

**Loudoun County Public Schools
Special Education Advisory Committee
Annual Report**

Loudoun County Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee Annual Report

Overview

The major responsibilities of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), as mandated by *The Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia*, include:

- Advising the local school system of the needs in the education of children with disabilities
- Assisting the local school system in the development of long-range plans which will provide needed services for children with disabilities
- Submitting periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities to the local school board
- Reviewing annually the school system's updated special education plan and application for federal funding

To meet these expectations, the SEAC is submitting a preliminary report that includes its recommendations for the 2008-2009 school year as well as a summary of its activities from the 2007-2008 school year. It is the intent of the Committee to provide an update to this report in the spring of 2009. At this time, the Committee's focus for 2008-2009 will be the following areas:

1. **Survey of IEP / 504 families on SPED services** – The Committee is interested in completing a survey that would solicit feedback from parents/guardians about their experience with Special Education.
2. **Town Hall Meeting Spring 2009** – The Committee has plans to host its second Town Hall meeting. All parents and guardians who have a child with an IEP or 504 will be invited to provide feedback to the school district
3. **Collaborative Training** – During the spring of 2008, the Committee started planning a training opportunity for parents and staff that focused on navigating the Special Education process. Special emphasis was placed on developing and maintaining a collaborative relationship between parents and school personnel. This event was scheduled for October 2008, but was postponed due to scheduling and planning constraints for the Committee representatives. The Committee hopes to reschedule this event at a later date this school year.
4. **Remedial Reading** – The Committee would like to better understand what systems and training are in place to appropriately identify remedial reading programs for students with disabilities. A sub-committee will be formed to address this topic.
5. **Transitions** - The Committee would like to explore what services are currently in place for students with disabilities who are transitioning from elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, and high school to post graduate opportunities.
6. **Special Education PTA/PTO Representative** – The Committee has plans to expand a pilot program where a parent/guardian PTA/PTO representative assists the committee in ensuring that events are planned in such a way that students with disabilities can

participate (i.e. developing a “buddy” program; having a “quiet room” for students who might be overwhelmed by the noise during an event). This representative would also help educate the PTA and school community on disabilities, and attend SEAC meetings to convey concerns and/ or comments to the Committee. With the assistance of Mrs. Kearney, the Committee will be reaching out to principals, to identify a parent in their school community to fulfill this role.

7. **Inclusive Practices and Website** – The Committee will continue to work on these two areas throughout the year.

Recommendations:

The Committee expects to have a variety of recommendations by the end of the 2008-2009 school year related to the section above. As noted, the Committee intends to submit a follow-up report on these areas at the end of this school year. At this time, the SEAC would like to make the following recommendations:

1. Review data on the special education staffing and turnover, as we know that there is a significant impact to children when good staff leaves. Staff experience and continuity are critical for our children.
2. The SEAC is sensitive to the budget crisis that faces the district. However, we strongly urge the School Board to give serious consideration and study to the impact of increasing class sizes on students with disabilities. There is also potential impact on staff turnover, if class sizes increase. The demands on both general and special educators who teach students with disabilities are already substantial.

Summary of 2007-2008 School Year

For the 2007-2008 school year, the LCPS Special Education Advisory Committee continued to focus on the areas of inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. Also, the SEAC continued to focus on increasing and diversifying its membership. It is our belief that having more age groups and disabilities represented will improve the recommendations this committee is able to share with the School Board. As discussed in the "Inclusion" section of this report, we have a plan to both expand and diversify our committee over the next two years. The focus on a Special Education PTA representative is one area we are pursuing for 2008-2009.

2007-2008 Committee Organization

Chairperson: Lynn Blycher

Co-Chairperson Planning: Claudia Wolfson

Co-Chairperson Membership: Cathryn Rice

Secretary: Deana Czaban

School Board Liaison: John Stevens, Tom Marshall

Committee Members: 15

Sub-committees: Inclusive Practices, Website, Twice Exceptional and Membership

2007-2008 SEAC Presentations/Activities

September 2007

Cathy Shwaery, Behavior Support Coordinator for LCPS, presented information on the school district's pilot of Positive Behavior Supports (PBS). The five schools piloting this initiative were: Rosa Lee Carter, Balls Bluff, Tolbert, Sully and Stone Hill Middle School.

