



Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council Board Meeting - Wednesday, January 13, 2010

MEETING MINUTES

- I. Call to Order – Nancy Sherburne called the meeting to order. The following Board members attended the meeting: Bill Guthlein, Nancy Sherburne, Caroline Jarvis, Sasha Stavsky, Lynne Zawada, Valerie Ryan. Also in attendance were Pupil Services representatives Matt Kidder and Julie Towell and School Committee members Mike Coppolino and Xuan Kong.

- II. Approval of September and November 2009 Minutes – It was noted that the September minutes had not been approved at the November meeting due to lack of a voting quorum. The September minutes were reviewed and a motion was made to approve them. That motion was seconded and the minutes were unanimously approved. The November minutes were reviewed. A question was asked about the home log section, specifically what RCS is. The reply was that RCS is an abbreviation for the consulting group Realizing Children’s Strengths. Julie stated that the district uses them for specific cases and staff training. A motion was made to approve the November minutes. That motion was seconded and the minutes were unanimously approved.

- III. Organizational/Business Issues
 - A. Need for monthly PAC meetings – Nancy stated that she and Bill agree that there is a need for more frequent business meetings. There was general agreement among the group that monthly business meetings would be useful. Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday were thought to be the most convenient evenings. It was noted that in February we have scheduled a Federation presentation so a separate meeting will be scheduled.
Action Item – Nancy/Bill schedule February business meeting.

 - B. Update on 501c3 process and proposed PAC by-law changes – Sasha updated the group regarding the requirements of obtaining 501c3 status. Sasha stated that the organizational by-laws must stipulate what the funds will be used for. Sasha pointed to two examples of by law language by groups with 501c3 status. The Groton Dunstable SpEd PAC had by-laws with general language while the California Garden Clubs had very specific language. Examples of language necessary for 501c3 status in by-laws include statements that members will not be reimbursed for services and members will not lobby for political offices. Sasha recommended that the PAC obtain the services of a legal professional to review the by-laws and to make sure that legal documents are in place. It was pointed out that once the 501c3 status is filed it would need to be submitted to the Attorney

General's office. The fee for 501c3 status is based on projected short-term revenue and would be \$300.00 for the PAC. An additional filing fee of \$50.00 would be charged by the Attorney General's office. Nancy mentioned the importance of adding a statement in the by-laws referencing Robert's Rules of Order as a guide to govern meeting proceedings. It was agreed that this was a good practice for the PAC to adopt into the by-laws. **Action Items: Sasha to follow-up on finding a legal professional to review the by-laws and ensure legal documents are in place.**

C. PAC Priorities for 2009 Survey Follow-up – Two priorities were discussed as follows:

i. Autism Parent Focus Groups – Nancy noted that Liza has proposed 4 forums with the parents of children on the autism spectrum in response to the survey results for this subgroup. The forums have been scheduled for January and February. Three of the forums are designed for in-district parents and are grouped by the children's ages – pre-k-2nd grade; grades 3rd -6th; and grades 7th-12th. The fourth forum is designed for out-of-district parents. All parents of autism spectrum children are invited to attend any of the forums, however. Nancy and Bill will meet with Liza this week to formulate questions and discuss format.

Action Item: Nancy/Bill meet with Liza regarding Autism Forums.

ii. Bullying Prevention – Nancy mentioned that the Bullying Policy Task Force met recently and that the four sub-committees continue to meet. Nancy noted discussions surrounding legal underpinnings about search and seizure and reasonable grounds to pursue investigation of reported incidents. One potential conflict surrounds anonymous reporting and legal credibility of those reports as a basis for pursuing investigations. The value of facilitating anonymous reporting was not disputed, as there are other benefits –e.g. increasing school staff awareness of issues – even if the reports are not legally viable. The task force has brought up the idea of providing written guidance identifying what the district is able, and unable, to do depending on how an incident is reported. Nancy mentioned that policy and procedure recommendations would be available within the next few months. One of the goals for the PAC outside of the task force is to identify resources for parents and post information on our website.

D. Special Education Cost Savings Proposal – Nancy compiled a list of cost saving ideas discussed by the PAC Board and has shared that list with Liza. Nancy proposed sharing the list directly with Steven Mills as well. The full list was e-mailed to PAC Board members; Pupil Services administration, Mike, and Xuan prior to the meeting. Additional copies

were provided at the meeting as well. A discussion took place regarding several of the items on the list as follows:

- i. Shift district practice to accepting recommendations from quality Independent Education Evaluations (IEEs) – It was pointed out that other districts, such as Concord, routinely accept outside evaluations. Several suggestions were made with regard to this goal:
 1. Determine the number of times internal vs. external evaluations are conflicting
 2. Provide a set of guidelines for acceptable evaluations
 3. Define conditions for either accepting or rejecting outside evaluations
 4. Define patterns/conduct a study of rejected vs. accepted cases

