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Loudoun County School Board, Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Meeting, Wednesday, September 6, 2023

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Length 37m (video)

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[00:00:00] It's so nice to see familiar faces and new faces as we get started with this 2023-2024 school year. The Special Education Advisory Committee, SEAC, is mandated by the regulations governing special education programs for children with disabilities in Virginia.

[00:00:19] SEAC strives to work alongside parents, students, educators, staff, and the school board to identify needs, suggest improvements, and advance the interest of students receiving special education services in Loudoun County public schools to help ensure that students with disabilities have access to and receive an appropriate, individualized, and inclusive public education.

[00:00:43] So my name is Liz Crotty. I am the SEAC chair this year, and we have to my right, Lisa Williams, the vice chair of planning. To my left, we have Carla Sola, our vice chair of membership.

[00:00:59] To my right, again, we have Shanaz Khan, our vice chair of communications. To my left, SEAC secretary, Katie Rosenbrook. Sharon Trofe is our SEAC past chair. She cannot be with us this evening, but she'll be with us at future meetings.

[00:01:16] And we also have, to my left, we have Dr. Paige Carter, who is our LCPS staff liaison and the special education director. And then all the way on the far right, we have Tiffany Polifco, who is our school

board liaison.

[00:01:32] And then over here to our right, this evening, we're joined by Erica Ogadegby, who is our school board liaison alternate. So as I said, my name's Liz Crotty. I've lived in Loudoun County for 13 years. This is my seventh year having kids in LCPS.

[00:01:50] I have three children receiving special education. I've been involved with SEAC for three years and also been active in my school's PTO. I have a background in tax accounting, but I spend most of my time now either in IEP meetings for my kids or learning about special education.

[00:02:10] I hope you will all feel free to reach out to me at any time with questions or concerns at SEACChair at LCPS.org. So this evening on the back table, you'll find lots of flyers, information about SEAC, as well as our PTA, PTO representatives list.

[00:02:31] We're not taking attendance this evening, but if you're a representative, please check and make sure that we have your information on there correctly. If you are interested in being a representative for your school, please also put your information on there. You can also alternatively email our SEAC Vice Chair of Membership at lcps.org and let them know you're interested as well.

[00:02:55] We have 19 voting members and two open membership positions. We have three new members who were just approved by the school board. So if you could just raise your hand if you're here. Alicia McFadden, Catherine Moran, I saw her, Erin Rosalpo, welcome.

[00:03:16] We're very happy to have you with us. Membership applications are also on the back table, and SEAC bylaws are on the LCPS website on the SEAC page. Meetings will be emailed to all of our PTA, PTO representatives, as well as posted on our SEAC webpage, which is listed there.

[00:03:37] We have some meetings coming up. We have an executive committee meeting, which will be on September 27th at 12.30 p.m. Specialized programs and services. We have a reading subcommittee, which will be scheduled shortly.

[00:03:55] a transition subcommittee that will meet in October sometime, so that will be forthcoming. We do have a policy and compliance subcommittee meeting that will be held on September 11th at 6.30 p.m. It will be virtual, so please feel free to join if you're interested, as well as a meaningful inclusion subcommittee meeting on September 14th at 6 p.m., which will also be virtual.

[00:04:19] Now I would like to introduce you all to our new superintendent. Dr. Aaron Spence was appointed superintendent on June 2nd, 2023. He holds a doctor of education degree in educational administration and supervision, a master's degree in secondary education, and a bachelor's degree in French studies, all from the University of Virginia.

[00:04:41] He and his wife have six children. So without further ado, I'll let him take over. Thank you. Thank you, and good evening. So good evening. All right, there we go.

[00:04:58] It's wonderful to be with all of you this evening. I was mentioning when I was coming into your leadership that this is actually outside of a meeting with our school board, the first public meeting that I've had the opportunity to come to, as this is day two for me in Loudoun County. But I'm thrilled to be here with you this evening.

[00:05:15] And yes, that does signal my commitment to the work that we do with SEAC. And it is really important to me to know and to have learned that we have a strong relationship with our SEAC here in

Loudoun County Schools that the relationship between our staff and I'm very excited about our new director who's joined us this evening but also just our staff in general and the SEAC to solve problems and work together to make sure that we are providing the best possible experiences for our students is a strong one and I certainly intend the superintendent to make sure that that relationship remains strong and support that in any way that I can

[00:05:53] And so I have, in addition to having some degrees from the University of Virginia, my background also includes having served in a lot of different roles in my time in education. This year, I think, is my 30th year in education, and I have been a teacher, and so I have sat in those special education meetings as a general education teacher.

