



Fauquier County Public Schools
Special Education Advisory Committee

SEAC

2025-26

Annual Report

to the

Fauquier County School Board

Approved by the SEAC May 7, 2026

INTRODUCTION:

This annual report outlines the role and responsibilities of the SEAC, the committee's goals and accomplishments of the past year, objectives for 2026-27, and recommendations to the School Board and FCPS staff to meet the needs of students with disabilities in Fauquier County Public Schools.

Funding for Special Education, especially for staff salaries, is a top concern for the SEAC. The increased funding in this year's budget was greatly appreciated, but salary disparities with neighboring counties continue to be a major problem. The significant number of new teachers and staff necessitates additional training with greater levels of ongoing support—for special education staff as well as general education teachers and administrators who all have responsibilities for implementing student IEPs.

The SEAC is recommending creation of a new School Board policy that specifically addresses the requirements of Section 504, including a clearly defined grievance process to address the wide range of issues covered under that law, which extends beyond discrimination/harassment by individual staff members or students. Detailed recommendations are in the final section of this report.

In addition to recommendations on policy, the SEAC is requesting that the School Board add information about the SEAC and other advisory committees to its webpage to increase parent awareness and input. Also, it would be helpful if the board could approve SEAC members before the SEAC's September organizational meeting each year, with the annual report presentation in July if possible.

In September, the committee approved a Policy Recommendations Chart that captures all recent SEAC recommendations and policy concerns in one location and organizes them to align with the School Board's policies. The intent in creating this document was to give board members and staff convenient access to SEAC input on issues being addressed by the School Board Policy Committee. This chart will be updated whenever there is a change or a new recommendation.

In January, the SEAC surveyed all parents of students with IEPs regarding their priorities and concerns, including what is working well and what could be improved for their children. While the response rate was lower than had been hoped, the committee did receive detailed input from over 100 families at schools across the county. The SEAC plans to repeat the survey next year with additional publicity, including a QR code. A subcommittee will meet over the summer to discuss details.

Finally, the SEAC was proud to sponsor an Exemplary Service Award to recognize teachers and other school employees who promote the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools.

The committee hopes to increase the number of nominations for next year's awards by soliciting more nominations from parents.

The SEAC would like to thank parents, teachers, and others who provided input to the committee through public comment, survey responses, and directly to SEAC members. We would also like to thank Ms. Gum, Mr. Napolitano, and Mr. Spahr for serving as advisory members of the committee, as well as the other FCPS administrators who gave presentations and attended our meetings. We are also grateful for the support of Victoria Moore, Brandon Giles, and Kathy Webb. Finally, the committee would like to recognize all FCPS teachers and other employees who work so hard every day to support our students with disabilities.

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 2025-26, the SEAC met at 6:00 pm on the first Thursday of the month from September through May, except in January and April. In April, the Executive Subcommittee met to draft the annual report. SEAC meetings were held at the Central Complex Building A.

In addition, the Executive Subcommittee met over the summer and as needed during the school year. Ad hoc committees were also appointed to review results of the Parent Survey and to select winners of the Exemplary Employee awards.

All meetings were open to the public, and full SEAC meetings begin with an opportunity for public comment. Regular SEAC meetings were livestreamed, and video recordings are available on the Special Education Department's YouTube channel. Subcommittee meetings and "work sessions" were not livestreamed or recorded.

Public comment can be offered in-person or submitted via email to seac@fcps1.org. Upcoming SEAC meetings are announced in the FCPS biweekly newsletter, which is emailed to all parents and staff in the school division. Meeting announcements, agendas, and minutes are posted on the SEAC webpage and are emailed to the committee's distribution list. Individuals may be added to the SEAC's email distribution list by sending a request to seac@fcps1.org.

2025-26 SEAC MEMBERS:

Committee Members:

Amy Hunter	Chair
Willette Trevis	Vice Chair
Anna Williams	Secretary
Megan Monnahan	Teacher Representative
Molly Lawson	Member At-Large
Marilyn McCombe	Member At-Large
Chelsea Racey	Member At-Large
Zach Roberts	Member At-Large
Elliott Robinson	Member At-Large

Committee Advisors:

Angie Gum	Director of Special Education
Nicholas Napolitano	Assistant Superintendent of Student Services
Dean Spahr	Parent Resource Center Coordinator

School Board Representative: Susan Pauling

2025-26 PUBLIC COMMENT:

The SEAC received two public comments in 2025-26.

