



**Acton-Boxborough Special Education
Parent Advisory Council Board Meeting -
Wednesday, March 11, 2009**

MEETING MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER:

Nancy Sherburne called the meeting to order.

Attendees: Nancy Sherburne, Bill Guthlein, Steve Lowe, Laurel Collins, Valerie Ryan, Xuan Kong, Julie Towell, Matthew Kidder

II. APPROVAL JANUARY MINUTES:

Approval of the minutes from the January 14, 2009 meeting was postponed until the next Board Meeting due to computer complications.

III. ORGANIZATION/BUSINESS ISSUES

A. Nancy Mullin Bullying Prevention Presentation on April 15th:

Nancy Mullin's role as a highly regarded expert and sought after speaker was discussed. Nancy Mullin is currently the Executive Director of Bullying Prevention, Inc., a non-profit organization. She previously served as the Director of both the Project on Teasing and Bullying and the Preschool Empathy Project at the Wellesley Centers for Women. She has been actively involved in projects concerned with curriculum development, teacher training, consultation and research and has published works that focus on bringing research and best practices about bullying prevention into schools. Julie mentioned that the event would be well publicized in the Action Unlimited and flyers in Acton and surrounding towns. Turn out for the event is expected to be good. The event will be held in the Junior High Auditorium from 7:00-9:00 pm on April 15th.

B. New Search Committee to Fill Elementary Special Education Coordinator Position:

Nancy shared that Lynn Mulrooney had announced her retirement. Nancy stated that Pupil Services was putting together a search committee to find her replacement and that the PAC had asked Steve Lowe and Francesca Riccardi to represent the organization on this committee. Laurel asked how the decision of who the parent representatives would be was made. Nancy explained that Liza Huber had asked her and Terry to make recommendations for parent representatives to the committee in a relatively short time frame. They recommended Steve and Francesca because of their experience as past PAC Chairs and their service on previous interview committees. In addition, they both have children who have gone through the elementary schools, so know the needs of this age child as well as the special education community. Finally, they both have good working relationships with Pupil Services. Laurel noted that the

manner in which the decision was made was of concern to her. She mentioned that the question of who should be recommended could have been brought to the Board for discussion prior to a recommendation being made. Nancy acknowledged her concern and stated that she and Terry had simply been trying to resolve the issue expeditiously and in the PAC's best interests. All agreed that Steve and Francesca were highly qualified representatives. However, Nancy said that she would take Laurel's suggestion under advisement..

Action Item:

- **Steve to coordinate with Francesca and Pupil Services regarding participation on the search committee.**

C. Next General PAC Meeting and Quarterly Meetings with Pupil Services:

- i. Nancy suggested we cancel the next general PAC meeting scheduled for April 8th due to the close timing with Nancy Mullin's presentation on April 15th. Steve suggested organizing a mixer to be held just prior to the presentation. It was agreed that this was a good idea.

Action items:

- **Julie to reserve Junior High Lobby**
 - **Steve to contact Roche Brothers regarding food donations**
 - **Nancy to e-mail the Special Education community about the mixer**
 - **Nancy to notify Town Hall about the meeting change**
- ii. Nancy asked if members of the Board had suggestions for topics of discussion at the next Quarterly meeting with Pupil Services. Nancy also asked Julie if Liza had mentioned any suggestions for topics. Julie said that they had not discussed it. Nancy suggested that Board members e-mail her if they had topics they wished to discuss at the Quarterly meeting. Laurel mentioned the idea of discussing some of our open agenda items.

D. Additional Questions re: Pupil Services' Budget:

Nancy shared that Bill hadn't had a chance to get through the budget notebook yet, as Terry was currently studying it. As soon as it was available Terry would pass it along to Bill so we can get together and finalize our additional questions.

E. PAC Survey closing March 20th:

Nancy shared that an announcement had been sent out to PAC members stating that the deadline for completing the survey would be March 20th. After the announcement a number of additional responses were received. Once the survey closes the data will be processed.