[00:06:16] I have been an administrator. I was a high school assistant principal. I was a longtime high school principal. And so I've sat in those IEP development meetings as an administrator and understand some of those challenges. I also have been a director of curriculum instruction responsible for overseeing how we work with our teachers on instruction and make sure that specially designed instruction is exactly what it says it is.

[00:06:41] And so I have that background and experience. And, of course, I've been in the superintendency now. This is going into my 13th year in the superintendency and dealt with any number of issues related to special education. And it is really clear to me through all of that, something that I learned in a different role, and that is as a dad.

[00:07:03] So you see that I have six children, and I have an incredible group of kids. They're all special to me, just as I know all of our children are special to us. And I've sat in those IEP meetings as a father as well and worked to try to understand through that process what that feels like.

[00:07:21] And here's what's interesting to just tell you candidly. The first IEP meeting I sat in for my daughter, it occurred to me really clearly that, you know, if you're the superintendent of schools and don't understand what's going on, how is it possible that somebody without that kind of background could understand what was going on?

[00:07:43] And so it was clear to me there were problems in our process back then in a different place. But it really made me commit to an understanding both personally and then professionally that the process is not about checking boxes, right? That the process is a human process.

[00:08:00] And it's about understanding that all together in the room, what we're trying to do is do what's best for a child. And that it's our job to work together responsibly to do that and to make sure that kids have amazing learning experiences when they're with us. You know, I talk all the time, but I envision a place where kids feel deeply that they belong, that they're supposed to be in our classrooms, and that they can thrive, that the resources and supports that they need exist so that they can thrive.

[00:08:27] And, you know, quite honestly, I think we can all shine a spotlight on different pieces of our data and find areas where we don't see that happening. And that's where the opportunity for us to have conversations together about how do we get better with that exists. So my commitment is that we do that together, that we work together to be better tomorrow than we are today, always, continuing to move forward.

[00:08:49] Don't expect perfection or flawlessness from either LCPS or me, but do expect a lot of hard work and commitment to bettering ourselves in the process and working with you to do that. So I'm

excited to be here and really excited to be working with you all.

[00:09:05] And to getting to know you, this is a much larger SEAC group than the last group that I worked with. But you know what? I intend to get to know you and to know what your needs and hopes and aspirations are for your children and to know how I can support that. As I was sharing with one of your vice chairs, however, if I don't remember your name the next time I see you, just please remind me and we'll get to know each other along the way.

[00:09:27] Thank you all for having me tonight. Thank you. Next, I would like to introduce Carrie Williams. She is the ombuds for LCPS. And I'll let her share some words about what the ombuds does and help everyone get to know her better.

[00:09:49] All right. Hello, everybody. I'm glad to be back for my second introduction for the CI committee. I began last year just a few weeks before I was introduced, and I really didn't have much to share other than my name, my office, phone number, and my email address.

[00:10:07] But since then, we've come a long way. I've worked with hundreds of individuals within the system in the past year as the ombuds, and I'm hoping to continue to spread that word, market my services, let people know that I am here, and I have had the pleasure of supporting many of our families who have students in the special education programming in the division.

[00:10:29] And I'm here tonight just so that you can reconnect with my role as the ombuds that you know that I am here as an informal resource within the division to support not only families but also employees, students, and the community to help navigate the system in a confidential manner as well.

[00:10:47] And being informal, I can help find resources, make connections, let individuals know policy, regulation, processes that they might not be aware of, and to just be there as an ear to listen, to hear their concerns and to help explore options that might exist and to make those connections, like I said, as necessary.

[00:11:10] I am an independent resource in the sense that I don't have any other roles or responsibilities that would keep me from being impartial or neutral when working with families. So in your roles, in your connections with other families, we have a lot of supervisors and special education staff in the room as well, please remember that I am here and that you can email me, fill out my form online, give me a call and we'll set up a time to learn more about those concerns and I'm here to support as I am able so thank you for having me tonight I do have bookmarks and cards in the back of the room just beyond the flyers that are on the table so if you want to grab one of those or two of those

[00:11:47] take them all I will replenish them and hand them out as you see fit thank you next we have Tedra Richardson she is our assistant superintendent of student services she the Department of Student Services provides leadership and coordination for the offices of special education diagnostic and prevention services student services student mental health services procedural support and the related programs that support student performance through special education

[00:12:23] school counseling student registration health social work student attendance Attendance, Homebound, Assessment, Diagnostic, Psychological, and Parent Resource Services. So, Tedra, please. Thank you for that warm welcome.

[00:12:46] It is certainly a pleasure and a privilege to stand here before you. It truly feels like a full circle moment because this time last year, I was standing here kicking off the meeting as your Director of Special Education, and now I have the distinct honor of serving as your assistant superintendent for student services.

