

Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)

Norfolk Public Schools

Minutes 1/7/21 – Adopted 3/4/21

Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic and Governor Northam’s Executive Order Number 53 (2020), effective March 23, 2020, this meeting was held via Zoom Communications, in accordance with Code of Virginia §2.2-3708.2.

Meeting, time and date: via Zoom, 1/7/21, 6:00 p.m.

Members present:	Shirley Confino-Rehder, Ellen Fitzenrider, Vicky Greco, Matthew Moynihan, Tasha Washington, Vashti Washington
Members absent:	Betty Boone, Diane Outlaw, Seraphine Nyuydine
NPS Consultants present:	Dr. Glenda Walter, Learning Support Director; Jerri Smith, Learning Support Senior Coordinator
Guests:	Sarah Bailey, Education Advocacy Coordinator, Endependence Center

Welcome/Introductions/Minutes: The meeting was called to order at 6:08 p.m. by SEAC Chair Mr. Moynihan, who welcomed all in attendance. Meeting attendees introduced themselves. Ms. Greco presented draft minutes from last month's meeting of December 3, 2020, with recommended edits. Mr. Moynihan moved that the Committee take the December meeting minutes under advisement and that approval take place at our next meeting. The motion carried.

Committee Membership: Mr. Moynihan led discussion regarding the School Board's reconstitution of advisory committee membership, including that of SEAC, and the related online applications recently submitted to the School Board clerk. Mr. Moynihan and Dr. Walter explained the process that they completed in reviewing the approximately 20-25 SEAC applicants' information forwarded by the School Board, which will make decisions regarding applicants at its meeting on January 13, 2021.

In response to the need for additional voices and diverse representation on SEAC, Mr. Moynihan and others expressed the hope that the Board approves candidates who applied to serve on SEAC this year. Dr. Walter noted that the following criteria will be included in the Board's SEAC confirmation appointments: related experience/educational and professional background, prior service on advisory committee(s), participation level on advisory committees, and geographic info/zip code.

2020 JLARC Study (<http://jlarc.virginia.gov/landing-2020-special-education.asp>): Mr. Moynihan reported the recent release by the Commonwealth's Joint Legislative, Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) of its study regarding K–12 special education services in Virginia. The overall purpose of the study was "to examine the processes used by school divisions to enroll students in special education, to determine the services needed by students with disabilities, and to provide needed services, as well as to review the effectiveness of VDOE in its supervisory role." Mr. Moynihan recognized that the 153-page final report, which he had previously forwarded to SEAC membes via an emailed link, would be a good item for discussion at the February meeting. Dr. Fitzenrider added that the Commission's summary report with its 27 recommendations for K-12 Special Education in Virginia was helpful.

Announcements:

Dr. Fitzenrider shared with the Committee that she had submitted public comments to the School Board at its most recent business meeting on December 16, 2020; however, the PDF file that she had attached was not entered into the public record.

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Ms. Bailey announced that there had been changes to the schedule of classes offered by the Endependence Center, Inc. (ECI), which she provided in tonight's Zoom Chat forum. During Tuesdays in January, ECI hosts Youth Independent Living (IL) Skills Training for youth between the ages of 17-24 and who use ECI services. During January, ECI will hold four webinars on Wednesday, January 6, 13, 20, and 27. Everyone is welcome to join these webinars. Registration and additional info about the webinar series, as well as other projects and services provided by ECI, can be found at <http://endependence.org/>.

Because school funding continues to be a key area for advocacy, Ms. Greco highlighted <https://www.fundourschoolsva.org/>, the website for Fund Our Schools, a statewide coalition of advocacy groups, parents, teachers, and students. Through its ongoing advocacy efforts, Fund Our Schools asks that the General Assembly enact legislation during its current session that provides for sufficient staffing, fair funding, and just compensation and supports for educators.

Ms. Confino-Rehder announced that the Norfolk Commission for Persons With Disabilities, for which she currently serves as chair, continues to receive NPS updates from Dr. Fitzenrider at its meetings.

Dr. Walter reported on Learning Support's efforts to promote SEAC's upcoming meetings, as well as Parent Resources Center opportunities. Discussion followed regarding potential outlets, in addition to posts on social media and the related tabs on the NPS website. Strategies that were discussed included use of school building e-newsletters, division-wide email updates (e.g., Coronavirus Communications Newsletter updates), and other NPS parent online guides (e.g. ParentVue).

