Fairfax County PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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Advisory Committee
for
Students with Disabilities
ANNUAL REPORT
2025-2026

Presentation to FCPS School Board
May 30, 2026

Table of Contents

Introduction **2**
Annual Charge 2
Alignment with 2023-30 Strategic Plan 2
Summary of 2025-2026 ACSD Recommendations **3**
Approval of Report **6**
Background Information **6**
Recommendations **7**
Accountability and Systems Improvement 7
Data and Measurements 12
Family and Student Empowerment 16
Follow-Up From 2024-2025 Report **17**
Future Annual Charge **25**
Appendices **26**
A. Membership Roster 26
B. Attendance Record 28
C. Summary of Public Comments 30
E. Interim Recommendations 34

Introduction

The Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities (ACSD) is pleased to present you with this annual report for 2025-2026 as required by Virginia regulation 8 VAC 20-81-230D(2) governing Special Education Advisory Committees (SEACs):

> The functions of the local advisory committee shall be as follows:
>
> A. Advise the local school division of needs in the education of children with disabilities;
> B. Participate in the development of priorities and strategies for meeting the identified needs of children with disabilities;
> C. Submit periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities to the division superintendent for transmission to the local school board;
> D. Assist the local school division in interpreting plans to the community for meeting the special needs of children with disabilities for educational services;
> E. Review the policies and procedures for the provision of special education and related services prior to submission to the local school board; and
> F. Participate in the review of the local school division's annual plan, as outlined in subdivision B 2 of this section. [§ 22.1-215 of the Code of Virginia; 34 CFR 300.200 and 34 CFR 300.212]

Annual Charge

The Fairfax County School Board's Community Advisory Committee Operating Manual (6/24) Section III.B. states that each year, the School Board shall approve clear charges for the issues or outcomes expected for Committees to pursue. For 2025-2026, the ACSD's charge is:

> The ACSD will examine current practices within FCPS regarding data collection and progress monitoring for students with disabilities and learning differences in the division. Using evidence-based and research-based models, the ACSD will make recommendations for:
>
> - Improving measurable outcomes for students by understanding the source data collected and used by staff to recommend programs and services;
> - Monitoring progress on multi-year special education improvement projects; and,
> - Empowering families and students to engage more effectively in educational planning using data transparency and interpretation.

Alignment with 2023-30 Strategic Plan

Alignment of this committee's recommendations with the 2023-2030 Strategic Plan is included on the chart of recommendations immediately following the Executive Summary (refer to page 4 of this report).

Executive Summary

The Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities (ACSD) respectfully submits its 2025–2026 Annual Report in fulfillment of its regulatory responsibility to advise the School Board on the needs of students with disabilities, and to recommend strategies that support improved student outcomes.

This report reflects the work of many dedicated volunteer members, including three students, who contributed their time, expertise, and community perspectives throughout the year. Our recommendations were guided by the School Board-approved annual charge to examine FCPS practices related to data collection and progress monitoring. Consistent with the FCPS 2023-2030 Strategic Plan, the ACSD focused on how data is used to inform decision-making, strengthen systems, and support student success.

Recommendations are organized into three areas:

1. Accountability and Systems Improvement: These recommendations are intended to strengthen structures that promote transparency, shared responsibility, and continuous improvement. Consistent with the Strategic Plan's emphasis on intentional partnerships and data-driven continuous improvement, the ACSD recommends clearer tracking of implementation, improved public access to information, and greater alignment between internal practices and public-facing resources.

2. Data and Measurements: These recommendations focus on ensuring data can meaningfully inform program decisions, highlight patterns affecting students with disabilities, and support families in understanding their rights and options. This aligns with FCPS's commitment to using evidence to expand access to high-quality academic programming and necessary support for every student.

3. Family and Student Empowerment: In alignment with the Strategic Plan goal of fostering a safe, supported, included, and empowered school community, the committee recommends consistent data collection on how families access information and participate in key educational decisions. These efforts are intended to strengthen engagement, reduce barriers, and ensure that all families can participate as informed partners.

Collectively, these recommendations support FCPS's Strategic Plan by reinforcing systems that are transparent, aligned, and responsive to the needs of each and every learner. The ACSD looks forward to continued collaboration with the School Board and FCPS staff to advance work that promotes equitable access, meaningful inclusion, and improved outcomes for students with disabilities.

Respectfully submitted,

2025-2026 Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities

Elizabeth Zielinski, Chair
Jay Berkenbilt, Vice Chair

Summary of 2025-2026 ACSD Recommendations

Accountability and Systems Improvement Subcommittee		Alignment
1.1	Present two town halls/forums during the 2026-2027 school year, one each for the general public and for special education and administrative school staff, dedicated to discussing and answering questions about the Special Education Enhancement Plan Close-Out report.	Pillar B[1] Goal 4[2]
1.2	Commission an independent third-party audit of ACSD Annual Reports to evaluate the implementation of recommendations over the last 5 years.	Pillar D[3]
1.3	Update the Community Advisory Committee Manual (CACM) to require that staff responses include names and contact information of responsible staff liaison(s).	Pillars B, D
1.4	Beginning with SY 2026-2027, implement the CACM's requirements for responding to Annual Reports, including: (1) a written response and plan of action to committees and the School Board; (2) presenting an update to committees at their December or January meeting; and (3) maintaining a record of actions taken.	Pillars B, D
1.5	Revise and expand FCPS' public-facing Special Education Program Descriptions to fully align with the scope, specificity, and methodologies described in the internal program guidance document of the same name.	Pillars B, D
1.6	Ensure that when special education reports are provided to the ACSD, linked documents within the reports are also available to the committee.	Pillars B, D

Data and Measurements Subcommittee		Alignment
2.1	Ensure that languages supported by official document translation are available and qualified staff can effectively communicate with the student(s) being evaluated.	Pillar A[4] Goal 1[5]

[1] **Pillar B, Vibrant Home, School, & Community Partnerships**: "We share responsibility to build trusting partnerships that sustain a safe, inclusive culture for learning and work, and we collaborate proactively with respect, honesty, and transparency."

[2] **Goal 4, Equitable Access and Opportunity**: "Every student will have access to high-quality academic programming and resources to support their success."

[3] **Pillar D, Culture of Equity, Excellence, & Accountability:** "We nurture processes and structures that are grounded in intentional partnerships, shared responsibility for equitable resource allocation, and data-driven continuous improvement and innovation."

[4] **Pillar A, Differentiated and Culturally Responsive Learning Environments:** "We design innovative learning experiences that meet the needs of each and every learner, and implement professional practices that engage, empower, include, and challenge the whole learner through varied opportunities."

[5] **Goal 1, Strong Start: Pre-K - 12:** "Every student will develop foundational academic skills, curiosity, and a joy for learning necessary for success in pre-K through 12th grade."

