

Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee
2012-2013 Report without Recommendations

May 8, 2013

The Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee (ASEAC) would like to thank Superintendent Patrick Murphy, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services Brenda Wilks, Director of the Office of Special Education Kristi Murphy, and Director of the Office of Pupil Services, Jeffrey Carpenter for their continued support in fostering a strong collaborative working relationship with our Committee. We would also like to recognize and extend thanks to Kathleen Donovan and Vickie Barr, Parent Resource Center, Wendy Carria, Office of Pupil Services and Becky Suttell, Arlington County Department of Parks and Recreation. We are especially grateful for the administrative assistance provide by Rosa Ewell and Veronica Tellez and our Spanish language interpreter, Soraya Strobach, who is always in attendance.

Introduction

ASEAC is pleased to present this Report without Recommendations for the 2012-2013 school year to the Advisory Council on Instruction (ACI), the Superintendent of Arlington Public Schools, and the Arlington County School Board.

Background

“Local SEACs have a long history in Virginia. Every school division is required to have a SEAC as detailed in the Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia, effective January 25, 2010 (special education regulations). The major purpose of SEACs is to provide an opportunity for parents and other school board appointees to have a voice in the way school divisions provide services to students with disabilities. SEACS are extensions of local school boards since members are appointed by them and SEACs provide reports and recommendations to their school boards.”¹

The regulations at 8 VAC 20-81-230 D state that:

A local advisory committee for special education, appointed by each local school board, shall advise the school board through the division superintendent.

1. Membership

- a. A majority of the committee shall be parents of children with disabilities or individuals with disabilities.
- b. The committee shall include one teacher.
- c. Additional local school division personnel shall serve only as consultants to the committee.

¹ Virginia Department of Education website,
http://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/committees_advisory/special_ed/local_sped_advisory_committees/index.shtml

2. The functions of the local advisory committee shall be as follows:

- a. Advise the local school division of needs in the education of children with disabilities;
- b. Participate in the development of priorities and strategies for meeting the identified needs of children with disabilities;
- c. Submit periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities to the division superintendent for transmission to the local school board;
- d. Assist the local school division in interpreting plans to the community for meeting the special needs of children with disabilities for educational services;
- e. Review the policies and procedures for the provision of special education and related services prior to submission to the local school board; and
- f. Participate in the review of the local school division's annual plan.²

Definitions

Students with disabilities that affect their ability to learn and engage socially are in all Arlington Public Schools. This includes those found eligible for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA). In 2012-2013, 3,363 students, or 14% of the APS population fall under this category. These students have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), receive a variety of services and/or accommodations which are provided either in the general education classroom or a "self-contained" special education classroom (or a combination thereof).

Other students with disabilities are identified for support under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the related Amendments Act (ADA AA) which "protects the rights of individuals with disabilities in programs or facilities that receive Federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Education."³ To be protected under Section 504, a student must be determined to: 1) have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; or 2) have a record of such an impairment; or 3) be regarded as having such an impairment. Section 504 requires that school districts provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to qualified students in their jurisdictions who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities⁴.

The third formal mechanism for supporting students with disabilities is through Intervention Assistance Teams (IAT). (Note: IAT is available to any student in need of assistance and is not limited to students with disabilities.) If appropriate, these students receive modifications to their educational program to address their particular needs. Some of these students go on to receive IEPs or 504s, if further intervention is necessary.

² Virginia Department of Education, http://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/committees_advisory/special_ed/local_sped_advisory_committees/index.shtml

³ U.S. Department of Education, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html>

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Updates

In addition to its regular monthly meetings (synopsis at the end of this report), ASEAC continued to facilitate participation of Arlington residents through its subcommittees. Many parents have an interest in special education services but cannot attend monthly ASEAC meetings or would like to focus on a specific disability area or concern. ASEAC subcommittees are led by an ASEAC member but ASEAC membership is not required to be a member of the subcommittee. Subcommittee participation is welcomed and encouraged by non-members with a specific interest or expertise in the topic. This year, ASEAC subcommittees focused on: Accountability and Evaluation, Autism, ADHD, Budget, Mental Health, and Reading.

