

# **Suffolk Public Schools**

## **Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)**

### **Annual Report**

**2022-2023**

Prepared for:

School Board

Suffolk Public Schools

By:

Kirstyn Oneill, Chair (2023-2024)

## **Purpose**

The Special Education Advisory Committee for Suffolk Public Schools is organized and functions in accordance with Sections 300.650-300.653, Rules and Regulations for the administration of Public Law 105-17. The Committee's functions are as follows:

1. To advise the Suffolk Public Schools of needs in the education of children with disabilities;
2. To participate in the development of priorities and strategies for meeting the identified needs of children with disabilities;
3. To submit periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities to the Suffolk Public Schools' superintendent for transmission to the local school board;
4. To assist the Suffolk Public Schools in interpreting plans to the community for meeting the special needs of children with disabilities for educational services;
5. To review the policies and procedures for the provision of special education and related services prior to submission to the local school board;
6. To participate in the review of the Suffolk Public Schools' annual plan, prior to the submission to the School Board.

## **Membership**

The Committee is composed of representatives of stakeholder groups that have a common interest in meeting the educational needs of students with disabilities. While some of the members are community service providers, most of the membership is comprised of parents of students currently receiving services in our division. As required by the *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia*, one teacher serves as a voting member on the Committee. The membership is appointed by the school board at the beginning of each school year. The Director of Special Education and the Coordinators of Special Education serve as consultants to the committee.

## **Organization**

The activities of SEAC are governed by a set of bylaws which were last revised in December 2009 and approved by the SPS School Board. Subcommittees are assigned as needed to monitor the recommendations and concerns of the Committee and to work toward its goals.

## **Meetings**

The Special Education Advisory Committee meets in regular session six times a year. Subcommittees meet as necessary to fulfill their responsibilities. All regularly scheduled meetings are in-person and open to the public. Prior notice is advertised in various publications of the school community. Time is allotted for public comment and subsequent review during each scheduled meeting of the full SEAC Committee. Due to continuing COVID-19 precautions, all scheduled meetings were made available virtually, as well as in-person. SEAC plans to continue to offer virtual attendance at all scheduled meetings for the foreseeable future.

**SEAC Accomplishments for 2022-2023**

- The SEAC committee continued to provide an opportunity for families with special needs to access resources and support throughout the 2022-2023 school year.
- The SEAC policy review subcommittee examined the school division's policy and current practices on providing IEP and 504 information to long-term subs in a time where long-term subs are being used in larger numbers. It found that while long-term subs who were brought on at the beginning of the school year had the same access to this information as other full-time staff members, the triggers for providing this information to long-term subs who started later in the year varied greatly from building to building, often leaving students with teachers who did not have the necessary information to adhere to the stipulations of their IEPs and 504s, sometimes for extended periods of time. As a result of this subcommittee work, this practice is being revisited on a division-wide level so that it is consistent from building to building and serves the needs of special education students in a more equitable manner.
- The SEAC transition subcommittee examined the division's policies on transition. While it noted that transition out of high school is something that the division has focused on to great effect in the past couple of years, it noted that transition between buildings is a difficult process for students with disabilities. Large scale orientation events for students starting kindergarten, sixth grade and ninth grade are not a positive experience for the majority of students with disabilities, and it was suggested that these experiences either be completely reinvented or supplemented with an optional second smaller-scale experience for students with disabilities and new students to the division. Taking SEAC's recommendations in stride, the Special Education department offered alternative orientation arrangements at schools this fall.
- The Committee discussed methods to improve communication between parents of students receiving special education services and the schools, including school event notice. SEAC continues to support and maintain a Facebook page to allow for better communication with stakeholders. The Committee also works with the Special Education Parent Resource Center (PRC) to distribute resource information to the community. The Committee is looking at introducing other social media platforms in order to raise SEAC interest.
- The Committee endeavored to improve resources available to parents of students receiving special education services. Our committee continues to provide recommendations for new materials to improve the Special Education Parent Resource Center and assists the Parent Resource Liaison in disseminating new resources to parents. The PRC has been working on making a vast number of resources available in Spanish to address our Spanish-speaking community members' needs.
- SEAC members participated in the planning and execution of the Disability Awareness Fair held in October 2022.
- The SEAC manned informational tables at the National Night Out event in August 2022, The SPS Disability Awareness Fair in October 2022, and the SPS Parents and Partners Together We Create Achievers event on March 25, 2023.