Data and Measurements Subcommittee		Alignment
2.2	Clarify data collected and produced by FCPS related to student suspensions to determine the statistical significance of suspensions for students with disabilities.	Pillar A Goal 2[6]
2.3	Identify correlations between students who do not pass SOLs with students who have IEPs or 504 Plans, are multilingual learners, receive Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) services, and/or are referred for special education eligibility to determine potential patterns of impact between these categories and SOL scores.	Pillar A Goal 1
2.4	Amend score reports for division standardized assessments to clarify that parents have the right to request an evaluation to determine their student's eligibility for special education services.	Pillar B Goal 3[7]
2.5	Create documentation that ensures IEP teams are considering Assistive Technology (AT) and/or Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices and services each time an IEP team develops, reviews, or revises a student's IEP or 504 Accommodation Plan, and that parents/guardians have been informed of their right to these devices or services at no cost.	Pillar B Goal 3
2.6	Develop a division-wide method to track the status of requests for AAC devices and services for students with disabilities to include the number of requests received, granted, rejected, or waitlisted by FCPS and the justification for each decision.	Pillar B Goal 3

Family and Student Empowerment Subcommittee		Alignment
3.1	Develop and implement a systematic process to collect and analyze data on how transition-related information is shared with families of students with disabilities.	Pillar D Goal 5[8]
3.2	Collect and report data on family participation in transition-related meetings; including attendance rates, barriers to participation, and availability of interpretation and translation services.	Pillar B Goal 5

[6] **Goal 2, Safe, Supported, Included, and Empowered**: "Every student will experience an equitable school community where student health and well-being are prioritized, and student voice is centered."
[7] **Goal 3, Academic Growth and Excellence**: "Every student will acquire critical and creative thinking skills, meet/exceed high academic standards, and achieve their highest academic potential."
[8] **Goal 5, Leading for Tomorrow's Innovation**: "Every student will graduate ready to thrive in life after high school and with the skills to navigate, adapt, and innovate for a sustainable future."

Approval of Report

A vote to approve this report was conducted at a committee meeting held on May 13, 2026, and passed with a unanimous vote of the 20 committee members present. The motion to approve the report received the following votes:

Support	Oppose	Abstain	Absent/Did Not Vote
Sonica Babu David Bean Jay Berkenbilt Amanda Campbell Brandon Cassady Joy Ramsey Charles Rachel Charlton Mary Kay Ciziunas Daniel Cronnell Carolyn Haydon Harry Henderson Kenneth Johnson Darcy Kim Colleen Paparella Nita Payton Tyler Rickman Stephanie Smith Dena Sonneborn Joanne Walton Elizabeth Zielinski	None	None	Jack Burke Charlotte Frazier-West Sarah Gilbert* Colleen Jones Adam Malik Nora Rodriguez Allyson Talbot Ayush Tripathy Ellen Valentine

* Did not attend more than 50% of the committee meetings they were eligible to attend, and so was not eligible to vote on the conclusions of the annual report. *[Community Advisory Committee Operating Manual, Section VIII C.5]*

Background Information

The research and data supporting this report are embedded within each recommendation through charts or footnotes citing sources, references, and expert input.

Members of the ACSD were permitted to make specific requests for data and documentation from FCPS departments and resources. In cases where a recommendation cites “FCPS reports,” the information was taken from the responses received to those requests.

The committee also incorporates qualitative data gathered from public testimony heard by the committee throughout the year; and each committee member contributes insights drawn from their individual expertise, lived experiences, community engagement, and appointing organizations.

Recommendations

Accountability and Systems Improvement

Primary Authors: Sonica Babu, David Bean, Amanda Campbell, Mary Kay Ciziunas, Daniel Cronnell, Harry Henderson, Colleen Jones, Darcy Kim, and Stephanie Smith

Recommendation 1.1: Present two town halls/forums during the 2026-2027 school year: one for the general public, and one for special education and administrative school staff, both of which are dedicated to discussing and answering questions from the community about the Special Education Enhancement Plan Close-Out report.

This update should clearly specify the policies, procedures, and/or practices being implemented to reduce special education teacher workload, as called for in the AIR report, and provide an opportunity for transparent dialogue with the community on the full report. We further recommend that any staff updates be provided virtually, outside classroom education hours, such as during the week before school begins or on a teacher workday when all staff can access the meeting.

Rationale: The Special Education Enhancement Plan Close-Out Report raises several important questions for the subcommittee that require interactive engagement with the FCPS disability community to resolve fully. A public town hall or community forum would provide a critical opportunity to engage directly with FCPS leadership, seek clarification, and ensure a more complete understanding of the division's plans. As the Enhancement Plan is a central component of FCPS's response to the AIR report, public accountability and transparency are essential in communicating FCPS's ongoing plan to improve special education access and outcomes.

In particular, a town hall or community forum would assist in addressing questions related to the consistent theme of special education teacher workload. Teacher workload directly impacts service quality, compliance, and retention; key factors in delivering a free, appropriate public education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Providing a clear, detailed update in a public setting not only promotes transparency but also strengthens oversight by allowing stakeholders to assess progress, identify potential gaps between policy and practice, and ask informed questions in real time. This engagement would reinforce FCPS's commitment to accountability, sustainable staffing, and improved outcomes for students with disabilities.

Recommendation 1.2: Commission an independent third-party audit of ACSD Annual Reports to evaluate the implementation of committee recommendations over the last 5 years. This audit should identify: (1) the number and percentage of recommendations that are fully or partially implemented; (2) the extent to which recommendations require multiple years before action is taken; and (3) the number of recommendations that receive no response or are never implemented. Findings should be publicly reported to strengthen transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in the advisory process. This may serve as a model for other advisory committees.

Rationale: Our review of staff responses to the ACSD's reports over the past three years indicates a consistent need for greater transparency and accountability in how committee recommendations are interpreted, tracked, and implemented. ACSD members have, over multiple program years, raised

concerns about whether our work is contributing to meaningful system improvements. The main concerns identified from this analysis are:

- Staff responses often do not address the full scope of recommendations, omitting or only partially addressing key elements of the recommendation and its supporting rationale;
- The disparity in implementation analysis between FCPS and this subcommittee demonstrates a lack of consensus on what constitutes implementation, which makes ongoing monitoring and tracking of implementation challenging; and
- Characterizations of ACSD's work by School Board counsel, as described in public testimony, raise questions about whether advisory committee input is consistently treated as meaningful in FCPS's decisionmaking.

Many responses categorized by FCPS as "fully implemented" rely on the assertion that existing practices already address the recommendation. However, when considered in light of the full recommended rationale[9,10,11] provided, these responses often do not substantively address the underlying concerns or intended changes.

The table below compares FCPS's analysis of implementation (as provided in this year's subcommittee data request) with an independent review conducted by subcommittee members, who evaluated staff responses in the full context of each recommendation and its supporting rationale. Across all three years[12,13,14], there is a pronounced disparity between these analyses. FCPS consistently reports a high percentage of recommendations as "fully implemented," while the subcommittee's review found that far fewer recommendations resulted in meaningful or complete implementation.

