

**Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee
Minutes
December 18, 2018**

Members Present:

Wendy Pizer (Chair), Nadia Facey (Vice-Chair), Nick Walkosak (Co-Secretary), Margy Dunn (Co-Secretary), Alison Acker, Amber Baum, John Best, Michelle Best, Leila Carney, Keith Channon, Caitlin Davies, Alison Dough, Kristin Gillig, Jay Hamon, Kay Luzius, David Rosenblatt, Kurt Schuler, Tauna Szymanski and Cristina Yacobucci

Members Absent:

Jennifer Johnson, Sarah Jane Owens, Minerva Trudo

Staff:

Dr. Patrick K. Murphy (Superintendent)
Dr. Tara Natrass (Assistant Superintendent, Teaching and Learning)
Paul Jamelske (Director of Special Education),
Kathleen Donovan (Parent Resource Center)
Kelly Mountain (Parent Resource Center)

Guests:

Matt Leland, Kim Leland, Nicole Davidson, Jana Dressel, Courtney Fox, Heather Wishart-Smith, Kathryn Linehan, David Siu

AGENDA:

Agenda Items	Discussion/Decisions	What to do/who/when
Welcome		
Wendy Pizer	Welcome and introductions	
Public Comments		
Matt Leland	<p>Hopes tonight accountability of the central office is discussed tonight as well. Central office interaction with regard to his daughter has been positive generally but has resulted in negative consequences. In 2015, VDOE found that APS was not implementing a portion of the IEP, OCR found school was discriminating against his daughter on the basis of her disability. And this summer, a due process hearing officer found Central Office staff in violation. Sometimes Central Office staff can be heavy-handed. When wife and I decided to ask APS to implement a portion of the IEP, the school system called them into Truancy Court. APS pursued that for four months until VDOE found that to be in violation and they pulled back two days later. Would like to know what we are supposed to do. Go public, enforce our legal rights, or some other way. Accountability needs to be at the school level as well as Central Office. How should parent's address problems with Central</p>	

	Office staff?	
School Board Liaison and ASEAC Updates		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monique: School Board last week did an update on performance data. Concentrated on Math, ELA, and Profile of a Graduate • In January or February 2019, there will be a SB Work Session on special education – date TBD • ASEAC is planning a midyear communication to the SB regarding public comments from last year and first part of this year. Will get to the SB before the special ed work session. • Next ASEAC meeting – 1/22/2019 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Kelly Krug on student support visioning ○ GSAC on appropriate supports for SWD in advanced classes • ASEAC Feb 26, 2019 Meeting – Inclusion policy with APS staff presenter • March – April meetings – FY 2020 Budget, working group reports to ASEAC 	
Paul Jamelske - Office of Special Education (OSE) Update		
	Office of Special Education response to Public Comment: It is inappropriate to respond to this specific public comment in this venue in order to maintain confidentiality of student/family information.	
Accountability for Special Education at the School Level – Dr. Patrick K. Murphy (Superintendent) and Dr. Tara Nattrass (Assistant Superintendent, Teaching and Learning)		
	<p>Wendy Pizer introduced Dr. Murphy and Dr. Nattrass. This topic arose because of a disconnect between the expectations at central office level and what is actually happening at the school level. This disconnect tends to be more pronounced at some schools than others. ASEAC is a recommending body. Use this discussion tonight to help inform our work and recommendations in the future. We sincerely appreciate the opportunity to have this conversation tonight.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Patrick Murphy (PKM): He read ASEAC's report from last year and it is the basis around the planning we are doing for the upcoming special ed work session. I'm sorry you are experiencing frustrations. However we can close that gap and make changes, we are in the process of doing that. It will take some time. There were several people who commented on individual situations this evening. I don't know the background on those so I 	

