

Suffolk Special Education Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
November 17, 2021

Saul Godinez announced that he visited the School Board at last week's Board meeting. He shared with the Committee the importance of maintaining a SEAC presence at the Board meetings and announced that he will attend future Board meetings when he is in town.

Mr. Godinez announced that, due to the delay in starting the meeting and the inclusion of two speakers for this meeting, the meeting agenda is adjusted.

I. Welcome and Introductions – Mr. Godinez welcomed all attendees and invited introductions. In attendance were the following:

Voting Members: Angela Bickerton, Holly Boyce, Saul Godinez (Chair), Debbie Kliche, Katie Morse (Vice Chair), Kirstyn O'Neill.

Consultants: Vivian Evett, Jessica Joyner, Kelly MacPherson, Julie Masters, Jamillah Silver.

Guests: Sarah Bailey (Endeppendence Center), Steven Edwards, Kaneisha Johnson, Blythe Johnson-Jones, Irhonda Ricks (WTCS), Sherri Story.

Julie Masters announced that the meeting was being audio recorded for the purpose of providing the minutes.

II. Special Education SOL Data Report – Mr. Edwards presented a PowerPoint presentation comparing the 2018-2019 and 2020-2021 data results for the Virginia Standards of Learning Tests and the Virginia Alternative Assessment Program as the 2019/2020 school year assessments were waived by the VDOE and federal government due to COVID-19. Mr. Edwards discussed the effect of Covid-19 precautions on student achievement. From the 2018/19 school year to the 2020/21 school year, students with disabilities showed significant loss in achievement in Reading (38-34%), Writing (30-22%), History (43-19%), Mathematics (51-19%), and Science (48-20%). Mr. Edwards stated that decreases in achievement are not isolated to Suffolk Public Schools. Districts throughout the state are indicating similar losses. Student access to virtual learning was also an issue. Additionally, the achievement data for these students compared to all students indicates a significant gap in achievement ranging from 22% to 39% in the 2020-2021 school year. SEAC members discussed the need to mitigate the loss in achievement for students with disabilities. Mr. Godinez noted that the gap for students with disabilities is either less than or equal to that of all students. Ms. O'Neill noted that schools are reteaching last years' material while teaching current class-level material and asked if the SOLs would be adjusted to account for this issue. Mr. Edwards stated that he had not yet heard how SOLs would be impacted this year but would continue to monitor to address this question. Ms. Bailey asked how the radical drop in data impact IDEA requirements and the need to meet target assessments. Ms. Bailey stated that this year the VDOE is asking for target input from stakeholders. She

is concerned that this loss of achievement will negatively affect the target input for the next five years. Mr. Edwards reminded attendees that accreditation requirements were waived for 2019 and 2021 data and believes that that target input data was also waived. Mr. Godinez asked if this waiver would occur for the current year's data as he believes that the gap in achievement would likely continue. Mr. Edwards stated that the state would return to its normal practices in the spring for accreditation using the 2020/2021 data. Mr. Edwards stated that, early this school year, SPS issued growth assessments for grades 3-8 to measure learning gaps that may have occurred during COVID-19 transition. In the spring, the state will compare SOLs to these growth assessments to determine if growth occurred in order to help determine accreditation. If no growth occurred, the state would compare last year's SOLs and growth assessments. Mr. Edward is not aware of any adjustments to SOLs but stated that the purpose of growth assessments is to identify any loss. Ms. O'Neill asked what SPS will do to address the loss. Mr. Edwards stated that principals have access to the data and will share with their staff to determine the need to reteach subjects. Ms. Masters discussed measure to address the loss through Saturday Academy. Ms. Masters also stated that high schools have already started afterschool remediation for SOLs. Mr. Edwards stated that SPS has worked on differentiation of student achievement in classrooms for years and would use that experience to address the current issue. Ms. Bailey asked if Saturday Academy had to be written in a student's IEP otherwise their accommodations and modifications may not be met. Ms. Silver stated that IEPs would be followed in Saturday Academy as this is considered an afterschool activity. Ms. Masters stated that transportation is not provided for Saturday Academy. SEAC members discussed the impact this lack of transportation would have on participation by students with disabilities and compliance of IEP transportation accommodations. Mr. Godinez recommended that parents use ESY to access this option.

Mr. Godinez noted that Sherri Story, School Board Member, was recording the meeting and streaming it live on Facebook without notifying participants. Mr. Godinez informed all attendees that they must notify all attendees before recording the meeting or live streaming on social media. Mr. Godinez asked Ms. Story to address the data being discussed but she stated that she was unable to comment due to School Board policy.

Comparing the 2018/2019 to the 2020/2021 school year data, VAAP results indicate decreases in achievement across the board: Reading (from 86% to 66%), Writing (from 76% to 61%), History (from 77% to 64%), Mathematics (from 85% to 71%), and Science (from 76% to 48%).