Table 1: FCPS and ACSD Implementation Comparison (2022–2025)

	FCPS Analysis of 2022-2023 Staff Response	Subcommittee Analysis of 2022-2023 Staff Response	FCPS Analysis of 2023-2024 Staff Response	ACSD Analysis of 2023-2024 Staff Response	FCPS Analysis of 2024-2025 Staff Response	ACSD Analysis of 2024-2025 Staff Response
Fully Implemented	76%	23%	47%	9%	89%	5.5%
Partially Implemented	N/A	55%	20%	22%	N/A	61%
Not Implemented	24%	16%	33%	26%	11%	5.5%
Doesn't Answer	N/A	6%	N/A	43%	N/A	28%

This divergence is particularly evident in the classification of recommendations as "partially implemented" or "not answered." Over multiple years, the subcommittee identified a substantial share of recommendations that were only partially addressed or not addressed at all, categories largely absent or

[9] Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities, Annual Report to the School Board, 2022–2023
[10] Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities, Annual Report to the School Board, 2023–2024
[11] Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities, Annual Report to the School Board, 2024–2025
[12] Staff Response to ACSD Annual Report, 2022–2023
[13] Staff Response to ACSD Annual Report, 2023–2024
[14] Staff Response to ACSD Annual Report, 2024–2025

underreported in FCPS's analysis. In 2023–2024, for example, 43% of recommendations were identified as not answered, and responses to one section of recommendations were omitted entirely. These discrepancies demonstrate the need for clear, consistent criteria for classifying the implementation of recommendations, particularly distinguishing between the division maintaining existing practices and taking new or expanded action based on recommendations. Without this differentiation, it is difficult to assess progress, ensure accountability, or measure the impact of advisory committee work over time.

Additional context reinforcing these concerns was provided through public comment following a recent due process hearing. A member of the public who attended the hearing later shared quotes made by School Board counsel Mr. John Cafferky, who, in the course of successfully arguing to disqualify a witness as an expert, referred to her work on ACSD in the following ways:

> *"She doesn't actually advise the school board on anything substantial."*
> *"...and cannot point to any ACSD recommendations that have been implemented."*[15]

Hearing Officer Polly Chong, Esq. summarized Mr. Cafferky's comments when she stated:

> *"She says she has drafted content, but it's not -- none of this content has ever been adopted by FCPS… Well, I mean, we don't have any evidence before us that it has been."*[16]

According to this testimony, ACSD was also described as "general and advisory, not including board or staff members." ACSD does, in fact, include a School Board member liaison, and non-voting staff members participate in meetings to provide updates. There are also representatives on the committee who are parents of children with disabilities but happen to also be employed by FCPS. While this account reflects one instance, it reinforces our concerns about how advisory committee input is understood and valued within the division's decisionmaking processes.

Taken together, these patterns indicate the absence of a shared, objective framework for determining implementation status and suggest that internal assessments alone may not provide a reliable or consistent measure of progress. They also underscore the need for a more systematic evaluation of how community advisory committee input is incorporated into FCPS decisionmaking.

It is not our expectation that all advisory committee recommendations are incorporated without exception or alteration. It is our hope that the volunteer time and effort made by participants on community advisory committees is sufficiently valued to warrant a thorough and accurate response from the division.

An independent third-party audit would provide an objective, longitudinal assessment of how recommendations are addressed. By tracking implementation rates, timelines, and the frequency of unaddressed recommendations, FCPS can identify gaps between advisory input and actual policy or practice, as well as systemic barriers to implementation. This analysis would establish a clear baseline for accountability, inform prioritization of future actions, and strengthen the efficacy of the community advisory process. Public reporting of these findings would further enhance transparency and support

[15] Quoted from public comment submitted by Ms. Callie Oettinger to the ACSD on, April 8, 2025, describing observations from an administrative due process hearing session on March 23rd, 2026. The statement is corroborated by multiple other observers.
[16] Transcript of administrative due process hearing, case number 26-016, March 23rd, 2026, p. 375, lines 20-22, and p. 376, lines 3-4.

continuous improvement consistent with oversight expectations under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Recommendation 1.3: Update the Community Advisory Committee Manual (CACM) to require that staff responses include names and contact information of responsible staff liaison(s) who can speak with the public about the response.

Rationale: Updating the CACM to require staff liaison contact information on responses strengthens transparency, accountability, and trust. A named point of contact in the response establishes clear ownership and promotes accuracy. It also provides families and stakeholders with a clear point of contact for follow-up questions, supporting more effective communication. This update reinforces FCPS's commitment to open communication, accountability, responsible decision-making, and meaningful engagement with the community, as stated in the FCPS 2023-2030 Strategic Plan and the Equity Policy & Strategic Initiatives.

While there is no separate legal requirement known to the ACSD that names and contact information are included on a formal response to the committee's report, we recommend that FCPS adhere to standards of institutional public accountability and adequate documentation within IDEA and the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (VFOIA) and have FCPS take ownership of implementing recommendations as appropriate. IDEA and VFOIA authorities require that decisions and actions be documented, accessible, and attributable to the public to ensure accountability. The formal response to reports should be sufficiently documented to permit public review, accountability, and inquiry.

Recommendation 1.4: Beginning with the 2026-2027 school year, the Department of Special Services (DSS) should implement the Community Advisory Committee Manual's[17] (CACM) requirements for responding to the ACSD annual report, including: (1) submitting a written response and plan of action to both the Committee and School Board by the end of the first quarter of the following school year; (2) presenting a timely update to the Committee at its December or January meeting; (3) maintaining and reviewing an ongoing record of actions taken in response to recommendations.

Rationale: The CACM establishes clear expectations for a written response and plan of action by the end of the first quarter of the following school year, along with a mid-year update and ongoing implementation tracking. In practice, the timing of written staff responses to ACSD recommendations has not consistently aligned with these expectations, with publication dates ranging from Q1 through Q3 in recent years. This inconsistency has limited the Committee's ability to incorporate staff responses into its annual planning cycle and ongoing committee work.

The formal response was not presented at an ACSD meeting. The expectations were established in June 2024 with the Board's approval of the CACM, but they have not been implemented as of yet.

Consistent adherence to the CACM guidelines would improve transparency, ensure the timely incorporation of staff feedback into committee work, and support a clear and publicly accessible accountability process for implementation or dismissal of recommendations.

[17] Fairfax County School Board, *Community Advisory Committee Operating Manual* (June 2024), Sect. F

Recommendation 1.5: FCPS should revise and expand its public-facing Special Education Program Descriptions[18] to fully align with the scope, specificity, and methodologies described in the internal program guidance document of the same name.

This should include creating dedicated, program-specific webpages for each major special education program labeled as described on the Special Education Program Sites page[19] (e.g., Enhanced Autism, Intellectual Disabilities, Comprehensive Services Sites, Public Day Schools, etc). Each page should present comprehensive, accurate, and accessible information for families, including the key defining characteristics that distinguish each program from others, with appropriate context and plain-language explanations.

