



Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council Board Meeting

Wednesday, September 9, 2009

MEETING MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER:

Nancy Sherburne called the meeting to order. The following Board Members attended the meeting: Nancy Sherburne, Caroline Jarvis, Sasha Stavsky, Lynne Zawada, and Valerie Ryan. Also in attendance were SpEd PAC members: Kim Nolan, Pupil Services Representative: Julie Towell; and School Committee Representative: Mike Coppolino.

II. APPROVAL OF MAY AND JUNE 2009 MINUTES:

Minutes from the May 2009 board meeting were reviewed. Nancy volunteered to address the Executive Session section of the minutes. She explained that a community member had threatened to take legal action against the PAC. An executive session was called to discuss how the PAC should go about seeking legal representation. The school district generously allowed the PAC Board to speak with their council regarding this matter. Nancy went on to say that the legal issue has been resolved and no legal actions were taken against the PAC. The open question of whether or not a PAC can be sued remains to be answered by the district's council. A motion was made to accept the May minutes, the motion was seconded and they were unanimously accepted. Minutes from the June 2009 Annual Meeting and Election of Officers were reviewed. A motion was made to accept the June minutes and the motion was seconded. The June minutes were unanimously approved.

Action Item:

Nancy and Bill to follow-up with the district's council on open question.

III. ORGANIZATION/BUSINESS ISSUES:

A. Fundraising Opportunities: Nancy explained that while fundraising is not a primary focus of the PAC, we are pursuing it this year due to the dire economic situation and anticipated budget cuts. The PAC is pursuing several fundraising opportunities: flower bulb sales, the Oktoberfest 5K race, and a grant proposal to the Astra foundation. Selling flower bulbs through Dutch Gardens and Flower Power Fundraising was presented as a good opportunity as 50% of all sales come back to the PAC. Nancy handed out sales kits to the group and encouraged everyone to join in trying to sell bulbs for the PAC. Additionally, Nancy has sent an e-mail to the rest of the PAC membership encouraging them to sell and/or buy bulbs to benefit the PAC. Other suggestions were to set-up tables at the Back-to-School Open Houses; to approach the PTOs for use in planting projects;

and to sell bulbs at the West Acton Farmer's Market. Nancy also mentioned an offer from the Middlesex West Chamber of Commerce (MWCOC) to partner with area non-profits for fundraising. The MWCOC is sponsoring an Oktoberfest 5K Run/Walk in West Acton on Saturday, October 3 in conjunction with the West Acton merchant Oktoberfest. For every person registering for the event and identifying himself or herself as an AB SpEd PAC supporter, \$5.00 of their \$15.00 registration fee will be returned to the PAC. Julie mentioned that she lives close by the main area of the Oktoberfest and that we are welcome to set-up in her yard to help support the fundraisers. In addition to the flower bulbs and 5K, Caroline is writing a grant proposal to the Astra Foundation to solicit annual funds and to support publication of the SpEd PAC handbook. Mike reminded all that the School Committee had agreed to fund publication and distribution should we need it to.

Action Items:

- 1) All board members sell bulbs and give orders to Val by October 9***
- 2) Val will compile sales forms and funds into one order and submit it to Dutch Gardens by October 23, 2009***

B. Upcoming Events and Educational Speakers: Several of the events scheduled were discussed as follows:

- September: The AB SpEd PAC Back-to-School Picnic to be held at Danny's Place on September 30. The picnic provides an opportunity for families to connect with one another, PAC representatives and Pupil Services staff in an informal social setting.
- October: 1) The Acton-Boxborough Youth Advocacy Symposium co-hosted by Pupil Services and the Acton-Boxborough Coalition for Healthy Youth. Ron Bell, Director of Community Affairs for the Deval Patrick administration, is the keynote speaker at the Symposium. Julie stated that the goal of the Symposium is to bring the community together in support of youth. 2) The Bullying Prevention Panel co-sponsored by the PAC, Pupil Services, The Community Alliance for Youth, and No-Place for Hate. Dr. Elizabeth Englander, Director of Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center will lead the panel. 3) A parent workshop titled "An IEP for my Child" presented by The Federation for Children with Special Needs and hosted by the PAC.
- November: The Parent Guardian Workshop, co-sponsored by the PAC and Pupil Services will be held on Nov. 6th. Julie scheduled Rick Lavoie as the keynote speaker. Rick Lavoie is a highly regarded speaker and author on social skills building for special needs students.
- December: On Dec. 9th the PAC will host a parent workshop titled "Basic Rights" that will be presented by The Federation for Children with Special Needs.

Nancy also mentioned that the first SpEd PAC Board/Pupil Services Quarterly meeting is tentatively scheduled for November 3rd. She reminded the group that this was an opportunity to discuss issues and provide feedback to the district. Nancy asked that suggestions for topics be sent to her and that an agenda would be put together as the meeting date gets closer. Nancy also mentioned that Bill had suggested that we approach new superintendent, Stephen Mills, and inquire about meeting with special education parents regarding his perspective and ideas. Additional presentations such as a transition workshop are being pursued.

Action Item:

Val work with Nancy work to schedule Stephen Mills.

