

Prince George's SECAC meeting 2/26/19

Board members in attendance: W. Troy Sampson, chair; Jonathan White, vice chair; Jamie Anfenson-Comeau, secretary; Ayo Bello, listserv and website manager.

Others in attendance: See attached sign-in sheet

Mr. Sampson opened the meeting at 6:32 p.m. addressing last month's cancellation. Due to building heating issues, the topic for last month, Transitions, was moved to this month. Mr. Sampson said keeping up with transitions is especially important for parents of children in special education.

Trinell Bowman, director of special education, announced that there will be a College and Career Fair for students with IEPs and 504 plans scheduled for 5 to 8 p.m. on March 28 at Largo High School, at 505 Largo Road in Largo.

A survey was also handed out asking attendees what topics in speech therapy they would like to see covered.

In addition, information was also given out about the Family Support Center's upcoming Dad and Male Caregivers Night Out, held from 6 to 7:30 p.m. March 5 and April 22 at the John Carroll Building, at 1400 Nalley Terrace in Landover.

Ms. Bowman also announced that the CEO's proposed 2019-2020 budget had been approved, with an amendment for additional psychological support. The budget includes funding for a new Autism program.

Mr. Sampson said the Arc is putting on a job fair for transitioning youth from 6 to 8 p.m. on March 11.

Diane Bonani, coordinating supervisor for early childhood special education, opened the topic with a discussion of kindergarten transition, noting that this first transition is a big step for everyone; students, parents, siblings and others.

She said that everyone must enroll at their boundary school, even if they have been accepted into a specialized program at another public school. If applying for a transfer to a different school, that must be submitted during the transfer window, which may not correspond with the timing of the annual review.

Ms. Bonani said students are placed in a kindergarten setting that fits with their Least Restrictive Environment, based on their IEP.

Programs may be general education, co-teaching, supported inclusion or intensive.

Students must be 5 years old by September 1 to enroll in kindergarten.

The curriculum is global, and modified based on an individual's needs, as determined by their IEP.

Kindergarten assessments include the Kindergarten Literacy Assessment, Developmental Reading Assessment and Kindergarten Readiness Assessment.

Parents can support the transition by attending Orientation Day, Open House and Back to School Night, requesting an IEP review if needed and meeting the key players on the student's IEP team, including their case manager, the special education chairperson, related service providers and guidance counselor.

Ways to prepare children for their kindergarten transition include finding books about starting school, creating personal picture books, establishing routines, talking about school in a positive way and visiting the school.

Ms. Bonani presented a timeline for the kindergarten transition process.

Tameka Wright, instructional supervisor for elementary special education, spoke about the transition from elementary to middle school.

Ms. Wright said that at this age, students have more responsibilities and more anxieties about the transition process.

The continuum of services at this level includes monitoring/consultative services, supported inclusion, co-taught classes, academic resource, designated special education program services and public separate day schools.

Ms. Wright said the school system is moving away from the self-contained programs towards more inclusive programs with interactions with non-IEP peers.

Ms. Wright said the middle school guidance counselors and special education chairs visit the feeder schools to discuss transitioning students.

Field trips for fifth graders to the middle schools help familiarize them with their new schools.

Supports for parents include Parent Night, Open House, requesting an IEP review if needed, and identifying the key players on the IEP team, including the IEP case manager, the special education chair, the guidance counselor, the school administrator and the special education instructional specialist.

Ms. Wright said that transitioning students' records are sent to the middle schools during the summer; prior to that the school does not have access to their records and the elementary school does not have access once they are transferred.

Toni Brooks, instructional supervisor, secondary special education, spoke about the transition from middle to high school.

Ms. Brooks said that by the age of 14, students should be attending their own IEP meetings; students should understand their disability, their strengths and their weaknesses in order to get them to buy into the process.

Ms. Brooks said students may be enrolled in Academic Resource, which helps teach self advocacy, planning, team working and executive function skills.

She said it is important for parents to meet with their child's guidance counselor.

Oftentimes at the high school level, the case manager will NOT be the student's teacher, and may not have daily interaction with the student. As students will often see as many as 8 to 10 teachers in a year, it is really important for them to organize themselves.

She said it is important to assist students in learning their own best strategies for studying, learning, taking notes, etc., as everyone learns differently. How do they retain information the best? Assist them in developing their own system.

