

Norfolk Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee

Annual Report 2017-2018

School Board of the City of Norfolk
800 E. City Hall Avenue
Norfolk VA 23510

January 10, 2019

Introduction

The Norfolk Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) is pleased to present this annual report to the School Board of the City of Norfolk. This report includes recommendations to help improve the education and educational outcomes for Norfolk Public Schools students receiving special education services.

The SEAC is mandated by state law to advise the local school division on needs of students with disabilities, assist in the development of long-term plans and participate in developing strategies for providing needed services to these students in Norfolk Public Schools.

SEAC Organization

Currently Norfolk Public Schools SEAC is composed of parents with children that receive special education services in Norfolk Public Schools, interested community members, and teachers from Norfolk Public Schools. In addition staff members from the Office of Learning Support and members from the School Board of the City of Norfolk serve as consultants and advise the SEAC.

SEAC meetings are held the first Thursday of each month at 6:00 pm on the 11th floor conference room of the school administration building. SEAC meetings are led by the Chairman, Vashti B. Washington. The meetings include but are not limited to public comment, old business, and new business along with any announcements from committee members. Currently the SEAC has three ad hoc sub-committees: the Membership sub-committee, the Bylaws sub-committee and the Policy and Procedures sub-committee.

2017-2018 SEAC Accomplishments

- Reviewed By-laws for 2017-2018 school year.
- Scheduled presentations to educate SEAC members and the public on different areas of special education along with policies and procedures of SEAC.
- Clarified the purpose and actions of SEAC for committee members and the public.
- Developed a brochure that introduces the goals and actions of SEAC to give to parents of

students with disabilities and the public.

- Confirmed active SEAC members.
- Voted in the official SEAC Board for 17-18 school year.
- Prepared a slate of officers and elected the official SEAC Board for 18-19 school year.
- Confirmed meeting dates for 17-18 and 18-19 school year.
- Began posting meeting agenda and minutes on the SEAC page on the NPS website.
- Began posting SEAC meetings on the NPS Facebook and twitter pages and NPS website.
- Developed two subcommittees (1)Bylaws, Policies and Procedures committee (2)Membership, Communications and Outreach committee.
- Completed a SEAC self-assessment.
- Developed a public comment card and added it as part of the meeting agenda.
- Provided feedback for the 17-18 school year Special Education Annual Plan.
- Completed SEAC membership training.

Presentations

- Presentation was given on January 16, 2018 by Ronald C. Richardson and Stephanie Whitley, Senior Coordinators, Learning Support – Special Education Services on the duties of the IEP case workers.

Committee Updates

- Currently there are three membership applications pending review by the school board.
- SEAC will sponsor parent training sessions during the 18/19 school year.
- SEAC will host a public coffee session with the Senior Director and staff of the Learning Support – Special Education Services office.
- The member application process is being streamlined.

Recommendations

These recommendations came from public comments offered by parent stakeholders that were received by SEAC and from committee members who saw a need for improvement in certain instructional and administrative areas coordinated by the Norfolk Public Schools Learning Support Department. These recommendations are based on a system-wide need versus any specific individual need. The recommendations are as follows:

- Case Managers/Special Education Teachers need to have clear, consistent and ongoing orientation and training of what is expected from them to assist the students with

getting the appropriate education. For example, a job description that details a checklist of responsibilities and requirements would be extremely helpful to assist the case worker in knowing and meeting these expectations as well as informing parents of what to expect.

- Timely communication is a vital part of the process, therefore Case Managers/Special Education Teachers need to have a 24 hour response time standard to anyone who has contacted them about one of their students. They must respond back in the manner that the individual who is contacting them prefers (i.e., phone, e-mail, etc.)
- Case Managers/Special Education Teachers need to have a set of accountability measures in place to ensure that policies and guidelines, as well as NPS regulations are being followed. This will improve compliance with IEP implementation.
- Case Managers/Special Education Teachers need to have mandatory trainings throughout the school year to ensure that regulations, as well as NPS guidelines and policies that affect special education students are being followed. They should also have a copy of the current rules and regulation guidelines to refer to as needed. This will improve compliance with delivery of special education services via IEP development, implementation and monitoring.
- Case Managers/Special Education Teachers must communicate and collaborate with general education teachers to make sure students are accomplishing goals set in the IEP and all accommodations are being followed.
- Guidance Counselors of students receiving special education need to be more involved in the education process for these students by effectively communicating with parents about post-secondary expectations for students and what is needed to move the students into that direction of higher education, as well as career-readiness (i.e., assistance in applying to College Board for PSAT, SAT and ACT accommodations)
- IEP teams must be aware and knowledgeable about alternative testing for students with disabilities when they do not pass the SOL.
- IEP Committee members must be knowledgeable of the disability of the child's case that they are working on and understand the needs related that particular disability.
- The number of students with disabilities in one general education classroom needs to be limited to a smaller number (12-14 percent matches the number of students with disabilities in the general population) to prevent lack of appropriate services for the students that are being included.
- Verify that students with disabilities have appropriate alternative format materials such