- C. PAC Representatives to Speak at School Open Houses:
A brief discussion took place regarding increasing awareness of the PAC by presenting information about the organization at each school open house. This idea had been discussed at the last general meeting. Nancy recommended that those who had volunteered to present information at the school open-houses contact the respective principals and PTO Chairs to coordinate their presentations. It was suggested that the volunteers mention the upcoming events and bring PAC pamphlets and Flower Power brochures with them.

Action Items:

- 1) Representatives work with respective schools regarding scheduling.***
- 2) Nancy to e-mail write-up regarding main points to present.***
- 3) Nancy to provide PAC brochures for the representatives to bring to the open-house events.***

- D. Autism Program Review:
Nancy mentioned that at the September 3rd, 2009 school committee meeting, Liza had proposed a comprehensive action plan in response to the PAC survey results showing a significant difference in the level of satisfaction among parents of children in this group. Nancy mentioned that the proceedings of the school committee meeting could be seen in detail on the districts website (<http://ab.mec.edu/about/meetings.shtml#sept>). It was agreed that focus groups with parents of spectrum children regarding their experiences and suggestions for improvement would be a valuable endeavor for the district.

Action Item:

Nancy and Bill will meet with Liza to discuss her action plan.

- E. Bullying Policy Task Force: Nancy noted that there was general agreement among school committee members at the September 3, 2009 school committee meeting that the districts policy is out of date and needs revision. Dr. Mills encouraged the PAC to participate on the Task Force

that Liza will be chairing. Mike suggested that it might make sense for an equal number of parents and staff to participate on this task force to ensure that the parent perspective is well represented. Nancy shared that Dr. Mills recognizes the essential nature of parent involvement on the task force.

- F. PAC Parent Handbook: Nancy and Val are working on portions of the handbook and the goal is to get it out in the 1st quarter. Nancy mentioned that the Federation has a draft revision of their handbook and that it may be beneficial to dovetail our handbook release with theirs to ensure content accuracy.
- G. Pursuit of MA non-profit Status & 501(c) 3 status: Nancy mentioned that the paperwork had not yet been filed for MA non-profit status (she had previously believed that it had). She stressed the importance of the PAC having this status if we plan to do more significant fundraising, as it will allow donors to receive tax deductions for their contributions. There is a minimum \$25.00 annual filing fee to maintain 501(c)(3) status.

Action Item:

Sasha and Caroline to complete filing.

- H. Technology use in IEP Development: The next meeting of the Technology Task Force is scheduled for September 24th.

IV. OPEN ISSUES:

- A. Combining Outside Specialists' Evaluations/Recommendations with District Evaluations/Recommendations and appropriately incorporating specialists' recommendations into the IEP: Julie mentioned that the next Pupil Services Leadership Team meeting is Monday, Sept 14th and that she'll get back to us with a date for the IEE meeting following that.
- B. Mandatory Special Education Training/Professional Development for Regular and Special Education Staff: Mike spoke about the recent school committee discussion regarding budget line item expenses. When compared with other districts, our professional development expenditures are very low. Mike went on to say that as Dr. Mills puts together a budget, some school committee members support increasing professional development expenditures to be more in line with other districts. Mike pointed out that better education of teachers can lead to reduced costs in other areas. Lynne asked if there were specific areas planned regarding teacher education. Nancy suggested that it was important for all staff, regular and special education, to be trained in how best to educate the population of students they're being asked to teach, including autism spectrum disabilities, language based learning differences, specific learning disorders, and physical impairments. Mike pointed out that there is an inherent benefit to the children in making the teaching staff more sensitive to different learning styles.

- C. Enhanced Summer School and After School/Extracurricular Programming: Nancy briefly mentioned that Caroline had an interest in this and that contacting PAC member Shu-Fang to discuss her ideas would be a good next step.

Action Item:

Caroline will contact Shu-Fang Lin to discuss her ideas presented at the June 2009 General Meeting.

- D. Increased use of Technology in IEP Development/Revision Process: A general discussion took place regarding ideas in addition to use of Smart Boards at IEP meetings. Ideas included the following:
- Use of Smart Pens for students may be beneficial as they record the voices of the teacher and students. Julie will look into whether this is legally allowed in the schools.
 - Use of technology to enhance general communications such as home logs. This might help with regard to the lack of contact opportunities parents have with certain special education staff (for example, classroom assistants, S/L and OT therapists).
 - A suggestion was made that improvements in speakerphones for IEP/Team meetings were badly needed. The ideas of video conferencing or Skypeing were also brought-up. Julie cautioned against using technology via the internet due to privacy concerns.
 - An improvement in teacher websites with regard to homework expectations was also stressed as an urgent need. It was suggested that special education liaisons might need to become involved in getting this information to parents if teachers don't have adequate sites and that it be written into IEPs if necessary.

Action Item:

Julie will find out about Smart Pens

V. ADJOURNMENT:

Val made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Sasha seconded the motion and all were in favor.

VI. NEXT MEETING:

The next meeting will be held October 14th at the Parker-Damon Library from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm. It is a General PAC Meeting in which the parent workshop, "An IEP for my Child" will be presented by the Federation for Children with Special Needs.

Meeting Minutes Respectfully Submitted by Valerie Ryan, Secretary.