Rationale: Providing families with clear, complete, and consistently structured information about special education programs is essential to equitable access and meaningful participation in educational decision-making. Currently, the public-facing materials provided by Fairfax County Public Schools are not consistently aligned across webpages and are significantly less specific than internal program guidance.

The internal Special Education Program Guidance document organizes and describes programs using clearly defined categories such as Enhanced Autism and Intellectual Disabilities, including detailed descriptions of instructional approaches, supports, and methodologies. In contrast, public-facing materials do not consistently provide these differentiating features, meaning families often do not have access to robust program-defining details. Additionally, the public-facing Program Descriptions page organizes information using broader or differently framed categories (e.g., "Adapted Curriculum," "Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Program"), while the Special Education Program Sites[2] page lists program names consistent with the internal document (e.g., Intellectual Disabilities, Enhanced Autism, Comprehensive Services Sites). These differing organizational structures across public-facing materials contribute to confusion in how programs are labeled and understood.

This lack of alignment increases the burden on families to independently research and understand not only what services exist, but how programs differ in purpose and design. As a result, families may not have equitable access to the foundational distinctions between programs prior to referral or placement decisions. The Special Education Program Sites page is frequently used by families, particularly those relocating to the division, to understand available program options and inform housing decisions; therefore inconsistencies between that page and other public descriptions make it more difficult to accurately understand these offerings.

Additionally, internal descriptions include key methodological details, such as the use of Applied Behavior Analysis across multiple programs, that are not consistently reflected in public-facing materials. Given the complexity of these approaches, clear program-level disclosure with appropriate context supports informed understanding of services offered. In turn, it may also shorten the length and number of IEP meetings required to reach team consensus, since all participants will arrive better informed to meaningfully participate in programming and placement decisions.

Establishing dedicated, program-specific webpages more completely aligned with internal guidance would:

[18]Fairfax County Public Schools, *Program Descriptions*, Department of Instructional Services and Department of Special Services

[19] Fairfax County Public Schools, *"Special Education Program Sites"*

- Provide a consistent and transparent structure for understanding program offerings;
- Clearly communicate the defining features that distinguish one program from another;
- Align naming conventions across public-facing materials and reduce conflicting terminology;
- Reduce reliance on school-by-school interpretation or informal sources of information; and
- Support more informed participation in IEP processes under the IDEA.

Importantly, this recommendation does not suggest publishing internal documents in their entirety. Rather, it calls for a curated, family-facing structure that reflects the internal organization of programs while ensuring accessibility and clarity. This includes:

- One dedicated page per program or service model;
- Plain-language descriptions of instructional approaches and supports;
- Clear articulation of how programs differ from one another in purpose and design;
- Clear identification of where programs are implemented and how they are accessed; and
- Consistent use of program names across all public-facing materials.

By aligning public-facing materials into a coherent, program-based structure, FCPS can improve transparency, reduce confusion, and better support families as informed partners in the educational planning process.

Recommendation 1.6: FCPS should ensure that when special education reports are provided to the ACSD, all linked documents within the reports are available to the committee, whether electronically or as a hard copy. Otherwise, official documents from FCPS should be shared as electronic attachments to ensure that information is accessible to committee members.

Rationale: An example of this issue is the *Enhancement Plan for Students with Disabilities: Close Out Report*. This was distributed to subcommittee members of the ACSD for review both electronically and in hard copy. When subcommittee members went to review the document, the links were restricted to access for those with FCPS accounts only. We cannot provide a full and accurate analysis without access to all relevant materials. This is a repeated issue across multiple program years of the ACSD's work.

Data and Measurements

Primary Authors: Jack Burke, Rachel G. Charlton, Charlotte Frazier-West, Sarah M. Gilbert, Kenneth D. Johnson, and Dena Sonneborn

Recommendation 2.1: Ensure that languages supported by official document translation are available and qualified staff can effectively communicate with students being evaluated, either directly or through interpreters.

Rationale: FCPS makes forms related to special education procedures available online, translated into Amharic, Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Farsi, French, Korean, Pashto, Russian, Spanish, Turkish, Urdu, and Vietnamese. Data provided to the ACSD committee by FCPS indicates that there are only qualified bilingual special education evaluators available in American Sign Language (ASL), Dari, Farsi, Greek, Italian, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish, and Vietnamese. Per FCPS, if a parent requests translation services for IEP and other school meetings, FCPS will initiate the formal request through Language Services for interpreters. For less common languages, Language Services has contracts with several outside vendors, including a telephone interpretation line, that are available to each school.

The ACSD's primary concern is the availability of these interpreters for students who may require dual language assessments to determine the appropriate language needed to effectively evaluate students for special education services. According to division staff, FCPS is phasing in translated documents used within the special education student records system, SEA-STARS. Currently, Meeting Notice letters and Prior Written Notices (PWNs) are available to be translated. FCPS is also planning to launch translation of IEPs and 504 functionality, including qualification, Plans, and PWNs in summer 2026. The division's efforts on expanding translated written communication is admirable; however, it is essential to ensure that the procedures for evaluating students who may require special education services receive the same attention to accessibility in written and verbal communication[20].

Recommendation 2.2: Clarify data collected and produced by FCPS related to student suspensions to determine the statistical significance of suspensions for students with disabilities.

Rationale: Data provided by FCPS for the 2024-2025 school year indicates 36% of In School Suspensions (ISS) occurred with students who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 Accommodation Plan (504), while 64% of instances of ISS were with students who do not have an IEP or 504. FCPS reported that in SY2024-2025, 45% of students who received short term suspension have IEPs or 504s while 55% of students who received short term suspensions do not receive any form of specialized instruction. Lastly, SY2024-2025 FCPS reports that 27% of students who received long-term suspensions receive specialized instruction via IEP or 504, while 73% of long-term suspensions were obtained by students without special education services. Upon initial review of data related to school suspensions, it could be inferred that interventions provided by FCPS' Department of Special Services, via IEPs, 504s, Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs), etc., are adequately assisting to reduce suspensions for students with disabilities. However, without knowledge of the percentage of suspensions compared to the individual population of students with IEPs or 504s vs those without, ACSD is unable to determine if suspension percentages provided by FPCS are statistically significant.

Recommendation 2.3: Identify correlations between students who do not pass Virginia Standards of Learning (VA SOL) testing with students who have IEPs or 504 Plans, are multilingual learners, receive Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) services, and/or are students referred for special education eligibility to determine potential patterns of impact of disability, potential disability, MTSS services, and/or multilingual learner status and VA SOL scores.

Rationale: When there are insufficient resources, some students with disabilities may be left with their legally entitled needs unmet. The ACSD requested data from FCPS to better understand if students who are not passing Virginia Reading SOLs are mostly multilingual learners, already receive specialized instruction or not, and if, as a result of not passing the SOLs, are referred for determination of special education eligibility. The Committee is unable to make a recommendation beyond improved data collection as we have not located post-test data on the number of students at Title I schools who failed the third grade reading SOL and were referred for services, pursuant to IDEA, Section 504, multilingual learner programs and/or MTSS. We were able to obtain some data on Title I schools, which we present as a proxy.