October 2007

John Lody, Diagnostic Services Supervisor for LCPS, presented information on the eligibility process. Mr. Lody was provided a list of questions, in advance, so that his presentation was tailored to the Committee's areas of interest and concern.

November 2007

Toni DeLuca-Strauss and Rebecca Argabrite-Grove, presented on inclusive practices in elementary and secondary settings.

December 2007

Department of Pupil Services provided a response to the Committee's Annual Report which had been presented in October 2007. The report and the response are available on the SEAC portion of the Loudoun County Public Schools website.

January 2008

Ellen McGraw, consulting teacher, presented information on Functional Behavior Analysis and Behavior Intervention Plans.

February 2008

Annual Report Follow-Up

March 2008 and April 2008

Business meeting. No presentations.

May 2008

Aundrea Foster, SEAC member, presented on a new initiative for Special Education PTA representatives. These representatives would be responsible for being a link between their school and the SEAC. These representatives would also focus on improving disability awareness at their school and providing input to the PTA as school events are planned, to ensure that they are accessible to all students.

Officer elections were also held.

June 2008

Business meeting. No presentation.

Twice Exceptional Task Force

Mission Statement: The Twice Exceptional Task Force was formed to explore the unique needs of students with exceptional abilities. The goal is to address the need for identifying and servicing students with multiple exceptionalities. (Multi-exceptionalities are those students who possess outstanding talents as well as individual learning challenges.)

The Twice Exceptional (2E) Task Force met several times throughout the 2007-2008 school year. Topics of discussion included: the continuation of refining the identification process for twice exceptional learners; the need for a systematic process to identify students during the eligibility process for special education who demonstrate exceptional abilities; opportunities for improved communication between the Office of Special Education and the Department of Instruction relative to meeting the needs of Twice Exceptional learners; and the need for 2E information that is tailored to different audiences – i.e. administrators, teachers and parents.

The SEAC is concerned with the difficulty this Task Force has had in bringing its ideas to fruition and, more importantly, action.

Membership Subcommittee

The Committee continued its efforts to expand and diversify its membership, to include a variety of disability, age ranges (elementary, middle & high school), ethnicity, and representation from

each cluster of Loudoun County. It is believed that the more diverse our committee is then the better we are able to understand the full range of needs for our students with disabilities.

To that end, the Committee has plans to expand a pilot program where a parent/guardian PTA/PTO representative assists the PTA committee in ensuring that events are planned in such a way that students with disabilities can participate (i.e. developing a “buddy” program; having a “quiet room” for students who might be overwhelmed by the noise during an event). This representative would also help educate the PTA and school community on disabilities, and attend SEAC meeting to convey concerns to the Committee.

Update on 2007-2008 Committee Activities

From last years' Annual Report recommendations, we are pleased that the School Board supported the budget for the Office of Special Education in the hiring of additional specialists. During our September 2008 meeting, three of the four specialists presented. The Committee is very optimistic that these positions will have a significant impact for students with autism, emotional disabilities, behavioral issues, and deaf & hard of hearing.

- Autism Specialist – Rosy McGuinness
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Specialist – Eileen McCartin
- Behavior Specialist – Ellen McGraw
- Programs & Services Supervisor – Connie Smith

Eligibility

In last year's report to the School Board, the Committee expressed concern about the percentage of student's found eligible for Special Education Services, and that this number was lower than the surrounding jurisdictions. The SEAC maintains its concern that there maybe students who are not accessing the Special Education process (child study, eligibility) because a teacher or administrator are discouraging or denying that the student has a disability. Evidence of this is anecdotal, but it does point to the need for accessible information to all stakeholders. The SEAC also wants to ensure that teachers and administrators are provided training about the eligibility process and accountability so that students' needs are met.

A great deal of thought was given to conducting a system wide survey to try and capture a statistical representation of how many students might fall into this category. In speaking with Dr. Kealy at our monthly meeting in March, the Committee decided to go forward without conducting a survey and assume that there were areas for improvement in this process.

Inclusion

Since last spring, the sub-committee has met on five occasions with Mrs. Kearney and a group of Special Education administrators/supervisors, as well as representatives from the Department of Instruction, to discuss inclusive practices in LCPS. A theme that continues to surface during our discussions is the critical role that building administrators play in creating and sustaining an inclusive environment.

