

ACPS SEAC Annual Report 2021-22

After the exceptionally difficult task of adapting to the challenges of COVID, we wish to again express our gratitude and support for all the teachers, staff, and administrators who have worked so hard to educate, accommodate, and encourage our students. Our students are fortunate to have such dedicated adults as part of their support network.

The Special Education Advisory Committee respectfully requests the ACPS School Board continue to support our students, families, and professionals by considering the following recommendations.

1. Increase special education training for all teachers:

We are recommending this support again because studies show “96% of students with disabilities spend at least part of their day in general education classes, and general education teachers serve as the teacher of record on students’ Individualized Education Programs,”¹ and “Less than 1 in 5 general education teachers feel ‘very well prepared’ to teach students with mild to moderate learning disabilities, including ADHD and dyslexia, according to a new survey from two national advocacy groups.”

² We request that the training be offered during work hours and not on evenings or weekends.

2. Improve teacher retention:

While every division employee is valuable, our teachers are our greatest asset. As a division, we spend a substantial sum attracting and training all teachers, especially those in special education. The pandemic, standardized testing, reporting requirements, staffing shortages, and increased mental health challenges have all accelerated teacher burnout. Typical teacher attrition has been about 8%, but recent studies have shown that up to 20% of teachers “have left or are actively considering leaving teaching.”³

¹ **Preparing General Education Teachers to Improve Outcomes for Students With Disabilities**

Prepared for AACTE and NCLD by Linda P. Blanton, Marleen C. Pugach, and Lani Florian, April 2011

²

<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/most-classroom-teachers-feel-unprepared-to-support-students-with-disabilities/2019/05>

³

<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/opinion-will-the-pandemic-drive-teachers-out-of-the-profession-what-one-study-says/2021/08>

3. Enhance accessibility:

Albemarle County schools need more wheelchair ramps, more elevators, and additional accessibility supports. For example, Murray needs a ramp at the front of the building so students with disabilities don't have to enter from a different door than their typically-abled peers. Several schools need additional elevators so students do not have to travel the length of the building to change classes and so there are alternate elevators in case of malfunctions. We ask that an internal accessibility audit be conducted and that accessibility be a top priority for future construction and renovations.

4. Reduce school transitions for special education students:

Currently, in Albemarle County, some students are being transported to schools outside their neighborhoods when service programs change. Parents have expressed concerns that their children with disabilities are being sent to different schools, sometimes as often as annually, as services shift throughout the county. When possible, we feel students would be better served in the schools attended by their siblings and neighbors. More importantly, we ask that families be included in the discussion of moving a student to a school away from their home. We request a standardized transition process be put in place to ensure consistency and fairness in the procedure when this change is necessary..

Parents are asking SEAC members the following questions:

Is this the same class and school my child would attend if she or he did not have a disability?

How many students without disabilities are sent to another school without parental input?

What services would not be provided if my child were to attend our neighborhood school?

Why was this decision not discussed with us in advance?

We are recommending ACPS review its placement policy and consider a more flexible policy on special education placements that prioritizes the child's successes and family relationships with school personnel.

The Special Education Advisory Committee appreciates the consideration of these recommendations in discussion of funding priorities and programming for the next academic year and beyond. We would like to thank Kevin Kirst, Katy Compel, and the entire Special Education Department for their continuing commitment to our students. Thank you also to the school board for allowing us to share this report.

This report was prepared by SEAC vice-chairperson Stephanie Hicks, with input from the SEAC membership. A draft of the document was sent by electronic mail to the SEAC on January 8, 2022, and finalized following the monthly meeting on March 8, 2022..