In October, a parent in the Scott District reported her concerns that her son's school had not complied with his IEP, including failing to provide a reading intervention for the first several weeks of the year and failure to provide accommodations in the classroom. She said that her son's teacher was unfamiliar with his IEP and had told the parent that her reason for not providing the accommodations was not wanting to call attention to the student. The parent asked for a review of current processes used to ensure staff compliance with IEPs and accommodations. She requested a survey of families to explore possible systemic IEP-related issues in Fauquier County. She emphasized, "I fully recognize that the underlying issue is staffing, pay, recruitment, and retention, and I do plan on addressing this extremely important issue with the Fauquier County School Board and the Fauquier County Board of Supervisors. However, that does not negate the policy violations and systemic failures. She urged school leaders to provide additional training and encouraged increased accountability and oversight of the IEP process.

In May, a parent couple living in the Center District with a child attending school in the Scott District reported significant failures in the implementation of their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Key issues included:

- Instruction not aligned with child's visual working memory.
- Use of unapproved accommodations during tests.
- Missing services, inconsistent scheduling, and at least 400 owed compensatory minutes in one subject.
- Missing service logs.
- Progress report provided three weeks late because it was still a "draft" in the system.
- Video recorded on an employee's personal cell phone for university coursework without parental consent.

The parents requested the SEAC's help to ensure students with disabilities receive promised services, including aligned instruction, consistent service delivery, accurate progress monitoring, and transparency.

ACTION ON 2025-26 SEAC GOALS:

The goals listed in this section in bold are from the 2024-25 Annual Report. Below each, in italics, is a summary of SEAC action on that goal.

1. Priority Issues:

- a. Inclusive Practices: The following topics were 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)**

ACTION (a. i.-iv.): *Ms. Gum provided regular updates to the SEAC on the FCPS Inclusive Practices planning process. The topics above are all part of this larger conversation. The SEAC will continue to monitor developments as Inclusive Practices teams are formed and begin meeting at individual schools in accordance with state law. Ms. Gum reported on co-teaching initiatives taking place in the division. She is working with TTAC to train and support these teacher teams. She will continue to update the SEAC on these efforts. The SEAC has consistently supported a division-wide conversation on inclusive practices, and welcomes the initiatives being undertaken by the special education department in response to new state policies and guidance,*

v. Update on the Impact of the VAAP Eligibility Decision-making Tool

ACTION: *Ms. Gum reported to the SEAC that there have been students who were previously on the VAAP assessment who no longer qualify based on an IEP team review using the new tool. Ms. Gum also reported that her staff is working closely with schools to promote inclusion in general education classrooms in Pre-K through 2nd grade, ensuring access to the full SOL curriculum and helping prevent students from falling significantly behind peers and being identified as unlikely to qualify for the VAAP in 3rd grade.*

vi. Twice-Exceptional “2E” Learners (explore collaboration with Gifted Advisory Committee)

ACTION: *The SEAC Chair met with the Director of Gifted and Advanced Programs regarding a possible joint effort to educate staff and parents about the unique needs of 2E learners. Due to time constraints and logistics questions, it was not possible to schedule an event during this school year, but this remains a priority for the SEAC.*

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

ACTION (b. i.-iii.): *At the November SEAC meeting, Ms. Boring, Ms. Crane, and Ms. Gum presented and update on implementation of the VLA, including the Individual Reading Plan process and recent assessment results. The SEAC invited the presenters to return next year with another update, including the trend in student progress since the VLA was implemented.*

c. Parent Observation Policy and Practices

ACTION: *Following up on last year's extensive discussions on this issue, FCPS leadership updated its observation request form, making it applicable to all students, and met with school administrators to ensure that practices are consistent across the county. The SEAC is not aware of requests for in-person observations being refused, but the issue of recording observations has come up. This is not currently allowed by FCPS and may be a topic for future SEAC discussion. The SEAC will continue to seek parent input regarding their experiences with observations since this is an important tool for parent participation. The SEAC continues to recommend that FCPS update its policies on parent observations for consistency and to ensure that observations are available to parents and parent-designated private professionals.*

d. Additional Policy Issues Identified by the Executive Subcommittee

Disability Discrimination—ACTION:

