

Minutes of Meeting of Suffolk Special Education Advisory Committee – March 17, 2021

Attendees:

Voting: Saul Godinez, Katie Morse, Kirstyn O'Neill, Pamela Charles, Shawynee Love

Consultant: Holly Boyce, Jamillah Silver, Jessica Joyner, Kelly MacPherson, Marisol Moore, Stephanie Whitley, Vivian Evett

Guest: Ann Dunn, Leslie Schiefer, Lugonda Vann, Sarah Bailey

Absent: Angela Bickerton, Danielle Scarborough, Melissa Gomes, Olivia Adamson-Delk, Stephanie Garrett, Amber Feliciano, Carolyn B. Johnson, Callie Koelling, Amanda Plotner

I. Welcome and Introductions

Mrs. Charles welcomed everyone. Pertinent guests and consultants for this evening were introduced. Quorum was ensured.

II. Public Comment

Ms. Sarah Bailey made a public comment to the SEAC this evening. Ms. Bailey asks SEAC to encourage the School Board to eliminate the use of seclusion and restraint in classrooms within the Suffolk Public Schools district. She notes that “restraint and seclusion expose children to danger and can escalate difficult behaviors, worsening the situation and interfering with the learning process”. She suggests that Suffolk Public Schools make better use of other tools such as conflict resolution and de-escalation instead of restraint or seclusion to produce a safer environment for its students.

III. Announcements/Correspondence

The Endependence Center is always looking to get more youth involved in their programs. The calendar of events is available on their website at www.endependence.org, or people may contact Sarah Bailey for more information.

IV. Old Business

A. Second Review of the Restraint and Seclusion Policy

The policy subcommittee met and reviewed the restraint and seclusion policy. Several recommendations were compiled that need to be put into a more cohesive format and presented to the school board. The notes thus far will be forwarded to all voting members and then the committee will meet again to iron everything out.

B. Approval of January 2021 Minutes (action required)

The January 2021 meeting minutes were approved as presented.

V. New Business

A. Special Education Annual Plan

Each year, localities have to submit an application for funds for special education. The formula considers different factors such as historical funding, total student population, poverty level, etc., to determine the allocations for the different districts. The application that Suffolk Public Schools is submitting this year is based on last years' funding. Our total count of students with disabilities is down this year from last year - probably due to the pandemic. The number is expected to go back up next year. This will probably affect funding somewhat for next year. One grant can be used to pay the salaries of special education teachers, teacher assistants, bus aides and other necessary staff. It can also be used for supplies and other such things, but the rules can be a little specific in terms of what it can and can't be used for, so Suffolk Public Schools tends to use this grant to pay salaries. Doing this frees up money in the local budget to use as needed in special education classrooms. The other is used specifically for preschool education.

B. Special Education Report

1. The SEAC training will be made available for the school board members in the near future.
2. The alternative assessment is being revamped for next year for kids who don't take the SOLs. They will not be a portfolio assessment anymore and they will be called VESOLs (Virginia Essential Standards of Learning). More information should be available by the next SEAC meeting.

C. PRC Report

Vivian Evett has been hired as the Parent Resource Center coordinator. She shared the report for the PRC so far for March. She has been reorganizing the PRC area and taking inventory of the resources housed there so that they can be listed online and updated as appropriate. The PRC is ready to receive visitors according to CDC guidelines.

VI. Public Comment Review

While the SEAC certainly appreciates Ms. Bailey's comment and feels that seclusion and restraint should be used only when absolutely required, it also feels that there are

times when the best use of conflict resolution and de-escalation have been made and restraint and/or seclusion will need to be available as an alternative method of diffusing the situation. The SEAC does not wish to see these tools taken away from staff, but it does wish them to be used as a last resort and with a great amount of care and transparency. SEAC voted not to ask the School Board to eliminate the use of seclusion and restraint.

VII. Adjournment

The next SEAC meeting will be held at 6:30 on Wednesday, July 21st, 2021.