The Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) is made up by parents who have volunteered over 3000 hours in the last year to support SEAC and its activities. This does not include the time spent by community members and ACPS employees who are consultants to SEAC.

Overall, SEAC continues to be concerned by the lack of progress to improve the services delivered to our children with special needs.

This report outlines our recommendations for improvement based on a review of many varied programs and initiatives. We have structured this document to align with the 2014-15 SEAC Scope of Work that was approved by SEAC and the School Board. Additional tasks were given to SEAC as the year progressed, and recommendations on those review tasks are included in this document.

This report was unanimously approved by SEAC at a working session on June 2, 2015.

**SEAC Vision**

All students with disabilities achieve their potential and actively contribute to our local and global communities.

**SEAC Purpose**

The purpose of this committee, in accordance with and subject to guidelines and regulations of the authorities of the Commonwealth of Virginia Administrative Code, Virginia Department of Education, Alexandria City School Board, and the SEAC Bylaws; shall be to provide advice and policy guidance concerning students with disabilities to members of the Alexandria City School Board.
2014-15 SEAC Objectives/Actions/Recommendations

1. **Provide recommendations to the School Board on ACPS outcome measures for students with disabilities.**

   The ACPS Strategic Planning process dictated the window of input by SEAC into outcome measures for students with disabilities. The outcome measures were recommended by the ACPS goal owners and SEAC members provided input on the proposed measures in the March and April. While not all proposed goals/objectives and outcome measures recommended by SEAC were incorporated, SEAC is looking forward to ACPS formalizing the measures and creating a public dashboard. In 2015-16 SEAC plans to focus on monitoring the outcome measures to not only identify early trends, but also to validate and modify the measures as needed.

2. **Improve sensitivity and understanding for the needs of students with disabilities across ACPS and the surrounding community.**

Harry Burke Award

Award nominations were down this year from last. **Of most concern is the lack of administrative support for nominations from central office and school leadership.** Despite more detailed directions for completion of the forms, many are submitted with only parent letters of support.

Despite budget constraints, the awards ceremony was a success with several upgrades. Entertainment focused on inclusion with the GW Men’s Choir (IEP student
included) and was uplifting. Overall, we believe our attempt to convey our true appreciation to nominees was achieved. Feedback has been positive and our honorees were pleased with the event. They deserved a step-up in our on-site program and we hope to sustain or improve the event in the future.

**Recommendations:**

SEAC recommends that the Central Office Special Education Leadership staff take advantage of this *easy* opportunity to promote the outstanding work of special educators and inclusion teachers in the system. There is a lack of measurable support from central office personnel over the past three years. A coordinated effort to support SEAC through insistence on nominees from each school should be a priority at Braddock Place. We need their communications in order to discover deserving nominees in each of our schools. SEAC is committed to planning earlier, but will need the credibility that comes from Special Education Leadership to make it a priority from school to school and thus parents and co-workers. *The administration* has budgetary limits on rewards, but letting this *opportunity to promote and recognize* a job well done could make a difference in ACPS educator retention.

SEAC recommends that the Central Office administration, School Board and Principals start to look for teachers who go above and beyond the job description early in the year and be sure that each school identify at least one teacher who is worthy of receiving these awards.

SEAC also recommends an expansion of the biographical information on Harry Burke and Anne Lipnick in the coming year. We hope that our Central Office publicity team can be of assistance in the effort.
Disability Awareness

October is Disability Awareness month. ACPS Special Education department sent out the basic packet that has been sent out in the past. This packet was sent via the school mail and it appeared that it was not received by a number of principals. A number of schools did various disability awareness activities. The results were reported by Dr. Quenneville to SEAC in the December meeting.

Recommendations

SEAC recommends that Disability Awareness and Acceptance be incorporated into every day of every school. SEAC recommends that ACPS formally incorporate into its K-12 curriculum, the essential elements of disability awareness and basic principles of disability studies.1 Highlighting the month with specific activities is beneficial for increased awareness as well.