The Executive Subcommittee identified Discrimination under Section 504 as a policy area in need of consideration by the SEAC. At the November meeting, the Assistant Superintendent for Student Services and the FCPS Compliance Officer gave a presentation on current policy and practices related to disability-based discrimination. The SEAC agreed to recommend policy changes that would more specifically address requirements under Section 504. Those recommendations are at the end of this annual report.

Special Education Funding and Staffing—ACTION:

In March, the SEAC asked the chair to draft a letter to the School Board supporting the board's proposed increase in special education funding, and outlining the unique budgetary issues faced by the special education department. When the subcommittee met

in April, the School Board was considering a proposed Special Education Compliance Supervisor position. The subcommittee agreed to send a letter strongly supporting the proposed position and describing the budget issues faced by the special education department, including the fact that the number of students in special education continues to rise, even as overall enrollment is falling. The letter was emailed to members of the School Board and Dr. Warner.

2. Parent Input and Involvement

a. Actively Recruit New SEAC Members

ACTION: *In 2025-26, all nine positions on the SEAC were filled for the first time in several years. All nine members have applied to continue serving on the SEAC in 2026-27.*

b. Develop and Implement an FCPS Special Education Parent Survey in coordination with the Special Education Department

ACTION: *A survey was developed by the SEAC in 2025. The committee used its December meeting to fine-tune the survey questions and work out other details. The survey was distributed via email to parents of all students with IEPs in FCPS. Responses were received from parents of 111 students in 19 schools. An ad hoc SEAC committee met in late January to review the responses and make recommendations to the full committee. While the number of responses was too low for statistical analysis, narrative responses provided some valuable information. SEAC members agree that an annual survey is a valuable source of parent input, that timing was a factor in this year's low response rate (early January), and that expanded publicity (with a QR code) and a longer response window would likely increase the response rate.*

c. Expand Outreach to Parents and Teachers (explore additional forums for sharing information about the SEAC, including social media)

ACTION: *The SEAC updated its brochure, which includes QR code links to the SEAC webpage and other resources. These brochures are available in school offices and were distributed at the Youth Resources Fair.*

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.

ACTION: *In 2025, working with the Assistant Superintendent for Student Services, the SEAC created the Exemplary Service Award to be given annually to one teacher and one*

support staff member who champion the inclusion of students with disabilities. The SEAC solicited nominations from students, parents, staff, and administrators. A subcommittee of the SEAC selected the winners from a pool of 18 nominations. The 2026 Exemplary Service Awards were presented to Helene Leigh (Teacher) and Tabitha Jones (Support Staff) at the March School Board meeting in recognition of Disability Awareness Month.

4. Review the SEAC Bylaws: The Executive Subcommittee will review the SEAC Bylaws over the summer and recommend changes to the full committee.

ACTION: *The Executive Subcommittee reviewed the SEAC Bylaws over the summer and recommended that no changes be made at that time. In May, the SEAC amended the bylaws to remove the timeframe for member appointments, since that schedule is determined by the School Board.*

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.

ACTION: *The Executive Subcommittee reviewed all existing School Board policies and identified those with a particular relevance to students with disabilities. The subcommittee created a SEAC Policy Recommendations and Comments Chart summarizing the relevant policy sections and the SEAC's recommendations or comments to the School Board or FCPS administration, if any. It is the SEAC's intention to maintain this resource for reference by the School Board Policy Committee and FCPS administration. A copy of the current document is being submitted with this annual report.*

6. 2025-26 SEAC Meeting Dates and Work Sessions (1st Thursdays):

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

- o **September 4, 2025—Organizational Meeting (Inviting VDOE Staff)** (Dr. Chiquita Seaborne, VDOE Office of Family Engagement, gave an orientation for SEAC members)
- o **October 2, 2025—Issue Presentation** (The SEAC discussed its Parent Survey and SEAC Policy Recommendations Chart.)
- o **November 6, 2025—Issue Presentation** (Director of Instruction Whitney Boring, Elementary Literacy Supervisor Kathy Crane, and Ms. Gum gave an update on Literacy Instruction and Interventions, including Student Reading Plans and Reading Assessment Results.)