FCPS reported that in SY2024-2025, 15% of all 3rd Grade students did not pass the 3rd Grade Reading SOL. It was reported that 6% of students in Title I schools who did not pass the 3rd Grade Reading SOL

[20] See Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1701(f). See also Settlement Agreement Between United States v. Arlington Public Schools (June 3, 2019).

were referred for special education eligibility compared with 9% of students in non-Title I schools. The committee was unable to determine whether referral for eligibility was directly related to SOL performance due to lack of available data. FCPS also provided data that indicated that 76% of 3rd Grade students in Title I schools who did not pass the Reading SOL were multilingual learners, while 46% of students in non-Title I schools who did not pass Reading SOLs were multilingual learners. Again, the committee was unable to correlate multilingual learning with SOL performance. Based on community discussions, we believe that a student with a disability who is, for example, a sixth grader reading at a third-grade level may be denied services because of how limited resources are allocated in areas of greatest need. For instance, a sixth grader who is reading at a kindergarten level may receive services regardless of disability status. If FCPS correlates SOL performance with multilingual learner status, MTSS services, and with referral for disability eligibility, it will become possible to better analyze whether access to services is being applied equitably and whether SOL performance is available as a trigger for evaluating eligibility for disability services.

Recommendation 2.4: Amend the Family Score Report letters, Family Growth Reports letters, and similar documents resulting from division standardized assessments to clarify that parents have a right to request an evaluation to determine their student's eligibility for special education services.

Rationale: School divisions have a responsibility to identify and evaluate those students who are believed to qualify for accommodations, modifications, and/or services, pursuant to Section 504 and the IDEA.

For Title I schools during the 2024-2025 academic year, FCPS reported that there were 13,378 third graders enrolled. According to the report, 2,016 third graders or 15.10% of the total did not pass the Reading Standards of Learning test (SOL). Of the 2,016 third graders who did not pass the Reading SOL, 119 or 5.90% have been evaluated for eligibility for special education services.

Although failure to pass the Reading SOL test is only one factor to consider in determining eligibility for special education services, it is concerning that only 5.90% of the third graders who did not pass the Reading SOL have been evaluated. To address this issue, we recommend that when parents of students receive Family Score Reports, Family Growth Reports, or similar documents, that FCPS inform the parents of their right to request that their students be evaluated to determine eligibility for special education services. This approach places the Section 504/IDEA notice provisions in context and facilitates parental decision making where the test score results may be indicative of additional learning needs. This approach also respects parental rights, grants parents an active role in their student's educational planning, and provides parents an informed opportunity to partner with their student's principal, assistant principals, counselors, and teachers to best address their student's learning needs.

Recommendation 2.5: Create documentation that ensures IEP teams are considering Assistive Technology (AT) and/or Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices and services each time an IEP team develops, reviews, or revises a student's IEP or 504 Plan. If the team determines that devices and/or services are necessary for the student but are being provided by the family, teams must document that the parent or guardian has been informed of their right to these devices or services at no cost.

Rationale: During the 2025-2026 academic year, ACSD has received public comments from several parents of students using augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). These parents explained

that: (1) students using AAC need more services, including immersion in AAC where a teacher models communication using visual representations on a user's AAC device; (2) students using AAC average three hours a month in speech services, as compared to students in dual language immersion programs who receive 15 hours a week or 60 hours a month in language immersion; (3) it was difficult for parents of a preschool-aged student to obtain FCPS evaluations and speech services for their student and the parents attributed their students' progress in both speech production as well as the use of his AAC device to his privately-hired speech-language pathologist; and (4) teachers who support students using AAC devices need additional training, so that they can provide consistent instruction to their students on effective use of AAC devices.

FCPS Assistive Technology Services has reported that it does not specifically count the number of teachers or speech-language pathologists employed by FCPS who are trained in AAC use. FCPS Assistive Technology coaches, however, reported that for the 2024-2025 academic year, there were 1200 incidents of staff training.

IEP teams are obligated to evaluate whether a student requires an AAC device and services during the development, review, and revision of the student's IEP. If the IEP Team determines that AAC devices or services are required to enable the student to receive FAPE, the school division is responsible for providing and maintaining the AAC device and providing any necessary AAC services. If IEP Team members lack sufficient expertise regarding AAC options to support the student's needs, it is imperative that they consult with individuals who possess specialized knowledge about AAC in order to make informed decisions[21].

In 2025, the Code of Virginia was amended[22] to better define AAC and build on the requirements for IEP documentation and staff training for students who need or use AAC. Virginia special education regulations already required IEP teams to document needed devices, services, and supports for school personnel and students, and the amended Code re-emphasizes these expectations and adds an explicit timeline for when individualized training must be provided.

Recommendation 2.6: Develop a division-wide method to track requests for AAC devices and services for students with disabilities, as requested by parents or guardians, speech-language pathologists, principals, assistant principals, special education teachers, general education teachers, and/or other staff members, documenting the number of requests received, granted, rejected, or waitlisted by FCPS and the justification for each decision.

Rationale: While some families can purchase AAC devices and services through private health insurance, many can't because they are not covered by private health insurance or are covered by plans that deny coverage, considering speech therapy to be an educational expense, and not medically necessary. By not tracking requests for AAC devices, whether the student ultimately gets one through other means or not, we lose the ability to know when the school division fails to meet its responsibility to provide and fully fund AAC devices and services where the IEP team determines that AAC devices and services are necessary to provide FAPE to the student.

In both the 2023-2024 and the 2024-2025 ACSD Annual Reports, issues were raised as to access to FCPS-provided AAC devices and services. It is clear that FCPS and several parents who have requested

[21] U.S. Dep't of Educ., *Myths and Facts Surrounding Assistive Technology Devices and Services* at 3 (Jan. 2024), and https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/Myths-and-Facts-Surrounding-Assistive-Technology-Devices-01-22-2024.pdf.
[22] Code of Virginia §22.1-217.4

AAC devices and services have differing views on these issues. We expect that division-wide tracking of requests for AAC devices and services will provide data which will open doors to collaboration and mutually beneficial solutions for FCPS and the affected parents and students.

Family and Student Empowerment

Primary Authors: Brandon Cassady, Joy Charles, Adam Malik, Nita Payton, Tyler Rickman, Allyson Talbot, Ayush Tripathy, Ellen Valentine, and Joanne Walton

Recommendation 3.1: Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) should develop and implement a systematic process to collect and analyze data on how transition-related information is shared with families of students with disabilities; including timing, format, language accessibility, and participation rates.

Rationale: This subcommittee's data inquiries to FCPS staff revealed a lack of consistent and accessible data being collected and preserved regarding how families receive information about key transition points (e.g., entry into special education services, grade-level transitions, and post-secondary planning). Without this data, FCPS cannot effectively evaluate whether current communication practices are reaching all families equitably. A standardized data collection process will allow FCPS to identify gaps, refine outreach strategies, and ensure that families are adequately informed and prepared for transitions in a manner that is both measurable and accountable.