	<p>cannot comment tonight, but I do promise to follow up and look into the matter. Please give Kathleen Donovan some more background. My job is to make sure we have happy customers and that kids are successful in the classroom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shifting to accountability. I'm having conversation with principals. Bringing up many of the same issues you are raising, asking how we can collectively solve some of these problems. They are important partners. We need to look at how all these different entities function together. It hurts and upsets me when kids are at the end of that line. But I'm going to need you to work with us to make that happen. I will ask Dr. Natrass to describe some of what we have begun to lay out. 	
	<p>Dr. Natrass (TN) introduces four categories for conversation tonight: Accountability Structures, Communication Channels, Expectations, and Opportunities for Improvement.</p> <p>Accountability Structures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational chart/chain of command for APS as a whole (was circulated to ASEAC members before the meeting) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PKM: School Board is my boss. I'm operations and day to day. School Board is policy and budget. The Audit element does not report to me – reports straight to the School Board. Last year we merged Teaching and Learning with Special Education, which is a recommendation that came out of PCG's last report. Very helpful to look through instructional lens when we try to fulfill our goals to meet the needs of all students. ▪ P. Jamelske: One benefit of the merger was facilitating inclusion work. • Q&A <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pizer: Do you think APS is optimally organized for accountability purposes or do you see room for further refinement organizationally? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PKM: We've had tremendous acceleration the past 10 years – 7,000 students. We're adding new schools 	

and programs every year. It is not a perfect system and will continue to evolve.

- Pizer: Who holds principals and schools accountable for special education?
 - PKM: At the end of the day that is me, but there are a variety of reporting mechanisms. I haven't been really successful at ordering people around. Have been successful at giving people resources and helping them resolve issues. Cintia Johnson is an integral part of principal supervision and support. Also Tara Natrass and Paul Jamelske. We do have remnants of a 15K-18K student school division. A lot of people report directly to the Superintendent, which may no longer make sense. We do not want to be administratively heavy, which we aren't. Have a good administrator to instructional staff ratio.
- Pizer: Does OSE authority work optimally in dealing with special ed issues at the school level?
 - PKM: Some of the issues that have been brought up at the school level makes it seem like it is not working as well as it could.
- Walkosak: Would it not be better for you to push out a vision and attitude toward special ed down systemically rather than putting out fires all the time. You put out my fire. I think what we are seeing here is schools are handling cases individually rather than changing the way they approach things systemically. Can we approach it top-down rather than bottom-up putting out fires?
 - PKM: Putting out fires was your term. There have been some things we have done recently that are significant about expectations we have for students that need support. There is a clearer message coming out. One example is expectation around inclusion and discussion that started last spring. We opened the dialogue and then arrived at a situation where people were able to make a choice about what was right for them. There are individuals in the

school system that we now have a broader understanding about. When I meet with all 140+ administrators, I send a very strong message about students that receive any kind of services. Also in my meetings with principals that involve data. The school 90-day plans include a focus on students that need support. I meet with principals three times a year with either Dr. Natrass or Ms. Johnson. 30-60 minute meetings. Those messages are being sent and progressively getting through.

- Matt Leland: Liked your comment earlier about your job being to make your customer happy. One way businesses do that is to look at data. Data and transparency bring accountability to light. What data are you using right now to ensure you are holding yourselves accountable? And to follow up, what sort of transparency do parents and does the School Board have on this data and accountability?
 - Jamelske: There are some pieces of data we have to report on. December 1 sped headcount is 4163. Within the last week, two different principals asked for inclusion data this year so far as compared to the last two years.
 - TN: The new Strategic Plan has quantitative performance objectives to eliminate the opportunity gap. We are closely tracking all of our gap groups. Have done some IEP audits in some individual schools. This past summer we met with all principals to discuss data on the gap group students.
- Kim Leland: Maybe I don't understand what the word accountability means. Can you please define to me what the word means.
 - PKM: Having a system in place so that the services you are delivering are implemented with a degree of fidelity.
 - Kim Leland: As a human being?
 - PKM: If I see that something is not being delivered or happening, then I follow up until it is resolved.
 - Kim Leland: Paul, what about you?

