

May 6, 2020

Dear Chair Gabriel and School Board Members,

Please allow this letter to serve as notice that the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) has reviewed the Annual Plan that is being presented to the Board for approval. While the COVID-19 pandemic has prevented the SEAC from having additional meetings since the Annual Plan was presented, the following concerns regarding the plan were raised by members of the SEAC.

1. Enhancement of plans and funding for Extended School Year program delivery of education and related services and supports, with emphasis on distance learning access, equity, and use of technology. Delivering quality instruction through distance learning is a challenge, and one that is significantly greater for our students with special needs. An enhanced focus on how the City will deliver the unique programming required by students with special needs has been highlighted during the current environment, and merits attention and changes moving forward.
2. Strengthening division-wide instructional coaching and professional development practices, including the requirement of professional development for all staff regarding IDEA legal requirements and responsibilities under the Every Student Succeeds Act during a state of emergency and prolonged school closures.
3. Use of evidence-based inclusion and classroom management strategies.
4. Increased focus on meeting the social and emotional needs of special needs students along with the teachers, staff, and professionals involved in special education.
5. Development of school safety strategies for children with special needs.
6. Division-wide focus on building welcoming, working, and collaborative relationships with parents, guardians, and advocates. There is a widespread and dedicated community of supporters of special education in Norfolk that are ready to assist the Board in fostering these relationships.
7. A year-round program of mentoring and inclusion of special education staff.
8. Improved system of administration and communication via a centralized and fully resourced Special Education department that is not relegated to support services, but is a division wide driver of the commitment to and investment in individualized learning for all students, with foremost priority placed in meeting the needs of all exceptional learners with disabilities.
9. A commitment that special needs funding will be deployed only for special needs programming and support in NPS.
10. A commitment to fund a board-certified behavioral analyst position. NPS has a sizable population of students with autism and similar diagnoses that would greatly benefit from a full-time BCBA.

The SEAC looks forward to continuing to work with the School Board in its mission to provide the best possible educational outcomes for all the students in Norfolk Public Schools.

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew Moynihan
SEAC Chair