SEAC recommends that school staff and/or school-based related service providers be appointed as the point person and distributor of information to staff and students. This makes them the expert in the school and a resource for all. Many parents and children do not know the services and expertise that the school social worker, counselor and psychologist can provide.

Parent Resource Center

1 For example, depending upon grade level, adding literature/movies that feature students with disabilities, at higher grade levels training students to distinguish between the medical and social models of disability.
Reports from the PRC representative indicate many new parent contacts and various trainings over the school year. There have also been 2 parent support groups started for pre-school and city-wide Autism classroom parents.

SEAC recommended in our budget requests that ACPS hire an additional full time professional who possesses significant experience in special education, counseling and parental engagement. We would like the new hire’s duties to include leading support groups, working directly with parents on SWD issues and including training on IEP development and the laws that govern IEP implementation and delivery to a student with disabilities by a public school system. This budget request was approved and funded by the school board.

**Recommendations**

*SEAC recommends the process for hiring is focused on finding a highly qualified, experienced person as this is a critical role in the relationship between parents and ACPS.* The recruitment process must be competitive and the approach must include wide publication of the vacancy and involvement of the SEAC during the *entire* process. The candidates should have significant strong experience and an advanced degree in counseling and/or a related field that would allow them to successfully form and maintain parent/family support groups for students with a disability. This person should be a liaison in planning and implementing parent training and staff relationship management with parents. This person will also work with other Central Office departments to determine various methods of outreach to parents in different parts of the ACPS community.

SEAC recommends that all PRC contacts have a follow up survey that will be sent to each parent/family contact made by PRC staff. This follow up survey should be

2 Follow-up customer surveys are current practice in many departments of the City of Alexandria.
sent to an administrator at the central office or human resources for recording and follow up as necessary. The survey results should be incorporated into the Special Education dashboard.

SEAC recommends that the PRC works closely with the FACE Center, the various school based PRC’s and the ACPS support staff for training in conjunction with PBIS and other programs.

3. **Deliver a timely and thorough evaluation of the Special Education Budget for the School Board.**

SEAC adjusted our meeting schedule to align with the ACPS budget process this year. We provided a prioritized list of additional budget requests via the Central Office Special Education Department prior to the Superintendent submitting the budget to the School Board. Most of the recommendations were incorporated into the budget as either additional funding requests, or incorporated into plans without additional funding. During the budget process, SEAC provided the School Board additional requests, analysis and questions on budget items pertaining to the delivery of Special Education. **SEAC was pleased when the School Board saw fit to realign funding to increase the additional FTE in the Parent Resource Center from 0.5 to 1.0.**

**Recommendation**

SEAC recommends the budget be tied to the strategic plan, the Special Education plan, and the supporting metrics for each plan. While the budget clearly showed where the money is being spent, it does not show why. The budget should be linked to initiatives and outcomes.
4. **Ensure ongoing progress on prior year initiatives (IEP quality, Executive Function, Career & Transition, Autism & Inclusion).**

**IEP Quality and Implementation**

Dr. Jane Quenneville presented the ACPS IEP Review findings at the April 28, 2015 SEAC meeting. The review generally focused on documentation and administrative compliance items in the rubric. Only 5 schools rating in the 80% - 89% of proficiency, all the others ranged from 50% - 79%. **Following years of focus on compliance, the results on this evaluation is disappointing.** The Central Office Special Education organization is providing feedback and additional training for teachers and administrators.

**SEAC wants to highlight this review was an evaluation of quality of the written IEP, not an evaluation of how well the IEP was being implemented or the outcomes of implementation.** Implementation of IEPs is still a significant issue in ACPS.