Action Item:

- **Bill to compile the survey data.**

- F. Kick off of Pupil Services' Task Force re: Technology Use in IEP Development Meetings:
Matt mentioned that he had offered to co-chair the task force together with Lynn Mulrooney. Matt talked about the need to identify members, including parents. Some background in technology was mentioned as a plus. The goal will be to see how technology can be used and implemented to facilitate the IEP development process. Meetings will take place in March and April. Nancy shared that Liza had suggested parent trials with a smart board as part of that process. Julie mentioned that other districts are using this technology already. Steve suggested defining how refined the capacity of the technology is. For example, will it accommodate detailed service provider data or is it for more broad uses? Steve suggested there be a strikeout or underscoring method used on the old IEP so parents can see what was changed. Steve and Nancy mentioned their interest in being on the task force. Nancy also mentioned that Terry had expressed an interest as well and that he has a background in technology.
- G. Clarification of Parent vs. Team meeting vision statement in IEP:
Nancy mentioned that there had been multiple calls to the PAC about the use of a Team Vision instead of, or together with, the Parent Vision on IEPs. Nancy and Terry will talk with Liza again about the use of a Team Vision to clarify. They had understood that this was not the practice and that this area on the IEP was meant for a Parent Vision statement. Nancy shared that Lynn M. had told her that this was a new practice – Parent Vision will be included but Team vision will be added if it differs. It was stated that it should not be titled a Team Vision unless parents had a part in it as full Team members. It was mentioned that families need to be educated on this topic once it is clarified. Steve suggested putting the practice in the Parent Handbook. Xuan asked about the status of the Parent Handbook. Nancy mentioned that it would be finished by the end of the summer with a goal of distributing it in the fall. Xuan emphasized the importance of completing the Handbook.

IV. OPEN ISSUES

- A. Concerns about the Process for Combining Outside Specialists' Recommendations with District Recommendations:
Nancy stated that this is an ongoing topic of conversation with the district and that progress is being made in this area. Nancy stated her hope that the next discussion with Liza would be more definitive. Steve asked for clarification on the difference of opinion. Nancy stated that the DOE and Federation Parent Handbook state that the intent of the law is that equal consideration be given to private and district evaluations. The district's perspective is that it's own evaluations carry more weight and that they are not obligated to give private evaluations equal consideration. There was a

brief discussion of how the question of equal weight could be resolved. It was pointed out that parents/Teams need to be educated on how to assess the value of the private evaluations. The ideas of looking at hearing decisions and use of the N1 form for point-by-point explanations were both brought-up.

B. Mandatory special education training/professional development for regular and special education staff:

Concerns about educator training on special education topics – particularly for regular education staff – were noted in Liza’s 2007 survey. This issue is complicated by the voluntary nature of professional development for regular education staff. Nancy shared that she and Terry are talking with Liza about the possibility of making some of this training mandatory.

C. Enhanced Summer School and After School/Extracurricular Programming:

Discussions with pre-school ABA parents revealed that there are questions about what criteria are used in determining which students qualify for summer services as well as which services will be provided during the summer months. It was mentioned that the district has stated that its principal criteria in this determination is the child’s risk of regression. Steve mentioned that there are actually a number of other criteria that should be considered when making this decision. All agreed on the importance of educating parents about the criteria that should be part of this Team decision and the need to document these criteria. Laurel mentioned that one concern for parents of spectrum children is the need for typically developing children in the summer program as peer models. She stated it is a win-win situation for children and the district as typical kids could be tutored in to the program. She mentioned that other districts are currently doing this. Steve mentioned use of the IEP service delivery grid to increase transparency about what is going to happen in the summer.

Action item:

- **Laurel will get three program descriptions from other school districts who tuition typical peers into their summer program.**

V. **NEW ITEMS**

A. Inclusion of Specific Recommendations in APS Specialists’ Evaluation Reports:

Some parents have reported that recommendations were not included in the district’s evaluation reports for their child. When it doesn’t occur parents are left unprepared for the Team meeting and unable to participate fully in the development of their child’s educational program. This is a compliance issue for the district.

B. Communication with Parents:

Bill suggested that as a PAC it would be appropriate to offer an opinion on communication with parents. He emphasized that culturally our policy is open communication. Communication issues such as access to teachers, records, and therapists notes were mentioned. The group discussed ways to facilitate direct communication between parents and providers. Availability of forms to request records and a flow chart on our web site were two ideas. Julie stated that requests for special education records should come to her. She mentioned that it would be helpful for her to know about specific issues with regard to getting records so there can be some internal education if necessary. Nancy stated that she feels that we are seeing a shift toward a more open communication style from and relationship with the district. Examples given included: On Team, Quarterly Meetings, Meetings with Liza and PAC Chairs, and the multiple meetings with the Pre-school parents earlier this year.

Action Item:

- **Julie to add this to list of discussion topics with Liza.**

VI. ADJOURNMENT:

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting. That motion was seconded and unanimously approved.

VII. NEXT MEETING:

PAC General Meeting April 8th at 7:00 PM canceled due to April 15th Bullying presentation by Nancy Mullin. May 13th is our next Board meeting.

Minutes respectfully submitted by, Valerie Ryan, Secretary