEAC updated its brochure in 2024-25, and distributed in school offices and at FCPS events, including the Youth Resources Fair. The committee will look for new ways to expand parent input in 2025-26, including conducting a parent survey, which was not completed in 2024-25.
4. **SEAC Membership:** Ongoing recruiting for SEAC members continues to be a priority. Although the committee began the year with a full nine-member committee, there were many absences throughout the year, and a few members are unlikely to return in 2025-26. The absence policy will be discussed as part of the bylaws review.

- 5. Communication and Collaboration within FCPS:** Increased collaboration between the Special Education and Instruction departments is crucial for students with disabilities. It is important to ensure that classroom instruction (Tier I) and specialized instruction (Tier III) is complementary and provided in the LRE. This cooperation was evident in the presentation on the Virginia Literacy Act. In 2024-25, the SEAC continued coordination with Ms. Yelland on the redesigned SEAC webpage. The SEAC also supported FCPS Disability Awareness Month in March and updated its *Disability Awareness Resources* document for distribution to librarians. This document was also made available on the SEAC webpage. The SEAC also participated in the Youth Resources Fair, which successfully combined the Transition and Disability Fair and the Youth Resources Fair into a larger division-wide event that was held at Liberty High School.
- 6. March Disability Awareness Month:** The SEAC updated its *Disability Awareness Resources* document with additional books and video listings. Internet resources that are no longer available have been removed. The updated document was distributed to school librarians and is available on the SEAC webpage. Initial plans for Virginia Disability History Awareness Month (October) were set aside due to the tight timeframe.
- 7. School Board Policy Review and Recommendations:** Review of existing FCPS policies was a goal for 2024-25. While this did not take place during the school year, the SEAC has appointed an Executive Subcommittee to review existing FCPS policies and identify those that may have a disproportionate impact on students with disabilities. The subcommittee will report its findings to the full SEAC in September.
- 8. 2024-25 SEAC Meeting Dates and Work Sessions (2nd Thursdays):** The SEAC met on 2nd Thursdays in 2024-25. In April and May, the SEAC held work sessions to develop the annual report. The SEAC met on the following dates in 2024-25:

  - September 12, 2024 (Work Session)—Organizational Meeting
  - October 10, 2024—Inclusive Practices Plan Overview
  - November 14, 2024—Assistive Technology
  - December 12, 2024—Meeting Cancelled
  - January 9, 2025—Paraprofessionals
  - February 13, 2025—Virginia Literacy Act Implementation
  - March 13, 2025—Annual Plan Review and Inclusive Practices Plan Update
  - April 10, 2025 (Work Session)—Annual Report Development
  - May 8, 2025 (Work Session)—Annual Report Review and Approval

**2025-26 SEAC GOALS:**

The SEAC has identified the following goals for 2025-26:

1. **Priority Issues:** The following issues will be on the SEAC’s agenda for 2025-26.
  - a. **Inclusive Practices:** The following topics have been identified for further discussion in 2025-26:
    - i. **Update on Implementation of the Inclusive Practices Plan and Individual School Self-Assessment and Planning**
    - ii. **Co-Teaching Models and Benefits**
    - iii. **Incorporating Universal Design for Learning in the Classroom**
    - iv. **Inclusive Practices Outside the Classroom (Transportation, Extracurriculars, and Involvement in the School Community)**
    - v. **Update on the Impact of the VAAP Eligibility Decision-making Tool**
    - vi. **Twice Exceptional “2E” Learners** (explore collaboration with Gifted Advisory Committee)
  - b. **Implementation of the Virginia Literacy Act**
    - i. **Update on VLA Implementation in FCPS**
    - ii. **Tier III Interventions in Middle and High Schools**
    - iii. **Implementation of Reading Plans for Students with IEPs**
  - c. **Parent Observation Policy and Practices**
  - d. **Additional Policy Issues Identified by the Executive Subcommittee**
2. **Parent Input and Involvement**
  - a. **Actively Recruit New SEAC Members**
  - b. **Develop and Implement an FCPS Special Education Parent Survey** (in coordination with the Special Education Department)
  - c. **Expand Outreach to Parents and Teachers** (explore additional forums for sharing information about the SEAC, including social media)
3. **Implement an Awards Program to Recognize FCPS Teachers and Staff:** The SEAC will work with FCPS administration to create an awards program to recognize staff who champion the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools.
4. **Review the SEAC Bylaws:** The Executive Subcommittee will review the SEAC Bylaws over the summer and recommend changes to the full committee.
5. **Review Existing FCPS Policies and Regulations:** The Executive Subcommittee will meet over the summer to identify existing policies and regulations specific to students with disabilities and general policies that are likely to have a disproportionate effect on students with disabilities.
6. **2025-26 SEAC Meeting Dates and Work Sessions (1<sup>st</sup> Thursdays):**

