2006-2007
Special Education Advisory Committee
Chairperson’s Report to the Superintendent,
Newport News Public Schools
June 2007

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I. State of Virginia Mandate for Local Special Education Advisory Committees

There shall be a local advisory committee for special education appointed by each local school board to advise the school board through the division superintendent. The composition of the committee shall include parents of children with disabilities and persons with disabilities.

A. Membership
   Local school division personnel shall serve only as consultants to the committee.

B. The function of the local advisory committee shall be as follows:
   1. Advise the school division of unmet needs in the education of children with disabilities:
   2. Assist the local school division in the formulation and development of plans for improving performance of children with disabilities specified in the Virginia Special Education Improvement Plan:
   3. Participate in the development of priorities and strategies for meeting the identified needs of children with disabilities:
   4. Submit periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities to the division superintendent for transmission to the local school board:
   5. Assist the local school division in interpreting plans to the community for meeting the special needs of children with disabilities for educational services:
   6. Review the policies and procedures for the provision of special education and related services prior to the submission by the local school board and the Virginia Department of Education.

C. Public notice shall be published annually listing the names of committee members and including a description of ways in
which interested parties may express their views to the committee.

D. Committee meetings shall be held at least quarterly and shall be open to the public.

II. Purpose of NNPS SEAC and Mission Statement
   A. Purpose
      1. Advise the superintendent, School Board and Special Education Department of any unmet needs in the education of children with disabilities in the NNPS system;
      2. Assist in the formation and development of long-range plans which will provide services for children with disabilities in the NNPS system;
      3. Participate in the development of priorities and strategies for meeting the identified needs of children with disabilities;
      4. Submit periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities to the School Board through the Superintendent. Any advisory statements made to the School Board on behalf of the SEAC shall first be presented to the committee for review and approval;
      5. Assist the Superintendent and the School Board in interpreting to the community plans for meeting the needs of students with disabilities for educational services; and
      6. Review annually the updated Special Education Annual Plan and Funding Application for Federal Flow-Through Funds thirty days prior to the submission by the Superintendent to the School Board.

   B. Mission Statement:
The Newport News Public School Special Education Advisory committee is comprised of parents of student with disabilities, persons with disabilities and community representatives. The mission of the SEAC is to work with the Special Education Department to help identify unmet needs of students with disabilities and advise the School Board accordingly.
III. Committee Membership

A. Parent Reps
1. Betty Anby  Grandparent
2. Carl Brakman  Parent
3. Sheila Canada  Parent
4. Stephanie Diggs* Parent
5. Brock Everett* Parent
6. Thomas Grummell* Parent
7. Chenelle Harris  Parent
8. Mary Beth Helsel  Parent
9. Latonya McCallum* Parent
10. Sara McLain* Parent
11. Chanel Mitchell* Parent
12. Sarah Russell  Parent
13. Pamela Santos* Parent
14. Amy Sroka* Parent
15. Dynatt Vann* Parent
16. Lori Watson* Parent

* new member as of May 21, 2007

B. Community Reps
1. Joan Brunner* Colonial Advocacy Rep
2. Brenda Claiborne** NN Department of Human Services
3. Kim Crutchfield** Ft. Eustis EFMP
4. Vera Hansley Dept. of Rehab. Services Rep
5. Vicki Mortorano Smart Ones Rep
6. Richard Mills PCDC Rep
7. Warren Mills ARC Rep
8. Maqbool Sheikh Community Civic Rep
9. Freddie Simmons HNN-CSB

* * new member as of May 21, 2007
** new member pending School Board Approval

C. Consulting Members
1. Jeanice Bryant  Specialist, Special Education
2. Wanda Council  Supervisor, Special Education
3. Dr. Charlene Greiner  Supervisor, Special Education
4. Marion Harper  Supervisor, Special Education
5. Teddy Hicks  School Board Representative  
6. Marlene Montandon  Supervisor, Special Education  
7. Ruthann Newton  Coordinator, Parent Educator Resource Center  
8. Robert Pietrasanta  Director, Special Education  
9. Dr. Lisa Powers  Supervisor, Special Education  
10. Dr. Kari Weston  Executive Director, Curriculum and Instruction  
11. Glenn Whitlock  Supervisor, Referrals and Assessments  

D. New Members, see above  

E. Member resignations: Marlene Cherrye  Ft. Eustis EFMP  
   George Flood  NNDHS  

F. Recommendations of Reappointment:  
   Betty Anby  

G. 2007-2008 Officers  
   1. Chair: Sarah Russell  
   2. Vice-Chair: Mary Beth Helsel  
   3. Recording Secretary: Sara McLain  
   4. Corresponding Secretary: Sheila Canada  

IV. Summary of SEAC meetings  
A. September  
   1. Public Comment Period  
      a. A parent had questions regarding who is responsible for changing IEPs and attending these IEP meetings.  
      b. A parent inquired about guidelines being used to determine if a child qualifies for speech.  

B. October  

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1. Public Comment Period
   A parent expressed concerns that as her child gets older, she is being placed in more restrictive environments. She is concerned that this is becoming a trend.

2. Program topic: This meeting was our second annual Meet and Greet. Members of the committee and the Special Education Department were available after the meeting to informally meet and talk with parents.

C. November
   1. Public Comment Period
      a. A parent praised the Assistive Technology Resource Center. She was able to come in and access a picture communication system that has in turn helped her child communicate using these pictures.
      b. A parent wanted to inform the committee on Suburban Learning Cottages and the need for them at MHS for providing Transition Services.
      c. A parent spoke about the Best Friends Foundation. She was concerned as the program has been dropped from Carver and Crittendon and will likely be dropped from Heritage.


