

Minutes of Suffolk Special Education Advisory Committee – July 15, 2020

Attendees:

Voting: Vivian Evett, Leslie Schiefer, Holly Boyce, Regina Hall, Saul Godinez, Anitra Simmons, Angela Bickerton

Consultant: Stephanie Whitley, Julie Masters, Kelly MacPherson, David Mitnick

Guest: Sarah Bailey, Ann Dunn, Katie Morse, Kirstyn Oniel, Pamela Charles, Ebony Harris, Johnetta Moody, Samantha (last name was not given)

Absent: Thea Davis, Jeff Davis, Courtney Richardson, Tiarra Logen-Biggs

I. Welcome and Introductions - Ms. Schiefer welcomed everyone and announced the people who were present on the platform. We did not do personal introductions due to the virtual platform.

II. Public Comment – No Public Comment

III. Announcements and Correspondence - No Announcements and Correspondence

IV. Old Business

- A. Approval of May minutes – Motion to approve the minutes by Vivian Evett, seconded by Saul Godinez. All members voted to approve the May minutes as written.

- B. Nominations 2020 – 2021 Academic year – Mrs. Schiefer stated that she gave the SEAC Annual Report at the School Board meeting held on July 9th, 2020. The School Board announced their appointees to SEAC later during the meeting as well. Mrs. Schiefer further opined that she was disappointed in the process that the board used for committee selection stating it was sloppy and disorganized. Mr. Godinez expressed his concerns with the board’s committee appointments as well. He asked how the appointees had been vetted. Mr. Mitnick answered the query by detailing the process of the board requiring a letter of application for SEAC appointment. Stating that all the applicants met the qualifications to serve on SEAC. The board members selected one person from each of their respective boroughs from the letters submitted. Each borough has a representative on SEAC except for the Whaleyville borough. Vivian Evett jumped into the conversation to state that she sent an email to Chairman Byrum on July 10th, 2020, requesting a list of all of the people who were appointed to SEAC by the board. She also requested to see the appointee’s qualifications to serve on SEAC as all of this information is required by SEAC for nominations. Mrs. Evett never received a reply from Chairman Byrum. Committee members Anitra Simmons, Vivian Evett and Saul Godinez continued to ask Mr. Mitnick questions specific to the membership appointments. Mr. Mitnick stated that everyone who was appointed to SEAC ultimately submitted a letter and met the qualifications. Therefore, the SEAC nominations process was completely thwarted by the School Board’s new policy for selecting members for their Citizen Advisory Committees. Anitra Simmons, voting member who was tapped to represent the Suffolk Borough, asked Mr. Mitnick what her responsibility was to the school board member who represents the Suffolk Borough. Mr. Mitnick replied, “nothing”. Anitra further asked, “what is their expectation of me as a representative of my borough?” Vivian pressed further by asking, “is she supposed to

report back to her school board member or fill out any reports or anything on our committee? What exactly is expected of these committee members?" Mr. Mitnick replied, "There has been no discussion of what's required." He further stated that, "these are one-year appointments which only adds to the confusion". Historically, SEAC membership is a two-year term with a consecutive four year max. Vivian Evett pointed out that the SEAC Bylaws are going to need to be rewritten to match the new SPS School Board policy of a one-year term. Questions about borough representation continued as there is MUCH confusion from the appointed members regarding any expectations or responsibilities, they may have to the School Board member that appointed them. Mrs. Schiefer jumped in to reiterate what the SEAC mission is and that SEAC is there to represent the stakeholders in SPS. SEAC advises the School Board not the other way around.

- C. Special Education Director's Report – Stephanie Whitley announced that the School Board approved three new Support Specialist that have been added to the Special Education Department. Holly Boyce is one of those Support Specialist and will now serve on SEAC as a consultant. Mrs. Whitley stated that she would likely be reaching out to SEAC members to work on a committee in conjunction with the core team regarding parental support. Virtual ESY is currently in session. Julie Masters stated that she held a staff meeting to get feedback. She reported that teachers said holding virtual meetings during ESY have been difficult. Therefore, they have sent packages out to students so they would have something to work on during the summer. They hope to get Teach Town up and running to help with the difficulties. Speech Therapists are pushing in and being a part of the virtual meetings as well. The Physical Therapist has also reached out to parents of students that are receiving those services to answer any questions that they may have. The Occupational Therapists have also followed the same protocol. Ms. Masters stated that under the circumstances, "we are charging along and trying to do the best that we can at this time." Mrs. Whitley further explained that Teach Town is a virtual program that SPS was able to access during the school closure and the department has been able to use some of the CARES ACT funding to purchase licensure for the program to use during ESY and in the fall. Mrs. Whitley encouraged everyone to fill out the return to school survey that is open now. She further stated that transportation is one of the biggest hurdles to returning to school for face to face instruction because of social distancing requirements. She stated that she is pushing to have the students that are in smaller specialized SpEd. programs return to school every day that school is open. There are still a lot of questions about what things are going to look like and what will ultimately happen. They are planning for all scenarios. The department is having conversations about how they are going to address the skills that have been lost during the closure. Another issue will be how they are going to handle the IEPs and making sure that the IEP is outlining the educational requirements whether the instruction that child receives is face to face or virtual. Sarah Bailey asked for clarification on use of SPED buses. Mrs. Whitley stated that SPED buses will only be used for students receiving special education services and NOT be included in the count for general education use. Therefore, any child in a specialized setting that does not currently have transportation as an added service on their IEP can have it added so they can attend school every day that school is opened if a hybrid model is chosen by the board. Saul offered to share protocols that the military is using regarding the use of PPE and how the protocols have been effective for in preventing COVID infections even while training large groups of people. Sarah Bailey expressed a concern about students with disabilities not being able to

