



Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council Annual Meeting Tuesday, September 13, 2011

MEETING MINUTES

- I. Call to Order – Nancy Sherburne called the meeting to order at 7:38 pm. The following Board members attended the meeting: Bill Guthlein, Nancy Sherburne, Caroline Jarvis, Cynthia Overman, and Valerie Ryan. Two other PAC members were in attendance, as was Pupil Services liaison, Julie Towell and School Committee members Mike Coppolino and Paul Murphy.

- II. Approval of June Minutes
The minutes were reviewed and a motion was made to approve. That motion was seconded and the minutes were unanimously approved.

- III. Organizational/Business Issues
 - A. Treasurer's Report - Nancy pointed out that all monies are now handled by the Friends of the AB SpEd PAC (Friends) organization and that the report and updates regarding 501 (c) (3) status will be covered in the Friends business meeting following this SpEd PAC meeting.

 - B. School Committee Update – Mike Coppolino updated the group on the most recent School Committee meeting.
 1. Regionalization – A Regional School District Study Committee is being formed to discuss the pros and cons of regionalizing Boxborough's Blanchard Memorial Elementary School. The committee will be made up of 3 members from Acton and 3 members from Boxborough. Representing each town will be a current school committee member, a current or previous finance committee member and a community resident (preferably a parent of a current student). It was noted that Boxborough is also exploring other options (with the town of Harvard, for example).
 2. Preliminary MCAS Data – Bill reported that McCarthy Towne School did not make AYP for English but the R.J. Grey Junior High – which is on Corrective Action status – did make AYP. A discussion took place regarding the value of the intensive focus on comprehensive goals to address the problem at the Junior High. Mike pointed out that Bill and Nancy's efforts to bring the issue to the forefront for the School Committee made a big impact. Julie stated that the final results for each school would be available to both parents and administration this Friday.

3. State Changes Regarding Teacher Evaluation Criteria – No new information was available regarding the new criteria.
4. Summer Programming – Julie stated that Pupil Services continues to support the goal of moving to an integrated model for SpEd summer programming. However the goal has proved more complicated than initially thought. Two issues are as follows:
 - a. The Department of Education has stated that providing a summer camp experience for special education students is not a legal mandate
 - b. Resistance from Community Education - primarily due to concerns regarding the extent of extra staff that would be needed.

A discussion took place regarding what might help – Mike suggested examining models where integrated programs have been successful. Val and Caroline suggested Shrewsbury’s summer program and Caroline mentioned she would e-mail a copy of the program outline to Julie immediately following the meeting. Additional comments were made to reinforce the importance of continuing pursuit of the goal. Caroline pointed out that not all students need academics over the summer, for many the needs are coaching and peer modeling of social skills; Nancy pointed out that the recent survey results included dissatisfaction regarding lack of progress in this area despite the emphasis placed on it in the 2010 forum discussions between special education parents and Pupil Services. Nancy also pointed out that Community Education is a part of the school district and so is legally obligated to make their program accessible to all. Julie stated that she and Liza will set-up a meeting to further discuss how to pursue the goal.

- IV. Parent Handbook Status – Nancy announced that the first draft of the handbook is now complete and that it is currently being reviewed by Pupil Services. Julie provided the feedback that Liza is very impressed with it. Mike inquired about print vs. electronic distribution. Nancy replied that the first release would be electronic with a few hard copies in key locations – each school and the Pupil Services office, for example.
- V. PAC Survey Status and Draft Report Feedback – Bill updated the group on the first data cut from the 2011 PAC survey. Bill noted that there were 105 respondents and that, in general, there appears to be an increase in overall satisfaction since the PAC’s 2008 survey with most notable improvements in IEP process and communication with parents. In addition, the gap between parents of autism spectrum students and parents of specific learning disability

(SLD) students appears to have narrowed. There were areas, however, in which dissatisfaction remained the same or worsened since the 2008 survey. Examples include special education assessments, confidence level in sharing concerns about services without negative repercussions and in one bullying question. In terms of assessments parents commented that there were large discrepancies between feedback given by special education staff and feedback from regular education staff. In terms of confidence in discussing services with special education staff, the number of parents fearing negative repercussions was approximately 25% of total respondents, a number discussed as too high. Additionally, concerns remained regarding bullying with approximately 15% of respondents answering that their child did not feel safe at school.

Concerns regarding bullying were discussed. One concern was that district principals reported no incidents of bullying since the implementation of the district wide anti-bullying policy. Two parents present noted that they had recently reported bullying to the principal and counselor of their children's school (both at the same school). One parent suggested that school staff may need increased training on how to handle incidents of bullying that includes information regarding special education children as it was noted that schools were still attempting to bring bully and victim together to "talk it out" despite obvious power differentials (sometimes in the form of social savvy, for example). It was also noted that reports of bullying should increase not decrease after implementation of anti-bullying policies due to increased overall awareness. In terms of potential steps in the right direction, Julie mentioned upcoming staff training regarding defining bullying from a legal perspective and a parent noted the "Everyone's Different" curriculum for 1st graders presented at her child's school's open house.

Mike Coppolino noted the group's comments and will bring them to the attention of the school committee and/or Dr. Mills.

VI. PAC Priorities for the 2011-2012 School year – Nancy reviewed the following priorities for the upcoming year:

1. Analysis of Survey Results
2. MCAS Analysis
3. Redesign of the PAC website (including building a list of resources vetted by the local special education community)
4. Increase Parent Outreach

One PAC member present mentioned a willingness to be part of a PR effort. The same PAC member noted that she had visited other area PAC websites and been pleased with features such as blogging among members in those communities. The PAC member's offer to become involved in the group's PR effort was enthusiastically embraced. Nancy also mentioned that Karl – the PAC's website manager – is looking at new software and that it includes blogging capability.

Nancy then called for ideas regarding speakers. In addition, Julie asked for comments regarding the district's fall 2010 special education

workshop. Julie stated that some of the feedback she had already received indicated that the workshop would be better attended if it were held in the spring and during the evening. The group gave the input that spring was likely a better time but that the overall format would have to change if the workshop were held during the evening.

- VII. Additional Business –
Paul Murphy brought up a discussion regarding the upgrade of the lower fields. He centered the discussion on ideas for how the benefit of putting the money into the upgrade can be extended beyond students involved in sports to include those who may not use the fields. Paul explored the idea of allotting a certain portion to adaptive sports for children with special needs. It was agreed that this would be a great way to fund special education programs and that there was a real need in Acton. Paul will introduce the idea to the School Committee.
- VIII. Adjournment – A motion was made to adjourn the meeting, that motion was seconded and unanimously approved. The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 pm.

Next Meeting – AB SpEd PAC Board Meeting Wednesday, October 12, 2011 at 7:30 pm in the R.J. Grey Junior High Library.

Respectfully submitted by Valerie Ryan, Secretary.