Recommendation 3.2: FCPS should collect and report data on family participation in transition-related meetings; including attendance rates, barriers to participation, and availability of interpretation and translation services.

Rationale: Current FCPS data does not provide statistical insight on attendance at transition-related meetings disaggregated by demographic information, which may assist in identifying the barriers that can prevent participation. Based on discussions with members of the community, we have anecdotal evidence that these barriers disproportionately affect families who are non-native English speakers, that qualify for free and reduced school lunch programs, or who may face challenges such as work schedules, transportation, or limited access to childcare; but it is not possible to confirm or refute this based on existing data. Collecting this data will enable FCPS to better understand participation disparities and develop targeted solutions to increase equitable access and engagement where gaps are identified. While transition resources exist, families who can't understand or access the information – whether from lack of access, clarity, cultural relevance, or accessibility – will not be able to effectively use the information. This is likely to be particularly critical for families with limited English proficiency or those who may require additional support navigating the education system.

Follow-Up From 2024-2025 Report

2024-2025 ACSD Recommendations
Staff Action Plan Updates as of May 6, 2026[23]

Recommendation: Conduct regular audits of progress toward the American Institute for Research (AIR) report recommendations to enable further opportunities for enhancement of innovation and increased transparency.

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
Develop a report documenting progress achieved during the 2024-2025 school year.	Summer 2025	Dept. of Special Services (DSS)	Completed and shared with the Chair of the ACSD[24].
Share report with the School Board.	Fall 2025	DSS	Completed.
Conduct quarterly progress reviews.	SY 2025-2026	DSS	Ongoing.

Recommendation: Based on the Community Schools initiative, all three pilot schools should collect and report outcome data to the School Board to demonstrate the impact on various stakeholders across multiple indicators. Additionally, the Community School model should expand to include more Title 1 schools.

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
Facilitate the Neighborhood Initiatives Request for Proposal (RFP) process to aid with the identification of local organizations to support community schools.	Fall 2025	DSS	The Selection Advisory Committee (SAC) for the RFP conducted their first meeting on Tuesday, July 29. The RFP was designed to aid with the identification of local organizations to support community schools along with opportunity neighborhoods, community-based centers, and communities of opportunities in Fairfax County. Of these four priority areas, no proposals were submitted to serve community schools. There are currently two community schools in FCPS: Mount Vernon Woods ES and Whitman MS.

[23] This section is written by FCPS staff and its contents are not part of the "Approval of Report" committee vote detailed on page 6. It is included here without revision or commentary from the committee.
[24] Included in the ACSD 2024-2025 Annual Report.

Recommendation: Expand access to inclusive pre-K programs for all eligible students. Additionally, begin providing ESOL services in Title 1 pre-K classrooms district-wide.

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
Expand PreK and inclusive PreK programs in FCPS.	SY 2025-2026	Instructional Services Dept. (ISD) & DSS	Completed & Ongoing.
Provide training to PreK staff on language development of MLs.	SY 2025-2026	ESOL Services	Completed. The Office of Early Childhood has integrated Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) strategies into science and social studies curriculum resources, aligning with the PreK Program of Studies to support oral language development and build academic vocabulary across early childhood settings. In partnership with the Office of Multilingual Learner Services, professional development was provided this year to Early Childhood staff on multilingual learner language development, with a targeted focus on identifying and responding to younger multilingual learners who are not demonstrating expected linguistic progress. Both offices collaborate with the Title I Office to ensure that preschool teach- ers are consistently included in school-based professional learning designed to address the needs of multilingual learners.

Recommendation: Partner with colleges and universities to develop programs that recruit and prepare the staff needed to support and scale the initiatives outlined above.

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
Offer virtual and on-site job fairs.	SY 2025-2026	Human Resources (HR)	Completed & Ongoing.
Offer special education information sessions that include information regarding course partnerships with local universities.	SY 2025-2026	HR	Completed & Ongoing.

Recommendation: Enhance access to emotional, behavioral, mental, and physical health services for special education and 504 students by conducting a comprehensive review and revision of the student-to-clinical/behavioral support staff ratios using a weighted formula.

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
Review staffing allocations for FY27 utilizing a weighted formula.	Spring 2026	DSS & Budget Services	DSS is collaborating with Budget Services to review the current staffing formula and identify potential updates or changes for FY28.

Recommendation: Consider alternative service delivery models for special education services in advanced classes.

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
Provide professional development to inclusive schooling phase I and phase II schools on service delivery models in advanced classes.	SY2025-2026	DSS & ISD	Completed.

Recommendation: Promote more teachers with disabilities to inspire students with disabilities.

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
Identify effective strategies to equitably promote FCPS colleagues of diverse abilities.	Fall 2025	HR	Ongoing.

Recommendation: Within the Inclusion Pilot Program, FCPS should work with the consultants to develop next-level Universal Design for Learning (UDL) training that incorporates best practices specific to selected curricular and co-curricular areas.

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
Consultants will develop and provide professional development to Phase I inclusion schools on UDL.	Summer 2025 SY 2025-2026	DSS	Completed.

Recommendation: Increase focus on relationships and play-based learning in both primary and secondary programs.

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
Integrate play-based learning experiences and relationship building across our early child-hood programs through ongoing professional development.	SY 2025-2026	DSS & ISD	Completed & Ongoing.

Recommendation: Utilize parent liaisons to discuss the continuum of services and spectrum of secondary courses and Academy options.

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
Opportunities through the FCPS Family Academy, Family & School Partnerships will collaborate with ISD & DSS to provide information regarding course options and FCPS Academies to parents through the online Family Academy website.	Fall 2025	Family & School Partnerships	Completed. A total of five sessions through the Family Academy were provided to families, November 2025–April 2026 titled “Career Pathways” through a collaboration with the Chief Experience and Engagement Office and Instructional Services. At this session you will learn about the various career and technical education courses available to middle and high school students in FCPS. This session will include information about available pathways, specialty programs and career academy opportunities.
Family liaisons will work with FCPS school teams to provide support and capacity-building for families regarding the continuum of services in FCPS and at individual schools.	SY 2025-2026	Family & School Partnerships	Completed & Ongoing.

Recommendation: Implement data tracking for student exemptions from literacy screeners, including demographic data and disaggregation by school level (elementary, middle, high) and IEP eligibility where applicable, to identify exemption patterns across diverse student groups.

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
The DSS data team will pull this data quarterly.	Quarterly SY 2025-2026	DSS	In Process. The DSS Data Management Team is in the process of creating the systems to be able to pull this data set.
Office of Special Education Instruction (OSEI) curriculum teams will review the data and identify patterns.	Quarterly SY 2025-2026	OSEI	In Process. Once the data system has been created, OSEI will complete this task.
OSEI curriculum teams will follow up with individual schools, special education department chairs.	Quarterly SY 2025-2026	OSEI	In Process. Once the data system has been created, OSEI will complete this task.

Recommendation: Develop a division-wide method to monitor literacy progress for students exempt from screeners, ensuring accountability for literacy development through accessible alternate assessments, curriculum participation tracking, and tools such as the Brigance.

