



Prince William County Schools  
Special Education Advisory Committee



Report to the Board for the 2023-2024 School Year

## About

The Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) is organized and functions in accordance with state and federal requirements. The activities of the SEAC are governed by the State of Virginia's Special Education Advisory Committee by-laws and the [Prince William County Special Education Advisory Committee by-laws](#).

## Purpose

The SEAC is organized and functions in accordance with state and federal requirements. Subcommittees are established to help conduct the work of the committee. Members are assigned or volunteer to serve on subcommittees. Special Education Department staff members are available at each meeting to provide information and assistance.

The Commonwealth of Virginia has modeled its legal provisions after the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia.

Pursuant to 8 VAC 20-80-90 E.2), SEAC is to:

- Advise the local school division of the needs in the education of children with disabilities.
- Participate in the development of priorities and strategies for meeting the identified needs of children with disabilities;
- Submit periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities to the division superintendent for transmission to the PWC school board;
- Assist the local school division in interpreting plans to the community for meeting the needs of children with disabilities for educational services;
- Review the policies and procedures for the provision of special education and related services prior to submission to the local school board;
- Participate in the review of the local school division's annual plan, and
- Review annually the updated Annual Special Education Plan and Application for Federal Flow-Through Funds thirty calendar days prior to submission by the Superintendent to the School Board.

## Membership

The SEAC is composed of representatives selected by members of the School Board and the Superintendent of Schools. A majority of the members must meet the criteria of having a child eligible to receive special education services through PWCS. Members serve a maximum of four year-long terms, without compensation. Below are the members for the 2023-24 school year:

SEAC Member	Role
<b>Shandel Lohr</b> (resigned effective June 18)	<b>At-Large</b>
<b>Kimberly Stewart</b>	<b>Brentsville District</b>
<b>Jennifer Howarth Mira</b> (resigned effective May 31)	<b>Coles District</b>
<b>Deborah Tekampe</b>	<b>Gainesville District</b>
<b>Shanta Price</b> (resigned effective May 31)	<b>Neabsco District</b>
<b>Angela Lello</b>	<b>Occoquan District</b>
<b>David Miles</b> (resigned effective Mar. 30)	<b>Potomac District</b>
<b>Sallay Banya</b>	<b>Woodbridge District</b>

<b>Michael Spironello</b>	<b>Teacher Representative</b>
<b>Tara Aqdas</b>	<b>Superintendent Representative</b>
<b>Kristie Bowie-Young</b>	<b>Superintendent Representative</b>
<b>Rosemary Scott</b>	<b>Superintendent Representative</b>
<b>Katherine Wears</b>	<b>Superintendent Representative</b>
<b>Eleanor Contreras</b>	<b>PRC Consultant</b>
<b>Christine Waite</b>	<b>Consultant</b>

### **Recommendations to the PWCS School Board**

During the course of the 2023 - 2024 school year, SEAC has received citizens' concerns and discussed issues identified by committee members in their district area. These ongoing conversations, along with presentations from the special education department (SED) resulted in the following recommendations from SEAC to the PWCS School Board for their consideration and support.

1. Increase the number of full-time employee staff for the specific tasks of instructing homebound students during the school year and students receiving Extended School Year services (ESY) during the summer breaks.
  - Currently, homebound instruction and ESY instruction are staffed part-time or as temporary assignments which impacts the amount, duration and scope of the services students are entitled to receive per their IEP, further impacting the need for compensatory services.
  - The addition of these positions would help make services available during the school day and at times most conducive to student learning, which is a concern that has been shared by families.
2. Evaluate the prevalence of and process for transfer requests for students with disabilities outside of the IEP placement process.
  - Currently there are inconsistencies in the application of district transfer policy.
  - A clarifying document is needed for parents on the difference between:
    - ∅ the transfer process that is available to all students, inclusive of those with disabilities, in instances where families are requesting a like-to-like program change; and
    - ∅ an IEP team's placement decision where the services required by the student require attendance outside of the base school.
3. Expand Early Childhood Special Education services to include pursuing more community options.
  - This expansion supports an overarching goal endorsed by SEAC for an increase in inclusive settings.
4. Evaluate the Child Find process and experience for families who are not native English speakers, to drive program improvement.
  - The Committee recommends that SED partner with the Department of Student Opportunity and multilingual Services to make process improvements in this area.
  - Addressing this issue is critical to ensure special education services are delivered equitability across the district.