[00:13:06] I'm here this evening just to welcome you all. It's so great to see some friendly faces and some new faces. I'm looking forward to moving around the room and meeting and greeting for sure. I wanted to give you an overview of the Department of Student Services, and we have gone through a bit of restructuring this summer.

[00:13:26] So here's a detailed overview. We have separated procedural support from the Office of Special Education. so that that office can now support the four offices. And so now we are a family of five. So the Office of Procedural Support really leads the charge with the implementation and interpretation of special education law and state regulations governing special education, the implementation of Section 504, as well as a review of our division-wide processes for Section 504 and special education.

[00:14:02] And they also take leadership on state and federal complaints.

[00:14:17] The Office of Diagnostic and Prevention Services, of course, serves and houses our educational diagnosticians, our eligibility services for special education, our multi-tiered system of supports for interventions, preschool child find services, section 504 services, and threat assessment services. The Office of Special Education, which most all of the representatives are here this evening, supports specialized instruction, inclusive practices, related services, transition, extended school year services.

[00:14:45] They serve as the liaison to the Special Education Advisory Committee and parent resource services. Student mental health services houses school counseling, school psychological services, school social work services, crisis intervention, unified mental health teams, and student assistant specialist.

[00:15:06] And rounding out our family of five, we have the Office of Student Services with Child Protective Services, Special Permissions, Student Registration Services, Student Health Services, Outreach Services, Homebound Instruction, and McKinney-Vento Services.

[00:15:26] So that gives you a very quick overview of all of the services and supports that we provide. And we take great privilege and honor each and every day to be able to serve the students, families, and schools of Loudoun County. It is without further ado that I get the distinct pleasure now of introducing our new Director of Special Education, Dr. Paige Carter.

[00:15:53] Good evening. I'm very excited to be here tonight. My very first day, November 2nd, as many of my team recalls, was a SEAC meeting. So on day one when I arrived, I got to meet many of you.

[00:16:11] Tonight, I just want to share a little bit of the state of special education. I'll be giving you guys an update every month when we meet. But first, I sort of want to tell you what we're going to be doing as far as my lens during SEAC. We're always going to have a little bit of a connection before content.

[00:16:28] That is something that we do here in Loudoun County, and I know it was to ground the work and define our commonalities between SEAC and the Office of Special Education. We are going to do that in a little exercise in a few minutes, but before, I want to remind us of our common ground that we identified last year, that we share a growth mindset for our students, that we support the whole child, and we want to set up students for success in everything that we do.

[00:16:58] And I'm also going to provide for you current trends and highlights, things that are happening in our office. We're also going to share any new information from VDOE in different ways with SEAC. Also topics of interest that you guys bring to us and would like more information about.

[00:17:16] And also professional development highlights as we go through the year. So before we get started, we're going to do a quick check-in. And I did this with over 1,000 special education teachers recently at Smarts Mill.

[00:17:31] Jesse, I see you there. Thank you. Host with the most right there. For the first time in recent memory, I'm told, if ever, over 1,000, all except a few of our special education teachers and related services personnel, came together.

[00:17:49] And we spent the day on the 17th of August learning together. And part of that day was an opportunity for Tedra and I to share the keynote. We delivered it three times because that's how many times we needed to, to fit in the auditorium.

[00:18:07] It was an incredible experience for us. The feedback has been amazing. But when I heard Dr. Spence talk about the human business that we're in, Tedra and I really wanted to deliver the keynote to let folks know who we are and our why as special educators.

[00:18:24] because that is who we are first. We are educators. We shared about our families. We shared about our dogs. We have a common love for dogs. I have two big ones. She has a little one. We shared our why, which I'm going to share with you really quickly.

[00:18:40] When I was a very young girl, six years old, my babysitter had a daughter who was then an adult, but she had Down syndrome and many other sort of comorbid disabilities. My family tells me that she never spoke a word, though I do have memories of conversing with her.

[00:18:59] So we had some time together. And I remember coming across the street from my school is where they lived. And I came home one day, and I said, is that where Mary Jane went to school? That's where my mom went. That's where I was going. And my Aunt Tilly, who was watching me, she said, Mary Jane didn't go to school.

[00:19:16] And I said, why not? And now this was 1975. And she said, kids like Mary Jane don't really go to school unless they go away. And I knew right then that that wasn't right because school is awesome and everybody needs to go to school.

[00:19:31] Well, I did not know, of course, at six years old, that at the same time, 94-142, which was the precursor to IDEA as we know it, was happening right then. And only a few years' time I started to notice things that changed in school.