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
OSEI will collaborate with the MTSS team to integrate literacy data for students on an adapted curriculum into the MTSS data tool in SIS.	Fall 2025	OSEI & MTSS	Completed December 2025.
Literacy information will be shared with parents following the schedule used for all students.	SY 2025-2026	ISD	Completed. Based on the data (screener or other), if the student has literacy needs, they should have a reading plan. Progress monitoring information for reading plan goals is available to parents through ParentVue.
OSEI will explore the ability to record Brigance data in one of the available FCPS data collection platforms.	Fall 2025	OSEI	In Process - OSEI is working with the DSS Data Management Team to explore.

Recommendation: Consider exemption data from reading screeners when selecting locations for Early Childhood Inclusion Programs (ECIP).

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
DSS & ISD will select ECIP site programs through the assessment of building space capacity, existing programs within the region/ pyramid, and community needs.	Fall 2025	DSS & ISD	Completed & Ongoing.
Early childhood and PreK teachers will utilize VKRP and VALLS screening data to measure growth and kindergarten readiness.	SY 2025	ISD & DSS	Completed.

Recommendation: Select a concussion baseline testing vendor that provides text-to-speech accessibility for the assessment instructions and the demographic data collection at the start of the test.

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
Office of Student Activities and Athletics (OSAA) will work with the Office of Procurement Services and the Department of Information Technology to evaluate all known vendors of concussion baseline testing.	Fall/Winter 2025- 2026	OSAA	OSAA has not identified any concussion-specific medical assessments that include native accommodations (screen readers). Baseline functional testing is often better assessed through structured question-naires to understand pre-injury abilities. FCPS staff can provide alternative means to approach baseline testing in neurodiverse individuals. Educational tests and medical tests are different, concussion assessments are considered medical tests. Pro-viding accommodations to provide student access to an educational assessment is a necessary, reasonable, best practice. Accommodations to access a medical test will most likely invalidate the medical assessment. If a medical test cannot be accessed/completed as is, the provider should choose a different assessment(s).

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
OSAA will make a recommendation based on research.	Spring 2026	OSAA	Recommendation: FCPS certified athletic trainers will be prepared to offer alternative methods to assess pre- and post-injury abilities for students that are better served through alternative means.

Recommendation: Provide training for staff and families, along with the related updates to SEA-STARS, to ensure that necessary accommodations for student participation in extracurricular activities are proactively included in an IEP.

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
OSEPS will issue a memo re-inforcing for school teams that they must ensure that students with disabilities have equal access to nonacademic and extra-curricular activities.	April 2026	Office of Special Education Procedural Support (OSEPS)	Completed April 2026.
Provide information and training with special education department chairs.	May 2026	OSEPS	Completed May 2026.
Update IEP meeting agenda and PLOP page in SEA-STARS to include the consideration of students' participation and needs during extracurricular activities.	SY 2025-2026	OSEPS	Completed & Ongoing. The IEP meeting agenda has been updated. The PLOP page is anticipated to be updated with a specific section during the summer of 2026.

Recommendation: As part of the Inclusion Pilot Program, provide targeted professional development and parent resources focused on best practices that promote a mindset of presumed competence and increase time spent in general education settings for students placed in more restrictive environments for the majority of their school day.

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
Inclusive Schooling consultants will keynote the Family Summit.	Spring 2026	DSS	Completed April 18, 2026.

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
Inclusive Schooling consultants will collaborate with Phase I schools around community engagement.	Spring 2026	ISD & DSS	Completed.
Inclusive Schooling consultants will provide a variety of resources to Phase I & II schools around family communications, learning, and understanding of inclusion, and inclusive practices.	SY 2025-2026	ISD & DSS	Completed.

Recommendation: Use data that Career and Transition Services (CTS) staff and Employment and Transition (ETR) representatives collect to identify and replicate best practices.

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
Career and Transition Services (CTS) will deliver the Transition Standards of Practice training and updates to school staff.	SY 2025-2026	CTS	Completed June 2025.
CTS will share examples and models of best practices with school staff during training.	SY 2025-2026	CTS	Completed June 2025.

Recommendation: Continue to use multiple methods of communication to keep students and families informed of programs and opportunities, making sure to include information about post-FCPS transition services as early as middle school.

FCPS Actions	Timeline	Responsible Party	Update
CTS will use a variety of communication systems to share information with students and families, including Keep in Touch, Instagram, Schoology, Atlas, Parent Resource Center, FCPS public webpage, and direct email.	SY 2025-2026	CTS	Completed & Ongoing. CTS also uses “News You Choose” as a regular communication tool.

Future Annual Charge

The committee considered several topics for its annual charge, selecting those that have consistently emerged over the past year through community engagement, public comments at meetings, and issues encountered in the committee's own work. Some of these topics have been revisited across multiple program years due to their ongoing relevance and impact across the largest groups of students.

Our collaboration resulted in the following recommendation as our charge for the 2026-2027 program year:

> "During the 2026-2027 program year, the ACSD will examine current practices within FCPS regarding the intersection of student mental health with disability and learning differences. Using evidence-based and research-based models, the ACSD will make recommendations for:
>
> - Reducing absenteeism related to school refusal;
> - Lowering the incidence of suspensions or other disciplinary responses to behavior;
> - Tools to support families in addressing mental health issues for their children; and,
> - Improving the understanding of internalized anxiety, trauma, or adverse childhood experiences (ACES) affecting access to education."

Appendices

A. Membership Roster

The ACSD membership is structured in accordance with 8VAC20-81-230.D(1) - Membership.

a. A majority of the committee shall be parents of children with disabilities or individuals with disabilities.
b. The committee shall include one teacher.
c. Additional local school division personnel shall serve only as consultants to the committee.

School Board Member Appointees

Braddock District, Rachna Sizemore-Heizer*:	Carolyn Haydon
Dranesville District, Robyn Lady:	Colleen Paparella
Hunter Mill District, Melanie Meren:	Joy Ramsey Charles
Franconia District, Marcia St. John-Cunning:	Stephanie Smith
Mason District, Ricardy Anderson:	Harry Henderson
Mount Vernon District, Mateo Dunne:	Colleen Jones
Providence District, Karl Frisch:	David Bean
Springfield District, Sandy Anderson:	Amanda Campbell
Sully District, Seema Dixit:	Sonica Babu
Member-at-Large, Kyle McDaniel:	VACANT
Member-at-Large, Ryan McElveen:	Allyson Talbot
Member-at-Large, Ilryong Moon:	Darcy Kim
Student Representative, Faith Mekonen:	Adam Malik
	Tyler Rickman

Region Representatives

Region 1, Jameile Choice , Assistant Superintendent:	Rachel Charlton
Region 2, Megan Vroman, Assistant Superintendent:	Jack Burke
Region 3, Ray Lonnett, Assistant Superintendent:	VACANT
Region 4, Pablo Resendiz, Assistant Superintendent:	Ellen Valentine
Region 5, Rebecca Baenig, Assistant Superintendent:	Nita Payton
Region 6, Michelle Boyd, Assistant Superintendent*:	Kenneth Johnson