There was a decrease in the on-time graduation rate for all students from 2019 to 2021 (2019 – 90%, 2020 – 87%, and 2021 – 86%); however, the on-time graduation rate for students with disabilities fluctuated over the same period (2019 – 80%, 2020 – 79%, 2021 – 83%). Diplomas Awarded data indicates that the percentage of all students who earned a diploma remained rather flat: 2019-2021 Advanced Diplomas -1%, Standard Diplomas +3%. Students with disabilities demonstrated no change 2019-2021 in Advanced Diplomas, with a 7% increase in Standard Diplomas. The percentage of GEDs stayed flat for all students from 2019-2021, with a 1% decrease for students with disabilities. It is noted that students with disabilities had a significant increase in GEDs during the

2019/2020 school year with a 13% increase from the previous year. The Dropout Rate for all students remained flat over the three school years being presented, while the data for students with disabilities fluctuated from 11% in 2019, 17% in 2020, and 9% in 2021.

Mr. Edwards advised that additional division and school-level data can be obtained on the VDOE's School Quality Profiles at <https://schoolquality.virginia.gov>. Mr. Godinez thanked Mr. Edwards and requested his return to address upcoming data.

III. Presentation of Waivers Process by Irhonda Ricks – Western Tidewater Community Service Board (WTCS) - Ms. Ricks stated that the state was tasked with reducing the number of people in institutions after a 2012 DOJ settlement. Integration into communities generated waivers for community living, family and individual support, and building independence. Ms. Ricks gave a brief overview of these three waivers. Ms. Ricks also discussed the process for applying for the DD waivers and ID/DD services at WTCSB. She stated that applicants must be found eligible in three out of eight areas to qualify for the DD Waiver: health status, communication, task learning, personal care, behavior, mobility, community living skills, and/or self-direction. Applicants must also meet Medicaid eligibility to receive long-term care but does not need to have Medicaid to be placed on waiver waitlist. Those who meet the criteria will be placed on the waitlist and designated as priority 1, 2, or 3, dependent upon current needs/circumstances. Severity of need drives offer of waiver, not time spent on the waitlist. CCC Plus waiver was discussed. Ms. Ricks noted that all waivers provide for respite care. Waivers become available when the state allocates additional waivers, when a waiver recipient dies, when a waiver recipient moves out of state, if a parent refuses waiver, or when a waiver recipient is placed in long-term care facility. The Waiver Slot Assignment Committee determine the recipients.

Ms. Ricks discussed various services available through the DD Waiver including employment and day services. She stated that employment supports are available through the waivers. Portco is an employment workshop for people with ID in Suffolk. Individuals cannot work over 25 hours per week due to restrictions on income for eligibility for SSI. Self-directed options are available for parents who wish to become designated as caretakers and receive pay to care for their children. Available services are dependent upon the waiver an individual receives.

Mr. Godinez asked if Ms. Ricks can provide intake for Spanish-speaking families. Ms. Ricks assured that accommodations would be provided. Members asked the age when parents should apply. Ms. Ricks recommended the earlier the better. Mr. Godinez thanked Ms. Ricks for presenting this information.

IV. Public Comment – None

V. Special Education Director Report – Ms. Masters provided the report due to the absence of Ms. Whitley. She stated that the VAAP will no longer be used. Those students will now be assessed on the Virginia Essentials Standards of Learning (VESOL). SPS staff have been participating in the training modules and TTAC training opportunities. Special Education Department staff will be supporting school-based staff in implementing the new

assessments. The VESOLs are an online assessment with different ways for students to demonstrate their knowledge. Special Education staff are currently working on the December 1 count to the state. Special Education Liaisons are being recruited to work within the schools to facilitate special education supports at the school level. Ms. Masters stated that Ms. Johnson was recently hired to be a liaison and three more would be starting in the first of the year. Mr. Godinez invited Ms. Johnson to introduce herself to the committee and describe her position as a liaison. Dr. MacPherson stated that the current liaisons would be placed at the secondary level in schools with the heaviest special education population. All three high schools with KFHS being the one with the largest population (over 200 students with disabilities), KFMS is the third largest school in regard to special education population. Liaisons will provide support to special education teachers and teams to help with compliance, instruction, behavioral needs, and interventions. SPS started with five liaisons but are now down to three. The liaisons will be housed in the school they are designated to support but will fall under the Special Education Department. They will work with other special education support members to assist the school with the large number of students receiving special education services. Ms. Masters noted that the Special Education Director, Supervisors, and Specialists were in the schools to provide supports as well. Ms. Silver stated that the Special Education Department is focused on provided strategic supports to address the needs of students with disabilities and address the achievement losses. Ms. O'Neill noted that the losses were not just academic but also included life skills and behaviors. Ms. Silver noted that SPS has a behavior specialist to provide supports as well as other specialists to focus on the academic issues and compliance. Ms. O'Neill asked if the specialist would work directly with the students in the schools; however, Ms. Silver stated that their function is mainly to work with the staff and support LEAs but will also work with parents to provide supports. The specialists work with school-based staff to provide interventions to address students' needs. Ms. O'Neill expressed appreciation to the Special Education Department for their efforts. Ms. Masters stated that the Special Education Department had issued another survey to determine the need for more manipulatives in classes to support academics. Ms. Masters announced that the Disability Resources and Awareness Fair has been postponed until the Spring due to Covid-19. This Fair is intended to be bigger and better than previous efforts. Ms. Evett asked the Special Education team to address a recurring question that she has encountered (and continues to see on parent-focused social media) so that SEAC can spread the word in the disability community: Why doesn't a medical diagnosis guarantee eligibility for special education services in schools? Dr. MacPherson stated that a medical diagnosis would be considered during eligibility but, in order to qualify for special education services, the disability must impact their education. For instance, if a student is diagnosed with Autism but that diagnosis does not impact the student's education, the student may not qualify for special education services. However, the need for accommodations could be considered for that student under a 504 Plan. An educational impact is necessary for special education services. Ms. Silver stated that a student must have the presence of a disability, an adverse impact on education, and the need for specially designed instruction.