Other areas of discussion have included:

- disability awareness training for both staff and students
- duplicating “best practices” across the school system
- differentiated instruction
- accountability for implementing inclusive practices
- defining and communicating the goal of inclusion for a student (social, physical or academic).

This sub-committee will continue to meet, and plans to construct a staff survey to better understand what practices are currently in place, what the roadblocks are and how we can possibly duplicate successful inclusive practices at other schools.

Another area of discussion was the impact on students with disabilities when class sizes increase due to budget cuts. The committee is concerned that students with disabilities may have a more difficult time in a larger classroom setting (i.e. impact on participation level, increased noise level, self regulation). Increasing the class size may also place a greater burden on the general education teacher, in terms of classroom management and materials preparation for all of their students.

Functional Behavior Analysis / Behavior Intervention Plans

In the Committee's last report, concern was expressed about the FBA and BIP process. In particular, we were concerned with the accessibility of special and general education teachers to the Autism Consulting Teachers, who have expertise in this area. Concern was also expressed about the lack of tracking for FBAs and BIPs. Additionally, since there was limited data collected on the number of FBAs and BIPs, it was difficult to measure whether the BIPs were successful in modifying or extinguishing the behavior.

The SEAC is pleased to report significant progress towards this concern. The Office of Special Education has hired a Behavior Specialist, Ms. Ellen McGraw. In September, 2008, Ms. McGraw presented information on her role and responsibilities. One of her first priorities was to provide training:

- The majority of teachers for students with Autism and ED teachers were trained in June 2008. If they were not able to attend the June sessions then training was provided in August, September or October sessions.

- During the August 2008 staff development days, four sessions were offered for any Special Education staff.
- On September 9 and 10, 2008, all School Social Workers, Educational Diagnosticians and School Psychologists were trained.
- From September 16 through October 22, 2008 cluster based trainings were offered to all Special Education teachers. Administrators and general education teachers were invited to attend.

To date, 806 LCPS staff members have been trained on FBAs and BIPs. Ms. McGraw that the training on FBAs and BIPs emphasizes the team process and that the FBA/BIP is not an individual effort. Specific emphasis has been given to collecting data. This is a critical piece to the FBA because decisions are made based on data, instead of suppositions.

Behavioral Supports

The SEAC is encouraged that the number of schools participating in Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) has expanded from 5 to 22 schools this year. This will have an overall impact in providing a behavioral framework for all students.

The Committee also expressed concern about the number of Autism Consulting Teachers and how large their caseloads were. For the 2008-2009 school years, additional consulting teachers were hired, bringing the total number to five. Based on a December 2007 student count of 525 students with Autism, this reduces the caseload to approximately 105 students each. It is hoped that this will have a positive impact for both students and teachers, ensuring they can better access the support personnel they need.

The Committee is also pleased that Ms. Rosy McGuinness was hired as an Autism Specialist, with the responsibility for supervising the Autism Consulting Teachers and the self-contained autism classrooms. Ms. McGuinness also presented at our September 2008 meeting, and relayed her goals for meeting the needs of students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The Committee is very pleased with the positive direction this area of concern has taken. We look forward to following up throughout the school year with the new specialists that were hired, and understanding the positive impact they are making for our students.

Website

Last year, the Committee recommended improvements to the Special Education section of the LCPS website to assist parents in understanding and involving themselves in the special education process. The Committee believes that providing parents (and staff) with comprehensive information, will also help to eliminate some of the misinformation that exists about certain special education processes. The Committee is pleased to report that we have been working with the new Administrative Computer Specialist for the Department of Pupil Services and Mrs. Kearney to accomplish this goal. A target to review the updated website has been set for mid January 2009. Once the initial changes have been reviewed, the Committee wishes to assist the school district in monitoring needed improvements.

The Committee is also working to ensure that every school website has a link, in the “For Parents” section, to the Parent Resource Center, the Minority Student Achievement Committee and the Special Education Advisory Committee. All of these links provide parents with important information. The Committee learned last year that only three school websites in the school district have links to the PRC. We sincerely hope that whatever roadblocks are preventing this from happening is quickly removed.

