

DATE: March 31, 2009
TO: Kevin Kirst, Director of Special Education, Albemarle County Schools
RE: SEAC response to the Albemarle County Schools Special Education Division Annual Plan for 2009-2010

Kevin,

The SEAC would like to express its sincere appreciation to the Albemarle County Schools Special Education Division for a thoughtful plan to address the needs of students receiving special education for the 2009-2010 school year. This school year provided unusual challenges to the Division in the form of:

- a reduced overall budget as a result of the current economic climate
- a significant finding resulting from a State audit. As you indicated to the Committee, the State found disproportionate representation of minorities in Albemarle County School receiving Special Education services for specific special education classifications. Based on your explanation, it is our understanding that Albemarle County Schools is required by the State of Virginia to spend 15% of IDEA Federal funds on early intervention services.

The Committee has engaged in discussions of the Annual Plan at your presentation at the recent SEAC meeting and in follow-up discussions, and a summary of our concerns is presented below.

1. The SEAC's primary concern, as expressed during its meeting, is the allocation of Special Education budgeted money towards a Regular Education program, namely early intervention services provided as a part of Response-to-Intervention (RTI). We understand both the necessity of this, given the mandatory 15% allocation, and the long-term benefits of enhancing early intervention services. However, during the prolonged discussions surrounding implementation of RTI last year, the Committee expressed its concern over the use of Special Education resources to support the Regular Education program. We were repeatedly assured that this would not happen and yet the opposite appears to be the occurring. The SEAC believes that Regular Education should be responsible—in part if not in whole—for the penalty that has been assessed solely to the Special Education Division. To speak plainly, the allocation for early intervening services is a result of too many students being supported by the Special Education Division and to fine the Division for their support of these children is illogical. Therefore, we request that the School Board ensure that this money be supplemented to the Special Education Division from other resources.
2. The Committee has also expressed concern for allocation of the 15% of IDEA funds for 5.5 Tier 2/3 Interventionists. In particular, we are concerned by the use of Special Education resources for the support of specialists in specific educational areas (literacy) at a time when the School system is currently reducing the number of specialists in that area. While we do support the use of these Interventionists to support students with literacy needs, we also acknowledge the need for supports in other areas such as math. We recall a review of the previous year SOL results suggesting that students receiving special education services performed poorly in math at certain elementary schools, and

therefore we would encourage the use of these Interventionists for support of math and additional educational areas. Furthermore, we caution the Schools not to use Interventionists, which are under the umbrella of the Special Education Division, to supplement a perceived gap in services as a result of the reorganization of literacy support services initiated by the School Division for the coming year.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns with you at your earliest convenience. I also offer that I will be happy to be in attendance when you present the Plan to the School Board on April 2 to offer my support and input. Again, thank you very much for your continued efforts in support of all children receiving special education service in Albemarle County.

Sincerely,

Amy Lankford
Chair, Albemarle County Special Education Advisory Committee