[00:19:48] So I think I was a special education major from about six years old, though I can't confirm that. But we shared our why with our teachers. We let them know who we were as people, and the feedback has been tremendous. But that is, I wanted to share that with you tonight just to let you know our mission from our office is to connect with our teachers and our families and our students on a very human level and to build and maintain relationships.

[00:20:18] So with that, we're going to do a check-in, one being the very lowest possible rating and five being the highest. I would like you to raise up, give me five, as the teachers say, raise up your rating for the following things.

[00:20:34] I'm going to do it just like I did it with the teachers. So show me how excited you are that we are all getting up early for school now. One to five. I see some, oh, I see some ones, some more not morning people.

[00:20:50] Okay. All right. Let's try again. Now, how hopeful are we for the amazing things that are going to happen during this school year? And your numbers look like their numbers. I had a thousand people throwing up fives for that question, encouraged me and gave me the juice, as I say, to proceed with the year. But then I asked them one to five, how do you feel about goat videos? And they all laughed. And Tedra was like, goat videos are a thing I didn't even know. So does anybody watch

[00:21:28] goat videos? Just curious. Okay. Yes. See, see their common ground. So what I really want you to do right now in your table groups is not talk about goat videos, but talk about that five you held up for your hope that you have for this year just for a few minutes at your table and connect

[00:21:59] about that hope for this year I'll give you about two minutes to do that okay guys if you could wrap

[00:23:58] up your last conversations at your table it is my pleasure it is my pleasure to introduce to you the leadership team from the office of special education most of them were able to join us tonight, so when I call your name, if you would stand and remain standing until we have introduced everyone. Jenna Arndt from Woodgrove Cluster, and it also supports transition and

[00:24:37] unified sports. Tom Shelgren from the Freedom Cluster is also our ESY guy and Virginia IEP. Margaret Osbury, specialized instruction, specialized instructional facilitators are on her team and you might know Margaret from the reading and literacy subgroup. Lucy Coronasario is here this evening. Awesome, Lucy. Nice to see you. Is queen of the Dominion cluster and also

[00:25:08] supports Robey. Tammy Davis is in charge of all related services. She is a speech therapist at heart. She also supports Medicaid and specialized music instruction. She also has on our team our amazing assistive technology folks. Kristen Everly, Loudoun Valley Cluster. You guys didn't stay standing. Okay, I just realized that. I just realized that. Kristen Everly, Loudoun Valley

[00:25:40] Cluster, and also supports the North Star School. Joy Engstrom supports autism, multiple disabilities, intellectual disabilities, emotional disabilities, all of our specialized programs, and specialized instructional facilitators for programs. Bridget Gorey, Riverside Cluster, she also supports elementary in the Tuscarora Cluster and our supports for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. All right, Jen Hanson, there you are, John Champ Cluster in Stonebridge Cluster, and she is

[00:26:17] busy. Busy, two clusters. Dr. Liz Martinez, Rockridge Cluster, she also supports students with visual impairments and supports orientation and mobility. Kim Jones, strategic planning and operations. She is also very busy. Specialized instructional facilitators. And before I go on to the next one, I didn't mean to make it sound like they aren't all very busy. I am noting who

[00:26:51] has been really busy this week and on my calendar a lot. Christy McKee is heritage cluster and secondary in Tuscarora and also supports our specialized instructional facilitators for behavior. She also supports MTSS and that process. Nakia Purnell, independence cluster plus charter schools, jails, and virtual distance learning. Lori Padgett is early childhood special education and also supports the Parent Resource Services.

[00:27:24] Arlene Vasquez supports Broad Run Cluster, Loudoun County Cluster, Elementary, and Academies of Loudoun. Ashley Spiegel supports the Parkview Cluster and also students who are duly identified.

[00:27:42] Holly Wiley, Briar Woods Cluster, Virginia IEP, and also supports ESY. Crystal Thompson supports the Potomac Falls cluster and our students who are served through the Children's Services Act in private day and residential. And Byron Woodard supports the Light Ridge cluster and also ESY. And that is our team. So I did want to share a little bit of a

[00:28:16] change that is happening within our department. We received some feedback last year that there were a lot of people supporting schools, which is not a problem, but it was a lot of people coming in and out of schools, and we listened to our principals to say, we'd really like to have fewer people in and out so we can get to know them and they can get to know us.

[00:28:37] So we have clustered our support around the cluster supervisors that I just shared with you, and they are the ones who are going to be communicating with our program supervisors and everyone else to coordinate folks who are coming in and out of schools to support.