**Recommendations**

SEAC recommends an audit of the IEP Quality and Implementation report be done. SEAC is concerned that the data shown in this report is the same data that was provided by the Autism Plan team in a meeting on April 29. Our concern is that either the data used for purposes of the Autism IEP review was not only that of children with Autism or that the IEP Quality and Implementation numbers came only from children with Autism. Either way,

SEAC recommends the trained teachers provide evaluative feedback on training and coaching to assess it’s quality, and follow-up reviews of IEPs take place early in the next school year.
SEAC recommends that IEP goals be tracked to determine goal mastery and goals that are continued into the next year’s IEP. At this time, we are questioning how many goals that are not mastered are exchanged for new goals on the next IEP.

**Executive Function**

Dr. John Brown provided SEAC with an update at the April 24, 2015 meeting on implementing Executive Function concepts in the ACPS curriculum.

**Recommendations**

SEAC recommends ACPS provide objective data to demonstrate the adoption of Executive Function in the curriculum as input to the next SEAC work plan. This data should be available on the Dashboard.

SEAC recommends that mandatory Executive Function training be included in the professional learning program for teachers.

**Career & Transition**

Dr. Jane Quenneville presented the status of the Career & Transition program at the February 24, 2015 SEAC Meeting. The overall program is trending positive and in the last year of data reported, ACPS was meeting the Virginia goals. Students transitioning out of ACPS are only surveyed on their first year of leaving ACPS.

**Recommendations**

SEAC recommends ACPS expand the survey to include the first 3-5 years of transition to improve the accuracy of the outcome measurement.
SEAC recommends the Career & Transition measurements be integrated and incorporated into the overall Special Education performance metrics being developed as part of the ACPS Strategic Plan.

SEAC recommends that Transition goals be started much earlier than in the 9th grade. Transition goals should be started in elementary (e.g. transportation, handling money) to identify what aptitudes should be explored for students with disabilities and functional and educational skills should be focused on in the IEP allowing the student to gain experience earlier on in his/her educational career.

Autism Plan

The Autism Plan team met 3 times this year to discuss the status and develop new goals, tasks and measurements. There are currently 6 goals.

Each of these 6 goal areas are divided into objectives with some established means of measurement, and targets. The objectives are further broken down into tasks with responsible staff listed for each task. The Autism Specialists are engaged and have input into the process of achieving the goals.

Of note, it is observed that most of the tasks are not things that can be done and marked completed...these are continuous programs that will be in place to make the program work. Given the scores and other indicative data, more work needs to be done to pinpoint new objectives/tasks that will improve the reading, math and other academic subject scores, adaptive behaviors and skills, social skills and graduation rates.
SEAC is unsure of the validity of the data presented on April 28 of the IEP Goal data by Dr. Quenneville. As stated in the IEP Quality and Implementation section, the data appears identical while the scope of the data is different.

After long discussions and conference with VCU professor, Carol Shaw, the Career and Transition Goal has been brought back to the Autism Plan. It had been passed onto the ACPS Career and Transition Plan team in 2013. This goal was determined necessary as children with ASD have different needs than some of the general special education population regarding social and emotional regulation. Goal 6, Career and Transition, is still in the draft format but will continue to be a focus of the Team. The last working group meeting of the year is on June 10, 2015.

**Recommendations**

SEAC recommends that the training completed that is done with the general education staff, school support staff and administration be tracked. The results of the training participation, follow up and evaluation metrics of the training need to be posted on the Special Education Dashboard school-by-school. This way, stand-out schools can provide best practices to all schools to learn from and be recognized for the focus and dedication to inclusion practices for all children.

SEAC recommends that the completion dates for tasks and objectives be changed only after reviewing the plan with the parents, central office administration, and autism staff; and where applicable, related service providers, and instructional coaches to determine what has changed to make the original goal unobtainable.
SEAC recommends that the plan be updated at least twice yearly on the website for access by the public.  

SEAC recommends changing the times of the meetings. Many of the meetings take place at times that are inconvenient for parents. In the past, meeting times were alternated between 7pm and 4:00p-ish to accommodate both staff and parent schedules.