As Special Education issues concern all students, and thus impact all Advisory committees, ASEAC is particularly interested in expanding its outreach efforts to other committees. This year we assigned liaisons to four other advisory committees in order to improve communication across constituencies and assist in meeting the needs of all students with disabilities. Our current liaisons and the advisory committees to which they serve as a resource are: James Smith, Superintendent's Advisory Committee on the Elimination of the Achievement Gap; Cleo Rodriguez, ESOL/HILT; Linda Arnsbarger, English; and Kate Van Slyck, Early Childhood Education.

Status of 2011-2012 Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Continue to be actively involved in the on-going Evaluation of Services for Students with Special Needs.

The original recommendation regarding an evaluation of services for students with special needs was the only recommendation in ASEAC's 2009-2010 report. It became the highest priority recommendation from ACI to the School Board that year. The School Board funded the evaluation and the consulting firm PCG was chosen to conduct the evaluation. Administrators, teachers, and two ASEAC members, Linda Arnsbarger and Nancy Van Doren, were on the oversight group for the evaluation.

The evaluation, conducted by PCG, was finalized in early 2013 and presented to the Arlington County School Board in February, following a January work session. APS staff, including those from the Office of Planning and Evaluation and the Department of Student Services, repeatedly remarked on the positive and valuable experience of working collaboratively with ASEAC members as part of the evaluation team. The results of the evaluation were presented to ACI on May 8, 2012.

PCG's review of APS services for students with special needs included 20 recommendations that were reorganized and restructured to form 11 overall recommendations, including six that have the highest priority for implementation. PCG stressed the importance, when planning implementation activities, of ensuring that there is an alignment between standards for an expected Multi-Tiered System of Supports and inclusive education practices with training and accountability measures. In other words, to ensure that all standards are linked to training and accountability; that all training provisions are linked to standards and accountability; and that all accountability measures are linked to standards and training.

These components should be supported with technology, effective organization, human resources, and parent, family, and school partnerships. The six highest priority recommendations are as follows:

1. Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)
2. Inclusive Education
3. Organization & Collaboration
4. Operating Procedures
5. Accountability
6. Parent, Family & School Partnerships

Virtually all of the key recommendations of the evaluation call for significant initiative and restructuring within Instruction/general education. They are not specific to the Department of Student Services, its Office of Special Education or students “in” special education.

ASEAC strongly supports the recommended MTSS structure because it would provide earlier and more appropriate identification of students who are not on track academically and/or socially and would allow for the application of differentiated instruction and intervention as soon as needed. It would provide intervention to all students in need, regardless of label.

Of particular concern to ASEAC are the findings on lack of research based reading interventions for all students who need them. It is ASEAC’s hope that the evaluation will prompt APS to restructure how it identifies students in need of reading support at all levels, regardless of label, and how it provides effective research based interventions that are targeted at the needs of the child.

The evaluation also identified significant connections between students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ELLs). PCG recommends that APS “expect consistent and collaborative systemic planning between the Special Education and ESOL/HILT offices to develop/monitor the implementation of standards for ELL/special needs identification, service delivery and related professional learning development activities. Cross-train personnel to foster a better understanding of each other’s policies, procedures, and practices and use of any allowable funding sources.”⁵

ASEAC will look closely to the evaluation as a guide in making its recommendations for the 2013-2014 school year. While we steadfastly support the Department of Student Services in its efforts to improve services for students with special needs, particularly the Department’s commitment to working hand-in-hand with the Department of Instruction, ***ASEAC cannot stress enough the critical need for a clear implementation plan as a “road map” for APS to follow while putting specific changes into action.*** ASEAC is committed to maintaining its positive collaborative relationship with APS in this process, while emphasizing the critical need to keep moving ahead and not lose momentum. Changes do not take place overnight, but neither is it possible for our students to get back what is lost with each passing year.