- o **December 4, 2025—Issue Presentation** (*The SEAC discussed and approved language in the Parent Survey, and the plan for survey distribution. A subcommittee was appointed to review the survey results.*)
- o **January—NO MEETING**
- o **February 5, 2026—Issue Presentation** (*The SEAC discussed results of the Parent Survey, the Disability Awareness Resources Document update, and the Exemplary Service Awards.*)
- o **March 5, 2026—FCPS Annual Plan Review** (*Ms. Gum presented the Annual Plan and an update on the Inclusive Practices Plan and school-based planning teams.*)
- o **April 2, 2026—Annual Report Development** (*The Executive Subcommittee met on April 16. The full SEAC did not meet in April.*)
- o **May 7, 2026—Annual Report Review and Approval**

ACTION: *The SEAC met as scheduled; however, the April meeting was replaced with a meeting of the Executive Subcommittee, which drafted the annual report and discussed recommendations for consideration by the full committee in May. Some meetings were dedicated to discussion of SEAC priorities. Presentation and discussion topics are listed following each meeting date above.*

2026-27 SEAC GOALS:

The SEAC has identified the following priority issues and goals for 2026-27:

1. Priority Issues:

- **Special Education Budget and Staffing**
- **Behavior Assessments, Intervention Plans, and Data Collection (including staff training)**
- **Student Discipline and the Manifestation Determination Process**
- **Progress Report Distribution**
- **Inclusive Practices Review and Planning Process, Including Progress of School-Based Inclusive Practices Teams**
- **FCPS Co-Teaching Initiatives**
- **Curriculum, Instruction, and Staffing in Self-Contained Classrooms**
- **Twice-Exceptional (2e) Learners and Transition Planning for College-bound Students**
- **Update On Literacy Instruction and Interventions, Including Data on Student Progress**

2. Parent Input and Outreach:

- Conduct Parent Survey
- SEAC Table at the Youth Resources Fair
- SEAC Table at Back-to-School Fairs
- Identify Other Outreach Opportunities

3. Increase Nominations for Exemplary Service Awards by Publicizing the Awards and Soliciting Nominations from Parents

4. Establish a Policy Subcommittee to Review Proposed Changes to School Board Policy and Recommend Updates to the SEAC

5. Encourage FCPS to Hold an Event and/or Provide Information to Parents and Teachers About the Profile and Needs of Twice-Exceptional (2e) Learners (students with disabilities who are also identified as “gifted”)

6. Update Disability Awareness Resources Document

2026-27 SEAC Meeting Dates and Work Sessions (1st Thursdays):

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

- September 3, 2026—Organizational Work Session
- October 1, 2026—Issue Presentation
- November 5, 2026—Issue Presentation
- December 3, 2026—Issue Presentation
- January 7, 2027—Issue Presentation
- February 4, 2027—Issue Presentation
- March 4, 2027—Review FCPS Annual Plan
- April 1, 2027—No Meeting—Spring Break
- TBD—Annual Report Drafting Discussion
- May 6, 2027—Annual Report Review and Approval

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE FAUQUIER COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION:

1. Special Education Staffing and Funding:

Unique Budget Considerations for Special Education

The SEAC appreciates the School Board’s support for increased special education funding in 2026-27, recognizing that the Special Education department contends with factors that do not affect other FCPS department:

- Although overall student enrollment is declining, the number of students qualifying for special education services continues to rise dramatically every year.
- Special education services are based on student IEPs, not district policy or budget priorities. All identified educational needs must be met, and students with suspected disabilities must be evaluated by qualified professionals. Services of specialists, including psychologists, social workers, and other related service providers are essential. If FCPS does not have necessary staff, it must contract for these services.
- Special education teachers must be “highly qualified.” Currently, four FCPS teacher positions in self-contained special education classrooms are being filled by unlicensed substitutes. In addition, administration is already aware of seven additional vacant special education teacher positions going into 2026-27, and this number is expected to grow.
- During FCPS budget discussions, critics frequently referred to the number of “central office staff” using numbers that included non-administrative special education department employees. These specialized teachers, psychologists, therapists, behavior specialists, and technical support staff support students in multiple schools. Some, like the Teacher of the Blind and Visually Impaired and Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing oversee services for every FCPS student with those disabilities. In fact, only the Director of Special Education and two of the four supervisors are administrators who supervise other employees.
- Students who do not receive services, and those who are not evaluated in the allotted time, are entitled to compensatory services and other remedies—which must be paid for by FCPS. The solution is to offer competitive salaries, not to eliminate these positions.
- The only administrators in the special education department are the Director and the four special education supervisors who share responsibility for overseeing special education services and supporting staff in all our schools and for all our preschool students.
- Veteran special ed teachers are being stretched to their limits, managing caseloads for students without a permanent teacher, and mentoring new and less experienced teachers, in addition to their regular responsibilities. FCPS must retain experienced and fully trained special education teachers who can ensure that federal and state requirements are met, and that IEPs and specially designed instruction meet the needs of our students.

Special Education Teacher Vacancies

While salaries for teachers in self-contained program classrooms were increased in 2025, there are still classrooms without a licensed teacher despite ongoing efforts to fill the

positions. While the county continues its search for candidates, the SEAC urges FCPS to contract with a private sector provider to fill special education teacher positions with temporary fully licensed in-person teachers until FCPS hires qualified permanent employees. State and federal laws mandate that all special education teachers be “highly qualified,” which includes being fully licensed by the state. What began as a short-term fix—utilizing instructional assistants as substitute teachers—has become an unacceptable long-term default (for over a year in some self-contained classrooms). The SEAC urges FCPS to consider the potential consequences of failing to provide qualified teachers for the students in these classrooms. These include both measurable educational harm to students and potential legal and financial consequences for the division, including compensatory education and other required remedies.

Caseload Limits

Compliance with Virginia’s mandated caseload limits must also remain a priority. 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

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). Instructional Assistants should be recognized for their valuable role and given opportunities for professional development and advancement.

Recommendation 1.1: Prioritize hiring of special education teachers, related service providers, and other specialists. Contract with a private sector provider to staff unfilled special education teacher positions with temporary fully licensed in-person teachers until FCPS is able to hire qualified permanent employees.

Recommendation 1.2: 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 1.3: 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.

2. FCPS Policy on Section 504-Related Protections:

While current School Board current policy (7-1.2) prohibits discrimination and harassment based on protected class status, it focuses on discrimination and harassment by individuals and does not fully address the requirements under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. There is no reference to the Section 504 administrator and her responsibility to implement and address grievances under that law, including allegations of FAPE denial or exclusion from FCPS programs or activities based on disability. The FCPS “Compliance Officer” is an HR professional. The FCPS Section 504 Coordinator is the Director of Special Education, who oversees 504 plans for individual students, as well as compliance with other Section 504 requirements. This policy recommendation is based on guidance from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. The SEAC’s intent is to strengthen and clarify FCPS procedures for protecting the rights of students with disabilities to encourage reporting of suspected violations, and to resolve disputes quickly and fairly at the division level before they escalate to federal complaints or legal action.

Recommendation 2.1: FCPS policy should state a clear division-wide commitment to preventing discrimination against students based on disability, and to ensuring that students with disabilities receive equal access to participate in and benefit from FCPS programs. FCPS policy should also state a commitment to provide a free appropriate public education to all students with disabilities, in accordance with state and federal law.

Recommendation 2.2: FCPS policy should include a clear grievance process for disputing FCPS actions related to Section 504 plans, as well as a process for reporting suspected violations of Section 504. There should be a clearly written form that contains relevant FCPS policy language, a link to the full grievance process, and a statement that retaliation against an individual requesting accommodation or reporting suspected discrimination is a violation of FCPS policy and federal law.