VCU Grant

*This year provided experience illustrating transparency is vital to open communication, collaboration and trust-based relationships between ACPS Central Office and school-based staff and parents.*

The VCU Grant was awarded in March of 2014 and the execution of the plan began in May. While we are grateful for the resources the grant will provide, it is unfortunate that the grant implementation did not get off to a good start. Parents were named in the original grant application as part of “ASD Services Improvement Team” without their knowledge and when this was revealed, it took parents until October of 2014 to obtain the pertinent materials. These same parents were excluded from the early onsite grant conversations thereby possibly leading to the loss of: 1) one of the requested areas of need (parent outreach and communication), 2) conversations regarding site selection bias, 3) input regarding the parent results of the May 2014 Survey and led to the fostering of an atmosphere of mistrust.

In the fall of 2014, an advisory panel was convened that includes parents, teachers, ACPS and VCU staff. To date, we have had three meetings where VCU has presented.

3 SEAC recommends that all the special education plans on the website be scheduled for updating, when appropriate, at least twice yearly.
updates and changes to two of the initial goals. However, we still have some unanswered questions regarding changes in Goal #2 and Goal #4 particularly, as relates to social communication and speech pathologists training and involvement.

In May, 2014 VCU conducted a survey of parents of students with autism and the teachers, staff and para-professionals who engage with them on a daily basis. The parent responses to question #4 in the 2014 VCU Survey showed the **#1 “potential priority” or area of need was “Providing access to therapies from qualified staff (Applied Behavior Analysis, Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Behavioral Therapy and Counseling)” with 54.55% of the parent response. (The second highest response for a potential priority was 18.18%).**

**SEAC is concerned that this important area of need has not been incorporated into the VCU grant plan.**

This grant gives ACPS access to the valuable pool of VCU staff expertise. One of the primary activities of the VCU staff is “coaching” the ACPS teachers and staff in implementing new strategies to our students with Autism. The VCU staff working with ACPS are knowledgeable and have valuable experience to share that will, eventually, be of major help to all ACPS staff and teachers thereby leading to better outcomes for all students with disabilities. The staff from VCU are trained to “coach” our staff in implementing new strategies for teachers in helping our students with Autism.

**Recommendations**

SEAC recommends that the strategies, supported by data, are found to be effective in the pilot classroom at Charles Barrett be shared with all ACPS staff to utilize via the teaching website with videos and lesson plan outlines. We realize that the ideal plan will not be able to be duplicated at each school due to each school having a unique culture and staff, but a format that allows for adjustment would be helpful.
SEAC recommended adding a SLP Speech and Language Therapist to the Autism team to provide professional guidance in this area. It is unclear if the requested SLP has been approved and will be added to the VCU Grant team. If approved, we hope to see this new SLP as part of the team by start of school, Fall 2015. We also hope that this person is allowed to assist the Autism Team in providing training and guidance to specifically work with children on social and communication skills that are being developed and implemented in the plan overseen by VCU.

**Inclusion Plan**

The Inclusion Plan is exploring a new approach named Specifically Designed Instruction to promote inclusion for students with disabilities (SWD). The rubric to determine implementation and measurements for this plan is being developed by staff now to be implemented in Fall 2015.

SEAC is concerned that this new program is the same approach that has been attempted in past years. We are concerned that the current program in place has not been fully implemented or properly evaluated to ascertain if it is achieving the desired results. Also, to our knowledge, we have no evaluative data at all schools to determine how the prior “old” approach/program was implemented. The overall question is: What worked, what didn’t work, and why?

Members of the special needs community have expressed their concerns about the lack of appropriate access to general education classrooms.

Another challenge that SEAC sees and is consistently concerned about is the continuous low scores produced by certain schools in reading and math on the SOL's as well as on the inclusion rubric.
Recommendation

SEAC recommends that ALL students have access to the general education classroom, and are provided with appropriate support and accommodations by trained educators.