⁵ Evaluation of APS Services for Students with Special Needs, Public Consulting Group, January 2013., p. 102

The evaluation can be accessed, in its entirety, at:

<http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/141/evaluation%20reports/APS%20Sped%20Final%20Report%201.18.pdf>

The Assistant Superintendent for Student Services presentation to the Arlington County School Board can be accessed at:

http://www.apsva.us/cms/lib2/VA01000586/Centricity/Domain/141/APS_school_board%20-%20final.pdf

Recommendation #2: All staff and ACI reports that include data on student achievement should include specific data on students with disabilities.

ASEAC was pleased to see progress in this area at ACI this year, with both the ESOL/HILT and English reports containing data on students with disabilities. In addition, we applaud improvements to APS data collection, through Synergy, that will allow easy access to this critical information. ASEAC notes that reporting of data on students with disabilities is not yet present in all staff reports. In presentations to the Arlington County School Board, while the Social Studies and Science updates contained student achievement data on students with disabilities, the Math update and the Strategic Plan Indicators did not.

It is critical that all of the seven AYP categories are reported and presented in all data and reports. Students with Disabilities (SWD), Limited English Proficient (LEP), and Economically Disadvantaged students routinely underperform. If we do not include these subgroups in reporting, we will not see where we need to focus our efforts and we will not put in place the plans we need to make progress toward improving Arlington's overall student performance.

Recommendation #3: Review the structure and operating procedures of ACI and its committees so that greater emphasis is placed on 1) aligning efforts with strategic plan goals, 2) utilizing student data as a starting point for considering committee priorities, and 3) increasing the sharing of information among committees. Additionally, ensure that committees are given opportunities to formally review major staff initiatives together with other ACI committee members.

ASEAC welcomed the importance the ACI Co-Chairs placed on aligning recommendations with APS strategic plan goals in its initial charge to the Committee this past fall. In addition, the newly implemented Committee Chair meetings have been a fantastic opportunity to encourage information sharing and camaraderie across committees.

2011-2012 Activities

September: Initial meeting, review of business, presentation by Dr. Brenda Wilks

October: VCU/ACE Update, Standards-based IEPs (mini)

November: Update on the Evaluation; Standards-based IEPs (full)

December: Director's Report, Office of Special Education

January: Joint session with the Arlington County School Board on the work session for the Evaluation of Services for Students with Special Needs.

February: Presentation on the Evaluation of Services for Student with Special Needs (Dr. Wilks)

March: 2013-2014 Budget, Virginia Alternate Assessment Program, and Annual Application for Federal Funds under IDEA

April: Annual Public Forum: Family Information Night on Social Skills and Autism Services Improvement Plan

May: Dyslexia for a Day (scheduled for regular ASEAC meeting)

Joint meeting with the Superintendent's Advisory Committee on the Elimination of the Achievement Gap (to discuss areas of joint interest in the outcome and recommendations of the Evaluation of Services for Students with Special Needs).

June: Mental Health (with Arlington County Department of Human Services – invited); Transition

Future Efforts

In addition to supporting the recommendations of the Evaluation, ASEAC's future efforts will focus on its priority areas of Autism, ADHD, mental health, reading, transition services, teacher training, as well as continued collaboration with other advisory committees and community groups and outreach to underserved populations, to ensure participation by parents of students from lesser represented disabilities and minority groups.

2012-2013 ASEAC Committee Members:

Chair: Nadine Asef-Sargent

Co-Chair: Alexandra Arriaga

Secretary: Heather Alderman

Members: Linda Arnsbarger, Julie Burke, Maggie Crossgrove (Teacher), Linda Gulyn, Genevieve Heighberger, Rebecca Hunter, Katherine Price, Cleo Rodriguez, Becky Smerdon, James Smith, Liz Tefera, Terrig Thomas, Kate Van Slyck

Staff Liaison: Dr. Kristi Murphy

Attachments:

Special Education Trends 2012

SOL data 2011-2012

PALS 2011-2012