The SEAC has set the following meeting dates and topics for 2025-26:

- September 4, 2025—Organizational Meeting (Inviting VDOE Staff)
- October 2, 2025—Issue Presentation
- November 6, 2025—Issue Presentation
- December 4, 2025—Issue Presentation
- January—NO MEETING
- February 5, 2026—Issue Presentation
- March 5, 2026—FCPS Annual Plan Review
- April 2, 2026—Annual Report Development
- May 7, 2026—Annual Report Review and Approval

**RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE FAUQUIER COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION:**  
**Special Education Staffing and Compensation:**

The SEAC commends the School Board for including salary increases for teachers in self-contained program classrooms, recognizing the fact that some of these classes do not have licensed teachers despite ongoing efforts to fill the positions. The SEAC continues to support staffing levels in compliance [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 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.

**Recommendation 1.1:** Closely monitor special education teacher caseloads to ensure compliance with [Virginia's mandated caseload limits](#). Continue to prioritize open special education teaching positions for hiring.

**Recommendation 1.2:** Recognize the important role that special education instructional assistants (i.e., paraeducators) play in our schools, and communicate their importance to

the FCPS community. Consider compensating IAs for time spent participating in VDOE-sponsored online training.

1. **Inclusive Practices Plan and Disability Awareness:**

The SEAC commends the Director of Special Education and her team for developing a comprehensive Inclusive Practices Plan, which being implemented over a three-year period. The SEAC receives regular updates on the implementation process.

**Recommendation 2.1:** Solicit input from parents, students, teachers and other stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of the Inclusive Practices Plan.

**Recommendation 2.2:** Develop a detailed training/reference manual for special education instructional assistants (paraeducators), 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. **Inclusion in the Least Restrictive Environment:**

The SEAC recognizes that a continuum of placements is required to meet the unique needs of all students with disabilities. To ensure placement in the least restrictive environment, every IEP team must first consider placement in general education 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, and students are not considered for VAAP eligibility until their 3<sup>rd</sup> grade IEP is developed, it is vital that IEP teams recognize the importance of placing kindergarten students in general education unless there is a compelling reason for placement in a more restrictive setting. Students who do not receive instruction on the full SOL curriculum in kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade will likely be far behind their peers in general education.

**Recommendation 3.1:** Continue to train all IEP team members on the VDOE VAAP Eligibility Decision-Making Tool and ensure that K-2 IEP teams understand the potential consequences of placement in a self-contained setting.

**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.

**Recommendation 3.3:** Ensure that all messaging about the Applied Studies Diploma by FCPS staff consistently reinforces 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.” (VDOE, *Critical Decision Points for Families of Children with Disabilities*) Provide training on this issue to school counselors, administrators at all levels, and any staff who will present information about diploma options to parents.

**Recommendation 3.4:** Support current efforts by the Special Education Department to place students in inclusive kindergarten classrooms.