This Annual Report was prepared by the 2008-2009 SEAC Executive Board:

Deana Czaban – Chairperson

Aundrea Foster – Co-Chairperson, Membership

Cathryn Rice – Co-Chairperson, Planning

Shelley Mills - Secretary

Addendum

Response to 4 day school week proposal

Date: October 19, 2008

To: Robert DuPree, School Board Chairman

From: Deana Czaban, Chair, Special Education Advisory Committee

CC: Mary Kearney, Tom Marshall, Tom Reed, John Stevens

Re: 4 day school week proposal – Possible Impact on Students with Disabilities

After learning that the School Board was investigating the feasibility of changing to a four day school week, the SEAC leadership decided that it would be appropriate to provide some feedback to you. I sent out an email to our members and attendees and asked for input. The committee leadership did not feel that it would be appropriate to make a sweeping statement either "for" or "against" this idea, since we only heard back from a small percentage of the 5,000+ families that LCPS provides Special Education services. However, we would respectfully request that you consider the following points when making your decision:

1. Many students with learning disabilities or other cognitive disabilities struggle to make it through a 6.5 hour school day and would be overwhelmed by the extended day. There would be little or no academic benefit for these students. Negative behaviors might increase.
2. Many students with learning disabilities or other cognitive disabilities process information slowly and need the 5th day for repetition.
3. Having four days "on" and three days "off", would ruin the momentum gained during a traditional school week.
4. Due to the severity of some student's disabilities, they may require Extended School Year services. This means they would still receive school based services. The bus would have to pick them up; the building would have to be heated/cooled; an administrator would have to be on sight; teachers and aides would have to be present; lunch would need to be provided; related services (speech/OT/PT) would have to be delivered and so on. Little savings might actually be realized.
5. Families, in which both parents work, would have to arrange for childcare on the 5th day. This is an undue burden. Also, for students with significant disabilities, finding appropriate childcare is almost impossible. There is one establishment in Loudoun County who specializes in providing daycare to special education students.
6. Due to the extended length of the school day, students would be traveling home on buses during rush hour. This poses a safety risk.
7. Some students receiving special education do not attend their home school and are bused to other school locations – sometimes *over an hour each way*. This is too long of a day for these students.
8. Due to the extended length of the school day, students would be challenged to both get homework done AND participate in extra-curricular activities.
9. For some students, a weekday off would provide the opportunity for families to schedule private therapies, or schedule play dates or other social opportunities. Even a half day off – similar to Fairfax County would be helpful in this regard.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Deana Czaban

Email: deanaczaban.seac@gmail.com

December 2008

Students with a Disability Child Count (12/1/2006 and 12/1/2007)

December 2006: Number of Students with Disabilities – 4,960

December 2007: Number of Students with Disabilities – 5,350

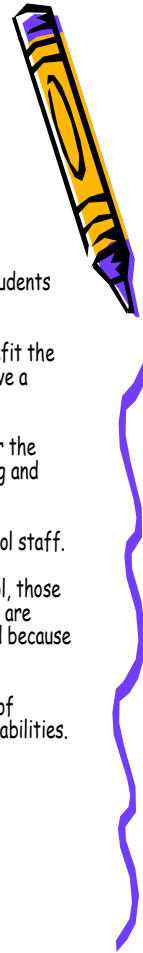
December 2007 - Breakdown by Disability Category	
Disability	Number
Deaf-Blindness	2
Traumatic Brain Injury	10
Visual Impairment	30
Severe Disabilities	33
Multiple Disabilities	43
Orthopedic Impairment	58
Deaf and Hard of Hearing	72
Mental Retardation	240
Developmental Delay	276
Emotional Disabilities	434
Autism	528
Other Health Impairment	756
Speech/Language Impairment	1096
Specific Learning Disability	1772
	5350

Projected 2008 Student Count – 5,827

Special Education PTA/PTO representative overview

Role of a SEAC PTA Representative

- Ensure PTA events are inclusive and accessible, both physically and socially, to all students and parents.
- Provide opportunities for parents to become involved in constructive ways that benefit the school as a whole. Parents who are actively involved in their school community achieve a more positive perspective on their children's educational experience
- Make the PTA relevant to all parents and students. PTAs must be willing to consider the difficult issues faced by the parents they represent and respond with understanding and assistance
- Help parents of special education students form working partnerships with the school staff.
- Welcome all parents served by your PTA who attend a special program at your school, those who come from a different base school may not think of joining the PTA unless they are specifically invited. Others may have become alienated from their own neighborhood because of their children's circumstances and may need to be drawn back into the PTA fold
- Educate students and parents in general education about special education. Parents of typical students may not understand the advantages of inclusion of children with disabilities.



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