	<p>This is a very intimate relationship. What is common courtesy and accountability in a relationship?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Jamelske: Expressing courtesy and open lines of communication to be able to have a dialogue and recognizing that everything is not always going to be perfect. Maintaining communication. There's not an end point. It is always a journey.▪ Kim: We purposely did not bring our parade of horrors in here. On a basic level, I believe that accountability is answering a question, responding to an email, respond to a complaint, and implementing an IEP. Accountability is not delay of process, which is what we have experienced. We have a case. There hasn't been accountability or transparency on a human level and that is why we brought our due process case. I would like to charge you with using our case as a case study. Our daughter is now 11. We naively put our daughter in at 2 early. Nine years later.... You have spent as a school district – we have spent tens and tens of thousands of dollars – trying to keep our daughter out of the school system. Want you to use our case as a case study to actually look at what happens at a human level with most families around the table. I would like a response to that. I just don't want it to happen to another child. Our situation has spanned many administrators and service providers. This is about a culture. Would like you charge you to accept our case to learn from.▪ Pizer: How do you respond to the culture issue?▪ PKM: Addressed that at the SEPTA meeting. It's getting the stakeholders in the room. We are planning to have some principals at the upcoming Work Session.▪ Pizer: We want to focus on the positive opportunities to solve some of these issues.▪ Monique O'Grady: I want to thank	
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anyone for the frank conversations. I was very happy to see the new Strategic Plan. Very positive for the special ed community. Equity is playing a much larger role. The accountability measures in the Strategic Plan are a way for us to move forward. The Strategic Plan is an acknowledgement that we aren't where we want to be.

- Kristin Gillig: How long is that going to take? What about the kids who are falling through the cracks now?
- O'Grady: Bringing Paul's office under Tara's is helping I think. Does take time to make a culture shift. When you write that down, and put metrics to it, it helps you move in the right direction.
- Heather Wishart-Smith: Writing it down is not sufficient. I tried from the very beginning to be collaborative. Went to the principal, and didn't show up for the meeting. Has become extremely frustrating. All the responses have been CYA, hiding behind compliance. Parents want to collaboratively improve the system. When certain questions are asked and commitments are requested and the response is here's the link to our professional learning framework, that is not a culture of accountability and transparency. Every single constructive point we brought was, "Thank you for your concern. There's a process for that."
- Kim Leland: The Compliance Coordinator was in charge of all of our mess.
- Caitlin Davies: What is the structure for teachers if we are seeing systemic issues especially if they regard communities where the parents are a little less vocal or where the challenges are not able to be handled by the principal, especially if it won't put our jobs in jeopardy?

Communication Channels

- TN: Draft chart graphic that PRC is working on.
 - Pizer: ASEAC has worked with the PRC on

this. This has been a really successful working arrangement. Had three new ASEAC members jump up to volunteer for this. Hope we can use that as a model to solve other things going forward.

- Gillig: Meant to be a tool for parents wondering about the escalation of issues.
- Amber Baum: The principal evaluation handbook is really enlightening. How do the concerns that parents raise in these sorts of meetings get fed into the principal evaluation process?
 - PKM: I'd like to hear your ideas. We have Your Voice Matters.
 - Amber Baum: Any group that is a minority group is going to get squelched in an analysis like that. Maybe a wider range of surveys? What do the principal self-reports look like? Is there a role for the public comments at ASEAC to be fed into the principal evaluations?
 - PKM: We could consider it. We do hear from Paul on the public comments at ASEAC.
 - Amber: Is it getting to the principals?
 - TN: Paul tells me right after the meeting, and I usually contact the principals about it. The principals really need to know. When they hear that five parents commented at a public meeting about them that's really unnerving, especially when it could be resolved. When those comments come up we want to resolve them.
 - Walkosak: Can you make the special ed portion of the evaluation a little more robust?
 - PKM: I understand where you are coming from. Chris Waddell shared this with me. This has been an advocacy for some time. If I deliver this to the principals, what do you think the reactions would be?
 - Gillig: No one likes change. Some

would respond really well and others wouldn't.