Ms. Brooks said there are autism programs at Largo, Parkdale and Springdale high schools.

Starting in March or April, the middle school special education chairs will visit with the high school chairs to discuss individual needs in preparation for transition.

There are a number of specialty programs at the high schools, both two-year and four-year programs.

Naviance is a platform students have access to which allows them to research different careers and job paths. They can post their transcripts and follow academic paths to careers.

Graduation requires earning 21 credits, including four years of English, four years of math, three years of science and three years of social studies.

PARCC assessments are a requirement of graduation.

Beginning in 11th grade, students with sufficient GPAs may enroll at Prince George's Community College for free while completing their high school requirements.

Liz Burley, a consultant for the school system, discussed secondary transition, that is, the transition from high school to post secondary paths.

Beginning at age 14 in Maryland, the IEP must include a transition plan. Federal law states age 16 but is superseded here by state law, Ms. Burley said.

The transition may include postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or community participation.

Ask questions about what they want to do in life, taking into account a student's strengths, preferences and interests. Include their instructional related services, community experiences and development of employment, Ms. Burley said. It's about knowing the realities of how they're going to get to the next level.

Ms. Burley discussed the difference between entitlement and eligibility: Students are entitled to a free and appropriate public education until they earn a diploma or reach 21 years old. But as an adult, they must meet eligibility requirements and funding availability from an adult service provider to receive services, including postsecondary education.

Ms. Burley said that if you know your student is struggling, plan early; for instance, start planning if they need a five-year or six-year graduation plan.

Certificate programs continue until the student turns 21, but parents can withdraw their children sooner. However, once withdrawn, they cannot re-enroll.

The IEP does not follow the student into postsecondary education; they must meet the college and program requirements.

Sheppard and Towson both have programs for students with autism.

In order to graduate high school, students must have document 24 volunteer service hours from an approved organization. Students can start earning volunteer service hours as early as seventh grade.

Ms. Burley said there are technical academies, formerly vocational tech programs, at Laurel, Bladensburg, Suitland, Crossland and Gwynn Park high schools.

Ms. Burley said to talk to your children all the time about what they want to do and what their goals are. She said she tells students it's important to love what you're doing, because otherwise they're not going to want to get up in the morning and go to work.

Know what you want to do and make a career out of it, not a job.

Ms. Burley said they can test the waters by trying out different jobs in the community.

Ms. Burley said every college and university has a disability support office. In order to receive accommodations, you must go to them, you must provide proof of disability and you must state what supports you need.

She noted that they're not going to modify the curriculum in college, they're not going to change the assignments. You have to do the work to get the college degree. Know what college options are available.

She said it is important to talk to your child about their disability; they already know they have it, but they need to understand how they learn, and how their method of learning is different from other students.

Ms. Burley said they should ask themselves, "What do I want to study? What are my career goals and how do I get there? Am I willing to disclose my disability?"

Ms Burley said the goal of the Division of Rehabilitative Services is employment. Once you've been employed for 90 days, they close your account. The optimal outcome is competitive employment. Everyone is time stamped by the date their materials are received.

Mail will come in the young adult's name, from the Maryland Department of Education. Parents cannot go with them on interviews.

Registration for DORS can begin at 14. They have a Summer Youth Employment Program for students with disabilities.

Ms. Burley said the employment rate for people with disabilities is very low, so more work needs to be done to improve it.

The Developmental Disabilities Administration is for people with long-term disabilities. The focus is on employment first. DDA provides supported employment.

Ms. Burley said there will be a Transitional Youth Services event April 30 at Largo High School.

She said youth can apply for DDA services at 14, but that it is critical to do so by age 18. At 18, adults with disabilities become a family of 1 for SSI purposes if they are significantly disabled. They can apply for Medicaid at age 18, and Medicaid will pay for DDA services.

There are Transitional Youth Fairs twice a year.

Ms. Burley said it is very important to promote independent living skills, as much as they can, from the time they begin school.

Also, teach safety issues. Who can they open the door to? What kind of information can they give out?

Teach age appropriate behaviors.

Ms. Burley said to promote independence, and do not become "helicopter parents" – so that they can be independent at college and make the correct decisions.

Mr. Sampson closed the meeting at 8 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 26 and will be on the topic of Disproportionality and Equity.