- SEAC invited Mr. Peter Carrington-Brown of Moms in Motion/At Home Your Way to speak to stakeholders during the March 2023 meeting. He explained the different Medicare waivers, who qualifies for each, and how his organization can help families with a qualifying member apply for them and get approved. He also explained how, in many cases, a current family caregiver can get paid to continue to serve as caregiver rather than hiring an outside caregiver.
- As mandated, SEAC reviewed SPS's proposed budget for the following school year to consider any impact on special education services and discuss any questions/concerns with the Special Education Director. No particular funding deficiency was noted. Your SEAC serves as a vehicle to address SPS funding deficiencies with the City Council.
- The SEAC reviewed the Annual Plan for the 2023-24 school year during the March 15, 2023 meeting. The annual plan is a plan for spending the federal funds that are given to the school division as a result of the December 1st special education student count. SPS uses these funds to pay for staff salaries and benefits, but these funds do not cover all of the necessary costs to fund special education. Additional special education funding comes out of the general fund.
- SEAC monitored testing data and assessments that impact students receiving special education services in SPS. The Committee also reviewed graduation and/or exit data. SEAC received a detailed presentation from Steven Edwards, SPS Coordinator of Research & Testing, including a comparison of the 2018-2019 and 2020-2021 Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) results, the Virginia Alternative Assessment Program (VAAP) results, and graduation data from Spring 2021 during the January 2023 meeting. All assessed areas showed a marked decrease following the pandemic, followed by an improvement in scores that hopefully marks the beginning of a positive trend.
- The SEAC is mandated to review school policies impacting students receiving special education services and their representation in the student and staff manuals. There were no policy changes pertaining to special education for the 2022-2023 school year for review.

### **Public Comment**

SEAC did not receive public comments during its meetings for the 2022-2023 school year. This indicator is viewed as a feedback mechanism from the community. As such, this could be construed as a positive response. The Committee will continue to provide a public forum to address the needs of all stakeholders.

### **Membership**

#### **Voting Members**

- Chair – Katie Morse
- Vice Chair - Sierrah Chavis
- Teacher - Holly Boyce

- Charlotte Brooks-Dale
- Sierrah Chavis
- Regina Hall
- Jamilia Heredia

### **Consultants**

- Towanda Shirley - Director of Special Education
- Jessica Joyner - Coordinator of Special Education Instruction and Compliance-Special Programs
- Kelly MacPherson - Coordinator of Special Education Instruction and Compliance-Secondary
- Jamillah Silver -Coordinator of Special Education Instruction and Compliance-Elementary
- Velvet Smith – Special Education Parent Resource Center Liaison

### **SEAC 2023-2024**

#### **Voting Members**

- Chair - Kirstyn O'Neill
- Vice Chair –Stephanie Whitley
- Secretary – Christy Cole
- Teacher - Holly Boyce
- Sierrah Chavis

#### **Consultants**

- Towanda Shirley - Director of Special Education
- Jessica Joyner - Coordinator of Special Education Instruction and Compliance-Special Programs
- Kelly MacPherson - Coordinator of Special Education Instruction and Compliance-Secondary
- Jamillah Silver -Coordinator of Special Education Instruction and Compliance-Elementary
- Velvet Smith – Special Education Parent Resource Center Liaison

### **Goals for 2023 – 2024 SEAC Year**

SEAC is finalizing specific committee goals for this year. Those goals will be presented to the School Board for your review and approval once fully developed. In addition, SEAC will continue to focus on how the following areas impact students with disabilities:

- Student Academic Performance
- Special Education Graduation Rates
- Special Education Diploma Options
- SOL Testing and Alternate Assessments
- Transition Services
- Transportation
- Disability Awareness
- Disability Harassment
- Physical Restraint and Seclusion
- Special Education Parent Resources
- Special Education Budget
- Increasing membership and parent engagement
- Meeting location
- Collaborating with local Hampton Roads SEACs

### **Meeting Dates for 2023 - 2024 SEAC Year**

- September 20, 2023
- November 15, 2023
- January 17, 2024
- March 20, 2024
- May 15, 2024
- July 17, 2024

All in-person scheduled meetings will be held at King's Fork Middle School, 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. We as a committee are discussing other location options moving forward.

### **Events So Far This Year**

In addition to following Virginia state mandates and Committee bylaws, SEAC continues to provide private, confidential consultations and guidance to families of students with disabilities in SPS.

SEAC has supported and/or participated in the following events so far this year:

- Big Feet Meet – November 8, 2023
- Parent Resource Night- November 29, 2023