5. Continue work focused on site-based management, and Standards of Excellence, with the focus on special education.
  - The SEAC has observed and communicated that there are variable experiences that students and families receive with respect to special education services, depending on which school they attend.
  - This is also true for the additional services and supports that create the school environment. This inconsistent experience across schools for services provided results in some campuses having more experience with inclusion and therefore they are more likely to offer it, suggest it, recommend it, identify it whereas other campuses may be less likely to do so.
  - Continue to include SEAC representation on any committee work around this topic.
6. Increase offerings of (and consider designating as required when appropriate), professional learning for staff around supporting student behavior.
  - Consider funding additional Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) and/or Behavior Specialist positions.
  - Additional required, ongoing, paid professional development for all staff is needed on implementing positive behavior supports.
7. Enhance efforts around building staff capacity to serve students with disabilities in PWCS.
  - Additional training and paid professional development are needed on accommodations in testing for special education.
  - Professional development for supporting students with disabilities who are English Language Learners is needed for staff.
  - Additional strategies and resources are needed to allow SED to recognize, support and engage teachers, staff and professionals that support students with disabilities every day, including those that may not be IEP case managers but are providing services on a regular and daily basis (e.g. paraeducators, auxiliary service providers, etc.).
  - Continue recruitment and retention efforts to address the staffing shortage in special education and provide new educators with targeted support.

### **Summary of 2023-2024 Meetings**

The SEAC met seven times during the 2023-2024 school year, on the third Tuesday of each month during September through June, with the exception of November, January, and May. The Annual Report was finalized prior to the June 2024 meeting. SEAC meetings were open to the public and held at the PWC Schools Edward Kelly Leadership Center. During each meeting, the SEAC received updates from the PWCS Special Education Department, heard comments and concerns from PWC citizens and received presentations from special guests on topics of interest as requested by SEAC members on behalf of citizen feedback and inquires.

Over the course of the 2023 - 2024 school year, SEAC meetings have focused on a variety of special education topics.

## September 2023 SEAC Meeting

### Citizens Time:

- Three (3) citizens presented during “Citizens Time” to share comments on the central office review process, the mediation process, equity committee, Special Olympics, caseload numbers for speech-language pathologists, and inclusive practices.

### SED Updates:

- SED provided a presentation on the structure of the department and its services.
- Parent Resource Center (PRC) staff presented on new staff and goals for the school year.

### Old Business:

- Members discussed and reviewed the role of the SEAC.

### New Business:

- New members were introduced, including the teacher representative and new regional representative.
- Sub-committee assignments were made, and duties and responsibilities were reviewed.

### Member Time:

- SEAC members shared information regarding Medicaid, IEP amendments due to Code Orange, virtual accessibility, support for special education teachers and the special education process.

## October 2023 SEAC Meeting

### Citizens Time:

- No citizens provided comments during this meeting.

### SED Updates:

- The Department updated SEAC on professional development for general and special education teachers and the SED presentation to the school board.
- PRC updates were also provided.

### Old Business:

- Code Orange IEP amendments concerns were discussed.

### New Business:

- Supporting special education teachers with growing demands and changes to programs.
- Sub-committees provided updates on activities and work underway.

### Member Time:

- Members reviewed concerns and items of interest happening across the district.

## December 2023 SEAC Meeting

### Citizens Time:

- No citizens provided comments during this meeting.