learn via a virtual platform and if the state has said that those students could return for in-person instruction, why aren't they following the state's advice? Mrs. Whitley reiterated that safety must come first, and the safety controls must be in place and that the schools MUST be ready. She felt that the schools were not there yet, but they were getting there. Kirstyn asked if speech therapy and occupational therapy would be conducted via online conference if a virtual model is chosen by the school board. Mrs. Whitley ensured that those services would be provided virtually according to the child's IEP and that the staff that provides those services would be monitored to ensure that those services ARE being provided as they should be.

V. New Business

A. New appointments for committee positions – Mrs. Schiefer opened the floor to the new voting members and asked each of them to introduce themselves to the committee. Kirstyn Oneil started, followed by Pamela Charles, Katie Morse, Saul Godinez, Angela Bickerton and Anitra Simmons. There was also additional conversation regarding the denial of voting membership to Sarah Bailey. Mrs. Schiefer and Mrs. Evett expressed frustration with the board for the denial and both have sent emails to the board chair requesting the board to reconsider the decision and allow Sarah to serve as a voting member. Mrs. Bailey, being a person with a disability, brings a much needed perspective to SEAC. She has a wealth of information to share and should be allowed to serve in a voting member capacity. There are no guidelines from State SEAC that says that a SEAC member must reside in the city of Suffolk. The School Board's position is that their policy trumps State SEAC guidelines and SEAC Bylaws. Mrs. Schiefer and Mrs. Evett decided that since the school board superseded the SEAC Bylaws, a vote on the new members by the committee was not necessary. After an extensive discussion about SEAC position roles, Mrs. Schiefer asked for volunteers for the SEAC positions. When no one volunteered for the SEAC positions, a motion was made to call a special business meeting in August to take care of position appointments by Angela Bickerton and seconded by Anitra Simmons. A vote was taken of all voting members. Each member voted in the affirmative. Therefore, a special meeting will convene on Wednesday, August 5, 2020 at 6:30 PM via Google Meet. There was further committee discussion regarding advocating for Sarah Bailey's request to become a voting member of SEAC. SEAC members will petition the School Board members individually on Sarah's behalf.

1. There was no volunteer from the new voting members to fill the SEAC Chairperson position.
2. There was no volunteer from the new voting members to fill the SEAC Vice Chair position.
3. There was no volunteer from the new voting members to fill the SEAC Secretary position.

VI. Public Comment Review – No public comment to review

VII. Open Discussion – Saul Godinez questioned where the CARES ACT money that was allotted to SPS has been spent. Mrs. Whitley was able to address a portion of the question. She relayed that some of the money was used to secure the license for the Teach Town virtual platform with the money. Mr. Mitnick added that "the federal government dictated what the CARES ACT money was able to be spent on. Most of it was to assist the school system in adjusting to what was needed because of the current state of affairs in our country." He went on to say that some of the money was

used to buy masks, gloves and other PPE for both staff and students. It was also used for janitorial supplies that were needed. Mrs. Whitley added that she believed that some of the money was also used to get devices for some of the district's younger students as part of the 1:1 initiative. Mr. Mitnick stated that another use of the money was setting up virtual learning, for example, contracts for iReady and Canvas. Saul asked if Mr. Mitnick could get a break down from SPS of how the money was spent. Mr. Godinez further stated that the figure was approximately \$2.19 Million. Mr. Mitnick replied that he would make a request from the Superintendent as to how much money was allotted to SPS through the CARES ACT and what it was used for. Mr. Mitnick further stated that he would send the answer to the committee as soon as he received it from Dr. Gordon.

VIII. Adjournment - The next full committee SEAC meeting will be held on September 16, 2020. A special business meeting will be held on August 5, 2020 to fill the SEAC officer positions and discuss goals for the 2020 – 2021 academic year.