as audible textbooks and reading material as soon as the school year begins.

- It is extremely vital that the administration, all principles, all teachers and all case managers' work from the same set of policies, guidelines and regulations set forth by VDOE to ensure that students with disabilities are all getting the same support and services vital to their education. Along with this, accountability measures should be in place to ensure this is taking place.
- Resource classes need to be a class that reinforces remediation for SOL testing.
- Students with disabilities should have the same opportunities to take online courses as well as advancement placement courses.
- SOL requirements should not determine if students with disabilities can participate in after-school activities when they are coming from middle school to high school.
- Accountability measures need to be in place to ensure that all teachers have received and are following the student's accommodations.
- Increased support is needed for families to help them learn more about the special education process and become better advocates for their students.
- Increased support for reading for students with disabilities is needed, particularly in the secondary schools.
- Paraprofessionals should have additional training throughout the year in order to better support students with disabilities.
- Consider hiring additional credentialed human service or social workers, as well as behavior specialists with some having the BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst) credential to better meet the needs of all students, and to support teachers providing services to students with disabilities. Additional support is needed for students who have been exposed to trauma and/or when students are receiving disciplinary actions who also have environmental and psychosocial concerns contributing to their behaviors and actions.

The recommendations noted above are areas of concern regarding the planning, delivery and management of special education services that have been consistently shared by parents of students with disabilities and from observing ongoing challenges experienced by special and regular education teachers and with case managers. If not addressed, these areas of concern will continue to cause frustration for parents and case workers alike. Improvements in these areas will not only allow an environment that is conducive to students with disabilities receiving an education with NPS, but will allow students with disabilities to receive the educational supports and services dictated by laws and regulations and demonstrate that Norfolk Public Schools is working to advance our students with disabilities successfully into the community.

2018-2019 Goals of SEAC

- * Better collaboration with the School Board of the City of Norfolk.
- * Increase parent membership.
- * Increase community awareness of SEAC.
- * Create innovative ways to reach goals.
- * Host a resource fair for students with disabilities and their families.
- * Help improve transition services and life skills for students with disabilities.

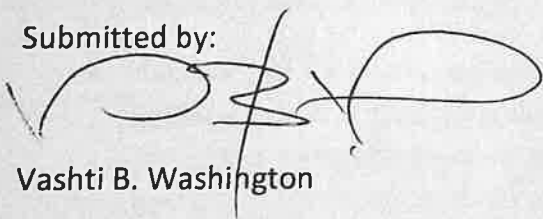
Conclusion

In the spirit of collaboration, the Norfolk Public Schools SEAC hopes that the recommendations in this report are given full consideration. We look forward to a response of actions taken by the School Board of the City of Norfolk as we continue to work together to help strengthen the learning support services for all students with disabilities in Norfolk Public Schools.

Acknowledgments

The Norfolk Public Schools SEAC would like to give a special thank you to Cheryl Ward of the Endependence Center, Rodney Jordan of the School Board of the City of Norfolk, Senior Director Dr. Janice James-Mitchell of the Office of Learning Support, and Assistant Director Joy Richardson of the Office of Learning Support for all of the support and assistance provided to SEAC. Finally, on behalf of the Norfolk SEAC, I would like to recognize Mrs. Ward's retirement and thank her for her invaluable service to NPS as a long-time SEAC member.

Submitted by:



Vashti B. Washington

Chairman

Norfolk Public Schools SEAC

Cc:

Dr. Noelle M. Gabriel, Chair, School Board of the City of Norfolk

Dr. Melinda J. Boone, Superintendent, Norfolk Public Schools

Dr. Janice James-Mitchell, Senior Director, Learning Support – Special Education Services