### SED Updates:

- The PRC provided additional updates on its work and noted the significant progress made in providing resources and education to PWCS parents and community members.
- Discussion occurred between SEAC and SED regarding professional development and methods by which PWCS can recognize and support teachers and professionals serving students with disabilities.

### Old Business:

- No old business was discussed.

### New Business:

- Members discussed strategies to support district special education personnel amidst growing demands and changes to programs.
- Sub-committees provided updates on activities and work underway.

### Member Time:

- Members reviewed concerns and items of interest happening across the district.

## February 2024 SEAC Meeting

### Citizens Time:

- Citizens comments included concerns regarding difficulty navigating the special education system in PWCS and perceived inequity across the district.

### SED Updates:

- PRC continues to grow in the areas of conducting training and distributing resources to families.
- District staff provided a presentation on an example of an inclusive after school program and the Department provided an overview on behavior plan assessments.

### Old Business:

- Members discussed strategies to support district special education personnel amidst growing demands and changes to programs.

### New Business:

- Sub-committees provided updates on activities and work underway.
- Members discussed the District's attendance policy regarding chronic absenteeism and its impact on students who are medically fragile or have medically complex conditions.

Member Time:

- Members reviewed concerns and items of interest happening across the district.

March 2024 SEAC Meeting

Citizens Time:

- Citizens expressed concerns regarding accessibility of SEAC and PWCS public meetings, engagement and administrative activities.

SED Updates:

- PRC presented an update on increased progress with outreach and resources provided to parents.

Old Business:

- Discussions continued related to support for teachers, ensuring equity across PWCS and addressing gaps in services across all special education services provided in the district.

New Business:

- Directly related to citizens' concerns, SEAC agreed to address these concerns directly with SED to ensure accessibility of future SEAC meetings was addressed.
- SED provided SEAC an overview with the IDEA Annual Report and opportunities for the Committee to provide input and comments. An area of interest was the increase in special education enrollment: PWCS has seen about 700 more students or nearly 14% total special education enrollment increase despite relatively stable district-wide enrollment. SED noted that the IDEA grants are used primarily to fund special education personnel, services and technology supports (e.g. alternative communication devices) for students. SEAC agreed with the prioritization and plan for IDEA funds as presented by SED.

Member Time:

- Members reiterated concerns from the community surrounding the need to address equitable access of services for all students and the importance of ensuring qualified, credentialed professionals are overseeing behavior services.

April 2024 SEAC Meeting

Citizens Time:

- Citizens provided comment related to specialized instruction for students with learning disabilities and provided resources to committee members.

SED Updates:

- SED provided updates on departmental activities, announced the appointment of a new SEAC consultant and provided updates on the PRC.
- District staff provided an overview of the team-taught system in place across division schools.

#### Old Business:

- The committee discussed ongoing concerns regarding the implementation of the District attendance policy.

#### New Business:

- The Annual Report sub-committee reviewed draft recommendations with the SEAC who discussed revisions and adopted an initial set of recommendations to the PWCS Board.
- The By-laws sub-committee presented a draft of revisions to the SEAC by-laws and after much discussion members directed the sub-committee to continue to work with SED and members to make updates to the proposed revisions. No changes to the by-laws were adopted or voted upon.
- The Nominations sub-committee presented a proposed slate of nominees for SEAC officers to be voted on at the subsequent meeting of SEAC.

#### Member Time:

- Members reviewed concerns and items of interest happening across the district.

#### **Conclusion**

As PWCS works towards realizing our Core Values of equity and inclusivity, the SEAC has continued to collaborate with SED to identify areas of need in the provision of special education instruction and related services to children with disabilities. It is the SEAC's hope that the PWCS Board considers acting upon its recommendations to continue to improve special education in Prince William County. SEAC looks forward to its ongoing partnership with PWCS, SED and the citizens of Prince William County to improve special education services county-wide.