D. January
   1. Public Comment Period
      a. A parent shared with the committee the progress her daughter has made over the past years. Her daughter was asked to apply to the Governor’s School for Science and Technology. The application requires a pre-admission test and the parent wanted to know if the resource teacher could assist in the delivery of the test since the student had this accommodation written into her IEP.
      b. A parent inquired as to how a Section 504 plan is disseminated to staff members providing services to that child.
2. Program topic: Transition. The presenter was unable to attend and the meeting was rescheduled to the February meeting.

E. February
   1. Public Comment Period: A parent shared concerns that her child’s IEP was not being followed and this was causing him stress.
   2. Program topic: Transition: How do you plan your child’s IEP now so that your child will be ready after high school? Marianne Moore, the State Transition Coordinator for the VDOE delivered the presentation.

F. March
   1. Public Comment Period:
      a. A parent had a concern about the time line for determining if the student was eligible for services.
      b. Parents had a concern about the class size for their child.
   3. Program Topic 2: Understanding ESY. Wanda Council, Supervisor of Special Education with the NNPS delivered the presentation.

G. April
   1. Public Comment Period:
      a. A representative from the NN Parks and Rec spoke about the 10 week summer program.
      b. A parent had a question about administers being present during IEP meetings. A teacher may be the admin designee. If a parent is not comfortable with this, they can request an administrator and reschedule.

H. May
   1. Public Comment Period: There were no comments.
   2. Program Topic: Teacher of the Year recognitions. Seven Special Education Teachers were chosen by their schools as the Teacher of the Year.
V. Summary of Subcommittee meetings

A. Annual Blueprint Subcommittee
   This subcommittee met several times in the summer and fall months. We looked at our subcommittee and decided that several other subcommittees should form to help the committee move ahead in a positive way. We formed the following committees: bylaws, mission statement, unmet needs, membership, legislative and uniform.

B. Bylaws Subcommittee
   The bylaws subcommittee went through the bylaws to make them parallel to the State SEAC bylaws. The most significant addition was the topic designation of the September and October meeting. The September meeting shall be designated for reviewing legislative actions slated for that year. The October meeting shall be designated as the Meet and Greet meeting where the public is invited to meet the members of the NNPS SEAC and all of the consulting members.

C. Mission Statement Subcommittee
   The subcommittee worked many months to come up with several options for the entire committee to vote on. The following is the chosen mission statement of the NNPS SEAC:

   The Newport News Public School Special Education Advisory Committee is comprised of parents of students with disabilities, persons with disabilities, and community representatives. The mission of the SEAC is to work with the Special Education Department to help identify unmet needs of students with disabilities and advise the School Board accordingly.

D. Unmet needs Subcommittee
   This subcommittee is in the process of creating a survey for parents regarding transition. They hope to have a survey ready to go out in the fall.

E. Membership Subcommittee
   This subcommittee worked very hard in trying to get new members and as a result we had over 30 applications for
membership. The subcommittee recommended 11 applicants, ten parents and one community representative.

F. Legislative Subcommittee
This subcommittee met several times to prepare a statement to the School Board regarding its proposed State Legislative Position Statements. Two of the three Priority Positions concerned special education matters. The School Board dropped the two special education matters for its Priority Positions, revised some of the language, but maintained their positions, just not listed as priorities, on special education matters. The subcommittee also has designated that every September meeting be a time where we would review upcoming legislation concerning special education.

G. Uniform Subcommittee
This subcommittee has formed and is viewing the report presented to the School Board. The subcommittee hopes to have a statement to present to the School Board pending approval by the Committee.

VI. SEAC Recommendations

A. Provide the SEAC Chair with opinions of draft legislative positions in early September to allow timely review and feedback to the Legislative Service Director and School Board.

B. Provide ongoing in-service education and training to guidance counselors, regular education teachers and others who have contact with our students with disabilities. Collaborative classes are becoming the norm. It is imperative that everyone involved with our special children receive training to be sensitive to the social/emotional needs of our students with disabilities. Often times as students with special needs progress in school and move into collaborative settings they become isolated. They need help forming friendships. We need to ensure that our students with disabilities have a well-rounded educational, social and emotional experience throughout their school years.
C. Explore best practices nationwide regarding buddy systems for students with disabilities for potential implementation in NNPS.

VII. Meeting Schedule for 2007-2008

All meetings are held at the School Administration Building in Conference Rooms A and B.

Tuesday, September 25th at 4:30 PM
Tuesday, October 23rd at 7:00 PM
Tuesday, November 27th at 4:30 PM
Tuesday, January 22nd at 4:30 PM
Tuesday, February 26th at 7:00 PM
Tuesday, March 25th at 4:30 PM
Tuesday, April 22nd at 4:30 PM
Tuesday, May 27th at 4:30 PM

VII. Personal observations
While I was Vice Chair, I along with many of the committee members received SEAC training through the VDOE. This was followed up with more intense training the summer prior to my being the Chair of SEAC. This training guided me through this past year. We have approved and adopted a Mission Statement, updated the By-laws, formed several subcommittees, implemented speaker guidelines, and will shortly be sending out our first survey to help us identify unmet needs. The committee has worked very hard and is looking forward to a great year. I would like to thank Mr. Robert Pietrasanta for providing me such positive guidance throughout the year. I would also like to thank Mrs. Ruthann Newton, Coordinator of the Parent Educator Resource Center. She has also been a positive guidance for me this past year. The school system is fortunate to have both of them.