In addition, Dr. Walter gave a synopsis of upcoming parent training sessions offered by the Parent Education and Advocacy Center (PEATC), the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), and other agencies. The workshops for January and February include:

- **Early Childhood Academy**, self-paced online course for parents of young children with disabilities, offered through PEATC
- **Transition University**, self-paced online course for families of students with disabilities, offered through PEATC
- **The Ins and Outs of IEPs**, online course specifically for military-connected families of students with disabilities, offered in conjunction with PEATC and other agencies
- **Disability Training Regs: Restraint and Seclusion: What Parents Need to Know**, offered by PEATC and the Disability Law Center
- **Self-Care of Social-Emotional Needs During These Uncertain Times**, offered by PEATC
- **Introduction to Autism and ABA**, offered by PEATC

Dr. Walter noted that some workshops begin in January or February, the online courses run 5 weeks, and courses will be offered again in the spring. She will forward the workshop flyers to the SEAC email account, as well as work with Ms. Kenita Matthews, Director of NPS Communications and Community Engagement, to

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promote these training opportunities for parents, guardians and families throughout the division and community.

Public Comments: Following the summary of guidelines for public comments, Mr. Moynihan opened the floor for public comments from the stakeholders in attendance.

Ms. Greco commented on the need for informed advocacy on behalf of our school division as the General Assembly is set to conduct its short legislative session from January 13 to February 27, 2021. She again noted the Fund Our Schools website and JLARC Special Education recommendations as examples of legislative resources for advocacy.

Issues Confronting Special Education during Covid-19: Mr. Moynihan led discussion of additional impact issues and/or topics for follow-up discussion by SEAC:

*Distribution of Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) Cards to all NPS parents/guardians to access Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits; additional clarification of family eligibility for P-EBT Cards

*Modification by School Board of Return to School Plan, now based on the status of primary health metrics of case incidence per 100,000 persons, percent positivity (RT-PCR testing) rate, and NPS readiness to implement key mitigation strategies. Students will not return to face-to-face learning until the core health metrics are in the yellow (moderate level) threat for 14 consecutive days.

Phased approach to in-person instruction as previously approved has not changed, with the Phase One group still including K-12 students with disabilities (SWD) assigned to self-contained classrooms. Dr. Walter also noted that the School Board left flexibility as needed by the administration between the 3-week period between phases.

*Anticipation of loss of student progress with virtual instruction and planning for subsequent instructional supports for SWD. Mr. Moynihan noted that Virginia Beach City Schools is considering year-round schooling. The group discussed the identification and mitigation of student needs once they are able to return safely to in-person learning. Dr. Walter indicated that the Learning Support Department has not received guidance at this time from VDOE regarding potential expansion of the Extended School Year (ESY) Program, for which student participation is based on SWD meeting the program criteria as determined by their IEP committees.

*Use of Coronavirus, Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds by NPS to provide recovery services to students with IEPs. Mr. Moynihan raised the question of the availability of public information on the status of NPS CARES Act spending, similar to the information provided by Chesapeake Public Schools. Dr. Walter reported that while she was not aware of reports released to the public by NPS regarding CARES fund expenditures, CARES funds received by Learning Support have been used to purchase additional technology for our students with disabilities, including Visually-Impaired (VI) Learners, as well as part-time pay for special educators who are conducting IEP make-up due to interruptions from Covid-19 and other set-asides for related services.

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In response to Ms. Greco's question about current special education staffing levels, Dr. Walter specified that no reductions in staffing were planned based on the division's December 1 counts, in spite of drops in enrollment since the start of the pandemic.

The Committee discussed advocacy for additional funding and resources during this period of FY22 budget planning and communicating back to the School Board. Dr. Walter noted fiscal responsibility in the allocation of resources and reported that Learning Support staff continues to meet with teachers and principals to better understand the impact on learning and what supports are needed for our students with disabilities, as well as the special educators and staff who teach them.

Other Business/Closing:

Mr. Moynihan asked the membership for additional items of business and none were raised. He then ruled that the meeting was adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 4, 2021 at 6 p.m. via Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,
Vicky Manugo Greco
Secretary