- PKM: What I hear Nick asking for is inserting a specific indicator addressing SWD specifically.
- Walkosak: Yes. Exactly.
- TN: We look at the special ed performance indicator data at the school level. They are held accountable through it. We as a school system as a whole are held accountable. That is why the 90-days plans have these indicators in them.
- PKM: School Management Plans used to be annual plans. 90 days give us more agility. Can make adjustments at the mid-year point. Can be more responsive. Would like to propose this:
 - Let me take Nick's idea – use the Indicators under each of the standards. Let me take this back to the principals. Have a meeting tomorrow to see what they think about it. No one likes an edict. That would be a healthier way to approach this. It may take us to the end of the year, but at least we are making a first step effort.
- Walkosak: At the end of that packet there is a performance improvement plan. I would like to see special ed performance trigger that PIP if necessary.

Expectations and Consistency

- TN: Will have public draft of special ed procedure manual by end of January with goal to finalize it by the end of the year. Will run it by ASEAC and other groups.
 - Courtney Fox: SWD are the most vulnerable students in the school. I would hope principals would react with compassion. I think that not only does special education need to be named, but fixing these failures needs a POC, with a clearly articulated timeline. Need to have positive and negative consequences for meeting or missing targets. These are not data points, these are children, the most vulnerable

children in the system. There is a huge gap between what is said, what is documented and what is actually happening. Parents who try to enforce their rights through official channels are punished. There needs to be a tremendous culture shift. Whether it is an open letter from you Dr. Murphy to the full community or just to the principals and parents about your expectations about how children should be handled in the system, how teachers can work in the system, how to interact with parents. It needs to be out there. Not in a private meeting with principals, but full on out there. There is some incredible talent around this table from the parent community. We are happy to help make this better. But we are not part of the process and when we try to make things better for our kids, we are punished. APS is a business and it needs to act like a business.

- Pizer: Do you want to respond?
- PKM: Thought that was more of a statement than a question. A letter is not going to bring about a culture shift. After we draft something for the evaluation plan, I'll come back here and then we can dialogue with the principals. That would be much more powerful than a letter. A letter doesn't have staying power like multiple conversations like that. That would be one actionable coming out of this meeting.
- Pizer: ASEAC wants to be part of the dialogue and part of the solution on accountability. I personally like the idea of both. When you are trying to change a culture, you can't do too much. A letter could be a start.
- Amber: I've read all these plans. Look for the bright spots. Some in there are really impressive as to how thoughtful they are in terms of inclusion and supporting all students. But there were plenty that were just checking the box. It would be interesting to see them volunteer themselves.
 - PKM: We do refer principals to each other.
- Caitlin: I really like the idea of adding a special education indicator to have a constant conversation. Maybe add some element of that indicator in several of the standards, like

	<p>climate, student performance level. Some of the SWD with more significant needs aren't getting dinged or flagged in some of that data.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Kim Leland: Share the positive. It's very positive. I was in customer service for 20+ years. I'd like to know if something negative or positive comes in about a teacher or an administrator does it go in their file? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PKM: That depends on what it is. Nothing can be put in their file without them knowing about it. There has to be some kind of due process around that. <p>PKM: I'll get back to you before your next meeting on how those conversations with the principals transpired about adding a special ed indicator to principal evaluations. If you share any info with Kathleen tonight, I'll get back to you by the end of the week. We recognize who our primary customer is and we don't demonstrate that consistently in some cases. Hope we have a path forward. Have a good holiday.</p>	
Meeting Adjourned	Meeting Adjourned at 921	

NEXT MEETING: Tuesday, January 22nd 2019 from 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.
Syphax Education Center, 2110 Washington Blvd, Room 456, Arlington, VA 22204