SEAC recommends that mandatory inclusion and co-teaching training be part of the professional learning program for teachers, including Encore, elective, and substitute teachers.

SEAC recommends that the ACPS website be updated with an updated Inclusion plan that will allow all schools to be on the same page and families to be involved and understand the plan. This Inclusion plan needs to be easy to read and understand, have measurable, achievable goals with projected dates of completion.

5. Deliver a “SEAC Special Ed 101” information/orientation guide for School Board members and new SEAC members.

SEAC presented an overview of the “Special Ed 101” package to the School Board in May, 2014. The School Board committed to scheduling time during a work session for SEAC to deliver the entire presentation and include a question and answer interaction. Unfortunately, this work session was never scheduled during the 2014-15 school year.

Recommendation

SEAC recommends it presents this session to the newly elected Board in January, 2016.
6. **Achieve full SEAC membership that represents the disabilities and educational levels in ACPS.**

Through extensive outreach efforts and modifications to the member screening process, SEAC added four, highly qualified parent members. The new members are all very active in community and were able to immediately provide additional support for SEAC sub-committees. During the past year, SEAC did have one parent member and the student representative resign. SEAC will look to fill the student representative position pending the revision of the School Board policy on committee membership.

**Recommendation**

SEAC recommends the screening process be adopted by other School Board committees to better manage the expectations of members to committees.

7. **Participate in the ACPS 2020 strategic planning process.**

SEAC was an active participant in the strategic planning process. One core committee member was a prior SEAC chair, and the co-chair of the Strategic Planning Committee is a current SEAC member. SEAC members also provided input during the process, and were present at many of the public meetings. *Even with this level of participation, SEAC has two major concerns going forward.*

**Recommendations**

SEAC recommends the School Board carefully review the current plan as we are concerned that the current version of the plan still does not adequately represent children with special needs.
SEAC recommends the plan be modified to specify priorities for ACPS; how will this plan be used to make decision on what gets funded, and what doesn’t get funding as the out-year budget situation continues to be uncertain.

8. *Establish a SEAC concept of operations detailing procedures and responsibilities.*

SEAC began a detailed review of process, and put a hold on this project when notified that the School Board was revising the committee policies that relate to membership and process. SEAC did continue to review, in consultation with the Superintendent, how the committee could better align with the refocusing of ACPS’s direction. The key outcome is a proposal to have SEAC focus on monitoring the bigger picture of Special Education in ACPS. SEAC would devote the bulk of it’s recurring meetings to review the Special Education operational metrics, and request more detailed presentations from ACPS on any issues highlighted by these “Program Reviews”.

**Recommendations**

SEAC recommends the School Board finalize all policies pertaining to sub-committees so the work can continue on establishing the SEAC concepts of operations (CONOPS).


While not in the SEAC Scope of Work, the committee agreed to be included in the new policy review process. SEAC formally reviewed 7 policies and provided feedback to ACPS.
Recommendation

SEAC recommends the School Board establish a recurring process that set the expectations for committees on their role in reviewing policies.

10. Initial Psychology testing to identify students with disabilities

Dr. John Baker presented an overview of the psychology testing program for students with disabilities at the March 24, 2015 SEAC Meeting. The presentation provided a good overview of the program and SEAC did not identify any significant issues.

Recommendation

SEAC recommends a similar presentation be made available to all parents, possibly through the PRC.

11. Review of Initial Special Education “Get Well” Plan

The Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer presented a plan for Special Education on May 14, 2015. SEAC provided all School Board Members a detailed review of the presentation within 2 days of it’s release. SEAC is very disappointed that the School Board put this off until the end of the school year, as SEAC raised substantial concerns very early in school year.

Overall this is the best, most understandable plan we've ever seen out of ACPS Special Education. The language is clear, and it contains many of the standard
components expected in plan. It is nice to see both a brainstormed list of implementation ideas and initial progress metrics.