[00:28:53] Another change is that our specialized instructional facilitators were formerly known for reading and math, and they are spending part of last year and all of this year cross-training so that they can support academics in all settings, and we are super excited about that move in that direction.

[00:29:18] All right, 97.50 is the count of the hour for students with disabilities here in Loudoun, and that number is changing every day as we account for transfers and students who are newly eligible. Serving those students are 1,010 special education teachers and 1,035 teacher assistants.

[00:29:41] We also have folks who are out there. Many of those teachers are brand new to the profession. Many of them need support in a lot of ways, our specialized instructional facilitators from our office are deployed to head out and support reading instruction, math instruction, student behavior, setting up programs, providing and supporting the use of assistive technology, and many, many other things. But that is a count of those folks who head out to the schools. Now, this number is a little higher than last year,

[00:30:16] But currently, we have 78 special education vacancies across the division and 22 vacancies of teacher assistants. It's actually 21 teacher assistant vacancies and one behavior assistant vacancy at this time.

[00:30:32] And I want to assure you that we are doing everything we can to recruit. Many are in the hiring process right now, but this is the number of vacancies that are yet unfilled. We are also supporting the teachers who are presently offering case management for the students across the division that exceed what would typically be their caseload because of vacancies.

[00:30:58] So we are looking at that on the daily with HRTD and keeping up with all of that and coming up with new and creative ways. But talking to colleagues across the region and the state, This number, considering the teacher shortage right now, is very low.

[00:31:16] And something that while it is concerning, I'm very proud of the work that HRTD and the principals have done to secure the teachers that they have. So while that number seems high, I want you to recall the number of positions that we have. So this is actually a really good thing.

[00:31:36] All right, so I just wanted to share with you three personal goals that I have established in my first year as director to really take a hard look at. The first one is, of course, specialized instruction. That is our work. So we will be taking a hard look at what specialized instruction looks like across the division and specifically how we use the impact of each student's disability to define what specialized instruction looks like for them.

[00:32:05] very individualized approach and so we'll be looking at that in a variety of ways and I'll be providing updates I also want to focus on collaboration collaboration across the division across the departments with principals across the schools and of course with SEAC and our community members and stakeholders and we also want to focus on meaningful inclusion and finding out where are the places where things are going really well and how can we replicate that and throughout the division. All right, but most of all, I just want to thank you for being here

[00:32:40] tonight, and we're looking forward to mingling and getting to know each of you as the year goes on. Feel free to reach out to our office if you have any questions or concerns at all. We really are in the business of supporting students in every way we can as one LCPS. Thank you for your time tonight. Thank you so much, Dr. Carter. And now we're going to hear from Parent Resource Services.

[00:33:11] i think we have laurie who's going to fill in tonight good evening typically leanne kidwell is up here and she was previously engaged and couldn't make it so i am here to support her and share the information that she would be providing you will see um on on the screen here is the workshop schedule this is also posted this is the master flyer so it's also posted on the website and there

[00:33:42] are hard copies as well on the back table. The next master flyer is for our mental health and wellness parent series and the list of those workshops for the year and again this is on our website as well as a hard copy if you'd like to take one on the back table. Our preschool child find chat developmental series this year it will be held at the Douglas Center it's the first this will be the first workshop in that new building so they are all very excited and and want you guys

[00:34:21] to attend and spread the word and so they can host in our in our brand new building our turn to talk will be held at Briar woods from 7:00 to 9:00 and that it will be on Thursday September 28th and then what is child find for those new to the process where a student is just recently going through that process of determining whether or not they're eligible for services we have a workshop

[00:34:56] on that and that will be Thursday the 28th from 6:30 to 8:00 and that's here at the admin building and then lastly how to contact parent resource services they are in the new Douglas building so here's the address for that the historic Douglas school and the phone number to get in touch with Leanne directly as well as her email address and then a global website for the LCPS parent resource services. You can like us on Facebook and follow us there, and you can also follow us on

[00:35:36] Twitter. Thank you. And now our next SEAC meeting will be held on October 4th. It's going to be at six o'clock, and the topic is Specialized Reading Instruction Updates in LCPS and Identifying Struggling Readers, and that will be presented by Margaret Osbury and team. So please come and join us for that it will also be CX first business meeting tonight is not a

[00:36:10] business meeting but we will go through our normal public comment and go through policies and and that sort of thing on October 4th so we hope you can join us there you can also participate virtually as well and also October is disability and dyslexia awareness month so thank you everyone for

coming it is so good to see you. I hope we will continue to see you at all of our meetings. There's a schedule of the year's worth of meetings on the back table. Please help yourself to that. And just thank you again

[00:36:48] for coming, and I hope you all have a wonderful school year.



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