Nancy pointed to the consistent feedback she has received from families on this issue over the last several years – as recently as January. Parents share that the recommendations from IEEs (performed by highly respected professionals) sometimes appear to be rejected in toto by the district, i.e., not incorporated into students IEPs. It was observed that the district often does not provide verbal or written explanation to families when rejecting recommendations by outside evaluators. Matt stated that the district is obligated to consider the results and the process for doing so is to have a Team meeting. Matt went on to say that from the district's view the recommendations may be aligned with the diagnosis but be counter to the whole child based on the child's performance in the school setting. Nancy pointed out the need for the district to strive for consensus among Team members. There was general agreement that it is likely the children with more complex needs are the ones who receive outside evaluations such as neuropsychological exams. Sometimes the district wants to hold off implementing recommendations until they've had a chance to retest the child. It was suggested that a potential solution might be for the district to implement recommended services on a conditional basis until the results of their own testing are available. Mike suggested that the issue be pushed forward to the next level as soon as possible. It was suggested that Dr. Mills be invited into the discussion to seek resolution on this issue.

- ii. IEP Technology Task Force – Nancy shared her frustration that progress within this task force has been excruciatingly slow. The Technology Task Force has only met two times in the past two school years – once in April 2009 and once in October 2009. The six months between meetings meant that most of the time in the second meeting was spent refreshing peoples' memories about what was discussed in the original kick-off meeting.

- iii. Increase the use of IEP Amendments –The time saved by the district and parents (who have to compare the revised IEP to the old one line by line) would be very valuable. Savings in paper and copying would also be realized.
- iv. Increase teaching of special education students by qualified teachers vs. assistants – beneficial in terms of progress vs. remediation.
- v. Other recommendations were briefly mentioned. These include: Move more of special education responsibility/decision making to school principals; Hire dual-certified teaching staff (qualified to teach regular and special education); Increase collaboration between regular and special education staff.

Mike suggested we ask Liza to comment on each recommendation. Bill asked if Mike would be willing to find a time to speak to the PAC about what his thinking is on special education cuts. Mike deferred to Dr. Mills and staff. Nancy emphasized the importance of letting the school committee know that the first line of cuts have already directly impacted teaching time for special education children because the assistants – whose hours have been cut - are teaching the special education children directly. Bill pointed to the Student Growth Model now being employed in MCAS data interpretation as a way for the school committee to determine the effectiveness of the special education programs. Mike agreed that this was a good model.

**Action Items: 1. Bill send Mike the Student Growth Model presentation given to the Lexington School Committee.
2. Nancy to get input from Liza on the cost savings recommendations and forward the information to Mike.**

- E. Special Education Parent Handbook – Multiple other priorities have taken precedence. However, examining the newest changes planned for the Federation Handbook will be useful as we work on our version. Mike suggested setting a reasonable deadline. Note: Nancy took this opportunity to mention that she has been invited to sit on the Mass PAC Advisory Board.
- F. Upcoming presentations – Caroline shared with the group a presentation opportunity on the subject of Sensory Integration (SI). Caroline made contact with Debbie Bauch, M.S., OTR/L. Ms. Bauch is a Clinical Director of the Astra Foundation. Caroline discussed Ms. Bauch’s considerable expertise in sensory integration and processing issues in children, as well as her background in early intervention. Ms. Bauch has agreed to present the workshop and provide packets at no charge to the PAC. It was agreed that this would be a desirable speaker for PAC membership. The Transition Workshop by the Federation of Children with Special Needs scheduled for February 10th was mentioned, as were

several additional relevant presentations sponsored by other groups but held in the area. A discussion regarding finding a speaker with expertise in the area of ADHD also took place. Val had looked into scheduling Ned Hallowell but it was largely agreed that the fee, even at the reduced rate of \$2,500, seems cost prohibitive at this time. There were also concerns that the presentation might market the Hallowell Center in part. Other speakers with expertise in ADHD will be investigated.

Action Items: 1. Caroline to schedule SI Presentation with Debbie Bauch (Val will assist in securing location and equipment); 2. Val to investigate ADHD speakers

- G. Task Force Meeting – regarding technology use in IEP development and IEE incorporation. It was mentioned that another meeting would be timely.

Action Item: Matt to send dates to Nancy regarding next meeting

- H. Budget Update – Nancy mentioned some of the ideas currently being considered by Dr. Mills. The ideas include: Re-framing FTEs so that two part-time employees could be considered one FTE; increasing class sizes to 30+ in Minuteman Tech and up to 40 in some lecture sections at the high school; and cutting staff. Nancy expressed the need to get the information out regarding the seriousness of the proposed cuts. Mike cautioned the need to wait until we get numbers from the state. Julie stated that some information would likely be detailed in tomorrow's paper. Bill mentioned the idea of borrowing money and paying it back when student population numbers decrease (a decrease in numbers is projected by the school committee). Bill expressed concern that the current student body is carrying the full burden of the budget crisis and its potential long-term impact.

Note: Nancy encouraged the group to attend the full-day budget workshop scheduled for February 6th.

- IV. Adjournment – A motion was made to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded and unanimously approved.
- V. Next Meeting – General PAC meeting February 10th at 7:00 in the Junior High Library – Federation for Children with Special Needs workshop entitled 'Transitions 101, High School to Adulthood' is scheduled.

Respectfully submitted by Valerie Ryan, Secretary.