2. **Virginia Literacy Act Implementation:**

Reading instruction based on the Science of Reading has been a priority in Fauquier County for several years. With enactment of the Virginia Literacy Act (VLA), FCPS began working to align its literacy instruction with the new VLA requirements, as well as the new Reading SOLs. In 2025-26 the VLA will be implemented in middle and high schools. The SEAC applauds the decision to train middle and high school special education teachers on phonics-based reading instruction, which will enable them to teach basic reading skills to students who are significantly below grade level. This training is especially important given that the state has not yet developed essentialized literacy standards to bring the VAAP into alignment with the new SOL standards.

**Recommendation 4.1:** Ensure coordination between Tier I instruction and Tier III interventions for students with disabilities. Prioritize interventions that can be provided seamlessly for students requiring specialized instruction.

**Recommendation 4.2:** Reading comprehension skills 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.

**Recommendation 4.3:** Encourage middle and high school IEP teams to reject the notion that all students with significant disabilities “plateau” in their ability to learn basic reading skills. Encourage these IEP teams to include reading skills goals that allow students to continue making progress in decoding, rather than simply focusing on comprehension of texts that are read to the student.

3. **Parent Observation of Students:**

During 2024-25, SEAC members raised several concerns regarding the policies and practices for parent observations and observations by private professionals at the request

of parents. The initial concern was that the requirement that a form be submitted, rather than simply allowing a parent to make a request “in writing” as one policy document stated. Additionally, the form that was being required had “Special Education” at the top and was no analogous form for parents of non-disabled students. A form was being used by the Special Education Department that was not required of students. FCPS responded quickly by changing the form to remove the reference to special education and informing principals that this form would be used for all observation requests. Adding to the confusion, the language in the *Student/Parent Handbook* on the FCPS website and the “FCPS Observation Protocols” on the School Board website conflicts. In addition, different schools have different practices related to observations, and the updated form allows principals the option to “reject” observation requests with no apparent restrictions.

Observations are an important way for parents to gather information the need to participate effectively in their child’s IEP meetings and to get a first-hand understanding of behaviors or other issues happening in the classroom. While SEAC members agreed that the observation policy should minimize the burden on parents, some members felt that a standard form would help ensure consistency among schools while others felt that this did not justify placing an additional requirement on the parent. The SEAC supports adoption of an FCPS policy on observations that incorporates the following recommendations:

**Recommendation 5.1:** There should be a consistent observation policy that applies to all schools. The policy should contain no unnecessary barriers that prevent or delay a parent’s access to an observation of their child. Any requirements of parents should be necessary to protect the safety and privacy of students and staff, or to comply with existing laws. The policy should address a parent’s right under IDEA to participate meaningfully in their child’s IEP process, which may include the need to have a non-school provider make an independent observation.

**Recommendation 5.2:** Schools should be required to respond to a parent’s observation request within 24 hours and schedule the observation in a reasonable amount of time. Observations should not be delayed unnecessarily to accommodate a particular staff member, unless the parent agrees that person is needed for the observation. Parents who have a time-sensitive IEP-related issue should be told to contact the Director of Special Education, who should address those requests on an individual basis.

**Recommendation 5.3:** Principals should only be allowed to deny an observation request in limited circumstances, and the criteria for denying a request should be clearly defined. There should be process for appealing a denial.

**Recommendation 5.4:** Schools should accommodate a parent’s request to exclude a particular administrator/staff member (other than the classroom teacher) from an observation in the classroom if the parent believes that the presence of that individual would impact the child’s behavior during the observation.

**Recommendation 5.5:** There should be options for observing the student depending on the objective of the parent or professional observing. The preferred method should be remote observation via a camera in the classroom since it is the least disruptive; however, parents should be allowed to observe in the classroom if a remote observation will not give them the information they need. There should also be an option for off-site remote observations (e.g., via Zoom) for parents who are unavailable to come to the school.

**Recommendation 5.6:** The policy and form (if required) should be available online and in each school office. The policy and form (if required) should state that parents may contact the Director of Special Education if they have any questions or concerns about observing a student with a disability or a suspected disability. **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 6:** The school division should continue to prioritize the retention of 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 fill a vacancy in one of these positions, a contracted professional should be hired to work in-person, rather than exclusively providing services remotely. **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 7:** 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