Recommendation 2.3: FCPS policy should clearly identify the Section 504 Coordinator, including an email address and phone number. This information and Section 504-related policies and procedures should be included in the Employee Handbook, the Student Handbook, and on the FCPS website with other information for parents of students with disabilities.

3. 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 is being implemented over a three-year

period. In 2026-27, individual schools will convene teams of administrators, teachers, related service providers, and parents to develop inclusive practices plans and evaluate ongoing progress on the plan. These school-based plans will serve as the basis for updates to the division-wide plan, which must be submitted to the state every three years. The SEAC will monitor this process and continue to provide input.

Recommendation 3.1: Solicit input from parents, students, teachers and other stakeholders regarding the effectiveness of the Inclusive Practices Plan.

Recommendation 3.2: 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 3.3 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.

4. 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 3rd grade, and students are not considered for VAAP eligibility until their 3rd 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 2nd grade will likely be far behind their peers in general education.

Recommendation 4.1: 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 4.2: 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 4.3: 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 4.4: Support current efforts by the Special Education Department to place students in inclusive kindergarten classrooms.

5. Literacy Instruction and Interventions:

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. The VLA has now been fully implemented. The SEAC recognizes the importance of literacy instruction at every grade level to support student progress in foundational literacy skills. Accommodations are not a replacement for specially designed reading instruction. The SEAC supports ongoing training of middle and high school special education teachers on phonics-based reading instruction, which enables them to teach basic reading skills to students who are significantly below grade level.

Recommendation 5.1: 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 5.2: Reject the myth that students with disabilities reach a learning “plateau” and are unable to acquire additional literacy and communication skills after certain age. Prioritize instruction on foundational literacy skills, including decoding, fluency, and encoding, throughout middle and high school for students with dyslexia and other disabilities that impact literacy. Ensure that teachers and staff receive the training needed to teach these skills in middle and high schools. Emphasize that continued, evidence-based instruction in areas remains appropriate and necessary, and that instruction should not be replaced solely by accommodations.

6. Parent Observation of Students:

Observations are an important way for parents to gather information they need to participate effectively on their child’s IEP teams and to get a first-hand understanding of

behaviors or other issues happening in the classroom. During 2024-25, the SEAC discussed several issues related to observations by parents and private professionals at parent request. In response to SEAC concerns, FCPS administration created a single form for all observations, replacing a form that was used only by the Special Education Department. The SEAC remains concerned that language in the *Student/Parent Handbook* on the FCPS website appears to conflict with the “FCPS Observation Protocols.” In addition, parents have reported that despite having a single form, practices vary in individual schools. While the SEAC appreciates that the Special Education Director and Supervisors address IEP-related observation requests, the SEAC encourages FCPS to adopt uniform policy language that incorporates the following recommendations:

Recommendation 6.1: 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 6.2: 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 6.3: 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 6.4: 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 6.5: 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 6.6: 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.

7. Mental Health and Social/Emotional Growth:

Vacancies in school psychologist and social worker positions impact schools' ability to address student mental health needs. 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.

School psychologists are required members of special education eligibility teams and are the only professionals qualified to administer psychological testing. If an employee is not available, FCPS must contract for these services.

Recommendation 7: The school division should continue to prioritize recruitment, hiring, and 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.

8. 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. The SEAC remains 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 8: The SEAC urges FCPS administration to provide as much live instructional time as possible during ASL online class time. The SEAC also urges 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

Additional Recommendations for School Board Action (Non-Policy):

- A. Include SEAC Information on the School Board Webpage:** To increase parent awareness and input, the SEAC asks that the School Board consider including information about the SEAC and the other advisory committees on its webpage.
- B. Adjust Dates of SEAC Report Presentation and Member Appointment to Coincide with the School Year:** The SEAC finalizes its annual report each May before the end of the school year. This is the natural time for departing members to step down from the committee, and the committee recruits to fill any vacancies. Currently, the annual report and member applications are not presented to the School Board until September, four months after the report was adopted. New applicants are in limbo for the September and October SEAC meetings, and committee information cannot be updated on the brochure or website for the new school year. The SEAC is requesting that, beginning in 2027-28, it be allowed to present its report and member applications at the July School Board work session with final action at the August meeting, in time for the first SEAC meeting of the school year.