- VI. Parent Resource Center Report** – Ms. Evett stated that the PRC hosted the *How To Talk So Schools Will Listen (And Listen So Schools Will Talk)* parent workshop with PEATC in October. Special Education Department members and PRC Liaison attended to provide

resources and supports for the 8 parents/guardians who attended. The PRC is planning monthly parent workshops with PEATC, as well as Special Education Department personnel with proposed workshop topics including the Eligibility process, assistive technology, behavior as communication, extracurricular opportunities in our area, and Manifestation Determination Reviews. Ms. Evett presented a virtual workshop for a local women's support group in September, which focused on the special education process including IEPs, State Regulations, Eligibility, and resources in our area. This workshop was requested by a parent who attended one of our workshops in August. The Disability Awareness/Resource Fair has been tentatively scheduled for April 27, 2022 from 2:00 p.m. until 5:30 p.m., at Nansemond River High School. Setup will begin at 1:00 p.m. and breakdown will end at 6:00 p.m. The Planning Committee intends to use the cafeteria and hallway for vendor booths and disability simulation activities and the media center for presentations from key speakers. The Planning Committee will meet again on December 8th and will continue to keep SEAC informed of the progress and involved in the process. Ms. Masters and Ms. Evett are currently working on a subgrant submission for funds to provide supports for the Fair. A meeting was held with school representatives to discuss ideas for activities to promote awareness and acceptance during Disability Awareness Month in October. Various resources were provided including the Special Olympics *Choose to Include* schoolwide awareness campaign, the Easterseals' *Friends Who Care* curriculum, and the *People Like Me* curriculum. Since the last SEAC meeting in September, Ms. Evett attended two webinars: "Addressing Disparities of African American Students with Disabilities" presented by Easterseals and "Strengthening Parent-Teacher Collaboration Around Learning and Thinking Differences" presented by the Understood Organization and the National PTA Association. Ms. Evett also attended the State Indicator Informational Session with PRC Coordinators. The PRC has distributed two newsletters and two news flashes within the last two months. The top three concerns of PRC contacts have been the special education process, Manifestation Determination Reviews, and Functional Behavior Assessments. The PRC webpage has received 91 views since the September report. Previous data indicates that the page was viewed 438 times from July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020 and 490 times from July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021. In closing her report, Ms. Evett presented SEAC go-bags to committee voting members in attendance which included SEAC pocket guides, PRC notebooks, PEATC pens, and SEAC and disability awareness pens to help members promote SEAC within the disability community. Committee members expressed their appreciation. Ms. O'Neill stated that it was the most appreciated she has felt as a SEAC member.

VII. SEAC Business - Mr. Godinez announced that the committee had a quorum and would continue the meeting with SEAC business.

A. Approval of the September Minutes – Voting members approved the minutes as written.

B. Appointment of SEAC secretary – Mr. Godinez requested a volunteer for the SEAC secretary position. The role of the secretary was discussed. No volunteers were noted. Ms. Evett recommended volunteers to notify Mr. Godinez by email.

C. SEAC Goals for 2021-2022 – SEAC members discussed the proposed goals for this year and voted to approve the goals as follows:

- Continue to assist in the development and promotion of the Disability Awareness Fair.
- Continue to develop methods to improve communication between schools and parents/guardians of students receiving Special Education services.
- Work in collaboration with the SPS special education department and the Parent Resource Center to educate and guide stakeholders toward resources, including but not limited to transition activities, community programs, and social media engagement.
- Recommend that SPS review current policy to ensure IEPs and 504s are readily available to instructional staff members who interact with a child.
- Continue to advance Disability Awareness and acceptance within the Suffolk Public Schools' student, parent, and teacher population.
- Recommend that SPS implement a policy for an audio/video monitoring system in district-wide alternative-adaptive and alternative-functional program classes.

SEAC members volunteered for the following subcommittees to address the 2021/2022 Goals:

Disability Awareness Subcommittee

Members: Kirstyn O'Neill (Chair), Saul Godinez

Communication Subcommittee

Members: Kirstyn O'Neill (Chair)

Transition Subcommittee

Members: Angela Bickerton, Sarah Bailey

Transportation Subcommittee

Members: Deborah Kliche (Chair)

VIII. Public Comment Review – No review necessary.

IX. Open Discussion – Committee attendees engaged in open discussion on Special Education related issues.

X. Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned until the next SEAC meeting scheduled for January 19, 2022.