For a school system experiencing declining special education test scores for the last five years, this plan is not advocating much change and provides no transparency into basis for the recommended changes. Most of the initiatives fall into the category of doing what we thought ACPS was already doing (although not necessarily well) and does not focus on key issues in ACPS Special Education - the culture of no trust.

Recommendations

Present the missing components of the plan:

There is no SWOT (strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats) analysis. The basis of a good plan is not just where are you going, but how are you going to leverage your strengths, overcome your weaknesses, minimize threats, and take advantage of your opportunities to get there. This is essentially the analysis of what was ACPS Special Ed doing that was working? what wasn't working? Why? The plan expects the audience to make the jump from Vision/Mission to "solution initiatives" without providing a "line of sight" between them. The result - it's a nice plan, but we have no way to trust it's solving the right problems or all the problems.

Present the analysis, goals, strategies, and objectives focused on cultural change

A major Special Education issue in ACPS over the past five years is the clear lack of trust-based relationships between the central special education program and all it's constituencies; and the lack of the same relationships across schools. How is this plan going to change the culture? A perfect plan will crumble in the face of an opposing organizational culture. Associated to this issue is the federated governance structure of ACPS. School principals direct the delivery of special education services
in their schools and this had led to an extremely wide variation of test scores. How is ACPS going to modify the governance structure to ensure Principal accountability and alignment?

Provide additional details on the realignment and how it is solving the issues in point #1 above.

More focus on instruction makes sense intuitively, but to implement it effectively ACPS needs fresh, experienced, eyes. If it's the same staff with different titles...then there is no real change. This also is not a big change, only re-titling five positions and there is concern on the impact of the inclusion programs?

* A detailed, comprehensive implementation plan must be developed by July 30, 2015.

Good plans are a dime a dozen, a good implementation is worth it's weight in gold. ACPS has a miserable history of implementation. How is this time going to be different? The plan must implement cultural change at many levels, immediately, or it will not succeed; yet this is not addressed head-on in the plan. The brainstormed list of actions is a start, but a clear plan, with metrics and milestones needs to be in place quickly. The implementation plan should include at a minimum the following components for the School Board to assess it's probability of success.

- schedule with roles, resources, and responsibilities,
- Intense areas for remediation or focus (such as reading /math) for AY 15-16
- budget plan,
- risk identification and mitigation plan,
- communications plan including parent outreach

*In the next month, a Rapid Recovery plan needs to be implemented for students already behind.*
There are many students with special needs who have fallen behind, particularly at schools with very poor test scores. This plan appears to be a 40,000 foot, "looking forward" approach, **but how is ACPS going to search out and put in place accelerated remediation plans for the students who have suffered with sub-standard attention?**

**12. ADA Compliant Elevators**

SEAC wants to thank Dr. Crawley for his attention to the non-ADA compliant elevator issue and taking steps to resolve it.

**Recommendation**

SEAC recommends the plan to bring all elevators, in all schools, into ADA compliance be created and monitored throughout next year.
13. *SEAC Agenda Summary 2014-15*

September 30, 2014
- Strategic Planning Overview
- Scope of Work Review
- Sub-committee Membership

October 28, 2014
- Autism Plan
- Operating Budget Requests
- Modification to Work Plan

November 18, 2014
- Review of Student with Disabilities Test Scores
- Disability Awareness Month Reports

December 16, 2014
- Parent Resource Center
- Inclusion Plan Status

February 10, 2015
- Review of ACPS Operating Budget

February 24, 2015
- Review of 2014-15 Scope of Work
- Review of Career & Transition Plan

March 24, 2015
- Policy Review Status
- Psychology Testing in ACPS
- Update on the Strategic Planning Process
April 28, 2015
- Incorporating Executive Function in Curriculum
- Review of Special Education Annual Plan for Part B
- Review of IEP Compliance Review
- SEAC CONOPS for 2015-16

May 26, 2015
- Review of Annual Report
- Review Special Education Plan

June 2, 2015 (Work Session)
- Finalize and Approve Annual Report