Community Representatives and Subject Matter Experts

Career and Transition Services:	Brandon Cassady
City of Fairfax School Board:	Mary Kay Ciziunas
Decoding Dyslexia of Virginia (DDVA):	Sarah Gilbert
Early Childhood Special Education:	Nora Rodriguez
Fairfax/Falls Church Community Services Board:	Daniel Cronnell
Military-Connected Families	VACANT
Parents of Autistic Children (PoAC)-NoVA:	Charlotte Frazier-West
Public Day Schools:	Jay Berkenbilt ***[Vice Chair]***
Special Education PTA (SEPTA), Fairfax County:	Dena Sonneborn
Speech and Communication Disorders:	Elizabeth Zielinski ***[Chair]***
Student:	Ayush Tripathy

FCPS Representatives

Teacher:	Joanne Walton
Staff Liaison:	Mike Bloom ***[non-voting]***

* Appointing individuals changed mid-year. Committee members are appointed for a full year, without respect to those changes.

B. Attendance Record

ACSD Member Attendance
September 2025 - May 2026

P = Present V = Attended Virtually ⬜= Did Not Attend NYA = Not Yet Appointed

Member Name	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Sonica Babu		P	P		P	P	P	P	P
David Bean	P	P	V	P		P			P
Jay Berkenbilt	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Jack Burke	P	P	P		P	P			
Amanda Campbell	P	V	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Brandon Cassady	P	V	V	P	P	V	P	P	P
Joy Ramsey Charles	P	P	P	P		P		P	P
Rachel Charlton	P	P	V	P		P	P		P
Mary Kay Ciziunas	P		P			P	P		P
Daniel Cronnell	P		P	P	P		P	P	P
Charlotte Frazier-West	P	P	P	P	P	P	P		
Sarah Gilbert	V	V	P						
Carolyn Haydon	P	P	P	P		V	P	P	P
Harry Henderson	V		P		P	P			P
Kenneth Johnson	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Colleen Jones	P	P	V	P	P	P	P	V	P
Darcy Kim	P	P	P	P	P	V	P	P	P
Adam Malik		P	P	P			V	P	P
Colleen Paparella	NYA	NYA	NYA	P	P	P		P	P
Nita Payton	P	P	P		P	P	P		P

Member Name	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
Tyler Rickman	P		P	P		P	P		P
Nora Rodriguez	NYA	NYA	NYA	P			P	V	
Stephanie Smith	NYA	NYA	V	P		P	P	P	P
Dena Sonneborn	P	P	V	P	P	P			P
Allyson Talbot	P	P	P			P		P	
Ayush Tripathy	NYA	NYA	V	V		P	P	P	
Ellen Valentine	P	P	V	P	P	P		P	
Joanne Walton	P	P	P	P		P	P		P
Elizabeth Zielinski	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P

C. Summary of Public Comments

The ACSD heard twenty-four public testimonies during the period of September 2025 - April 2026. The following topics were represented in these testimonies, and are shared here in order of topical prevalence.

Due Process Hearing

- A due process hearing is scheduled for March 23-27 at the Virginia Hills Administrative Center and will be open to the public for observation. The case involves IEP implementation for a nonspeaking autistic teen enrolled in high school.
- The School Board's hired legal counsel negatively characterized the ACSD during a due process hearing in March, 2026. As part of successfully excluding a witness to be certified as an expert, the attorney questioned whether the witness, an ACSD member, writes recommendations to the school board nor that any ACSD recommendations had been implemented over the last six years of the witness' time on the committee. Although this attorney was not FCPS staff, they were hired by FCPS to represent their interests, and so the claims made during the hearing are appropriately attributed to FCPS.
- The ACSD member referenced in the previous comment responded with their own testimony. It was explained that they were not able to share more details because testimony was still underway, but that the claims made about the characterization of the ACSD had occurred and were accurately described by the prior community member.

Staff Appreciation

- A community member offered thanks to Superintendent Michelle Reid for acting quickly to personally assist a student to get College Board accommodations quickly when the school was unwilling to provide timely solutions.
- A parent expressed gratitude for the outstanding staff at Pimmit Hills special education preschool. This parent recommended greater efforts to identify students who need early support and intervention so that more of the community can address developmental needs early.
- A parent thanked Fairfax County Health Department staff for creating and delivering autism awareness training for school-based health room and clinic staff. She appreciated that the health staff were excited to take these first steps toward better understanding of the autistic students they support.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Users

- There is a lack of awareness, training, and services for students who are AAC users, especially those enrolled at schools with dual language immersion programming.
- A parent discussed how her preschool aged child has received inconsistent support for his speech device in school. She noted that his progress in using the device has only been attributable to their ability to obtain privately-paid speech therapy outside of school.

Procedural Issues in IEP Meetings

- The Procedural Support Liaison (PSL) in the South Lakes pyramid has created a difficult dynamic on a parent's IEP team. According to the commenter, the PSL has a dominant role in meetings, and school-based members of the team are unwilling to publicly disagree with her. The PSL has denied the parent request for the team to participate in training about her child's uncommon disability, and the untrained staff have been unable to properly support her child. This has resulted in regression and a mental health decline for her six year old son.

- Parents are sometimes told by FCPS staff they are not permitted to sign an IEP with partial consent. *[ACSD note: This has been addressed with a recent update to the SEA-STARS software, which now includes "Partial Consent" as a separate option on the signature page of IEPs.]*

Age Spans in Self-Contained Classrooms

- A bill has been presented in the Virginia General Assembly which would limit the age span of students placed in individual self-contained classrooms to no more than four years. *[ACSD Note: The bill passed the Virginia Assembly and was approved by the Governor, it will become effective 7/1/2027.]*

Budget Concerns

- A community member discussed the status of complaints against FCPS at both the state and federal levels, and offered the suggestion that it's both inequitable and costly to allow disputes to rise to the level of seeking state or federal intervention than it is to seek authentic resolutions via the IEP process.

Cafeteria Noise

- A student shared that she is unable to have lunch in her cafeteria because of the noise level and her sensitive hearing. She has been eating lunch in the school office all year. She asked that FPCS prioritize social spaces for students to eat lunch if they can't tolerate cafeteria noise.

Continuum of Placement Options

- A teacher commented about how there is a growing need for a tailored placement option that is between general education and enhanced autism classrooms. She described how there are many students who are not prepared for general education and would benefit from the targeted support in speech services, behavioral therapy and executive functioning skills. But they are academically not challenged enough by the typical programming in enhanced autism settings.

Curriculum Support

- A teacher described the challenge she faces with curriculum design, explaining that the curriculum tools available for teachers are appropriate for two ends of a spectrum of learners (benchmark and adapted studies). She described how there is a need for structural support for the many students who are not well served by either of those options. Currently she is extensively scaffolding the general curriculum and the extra work that creates is burdensome

and unsustainable, and both general and special education teachers are being stretched beyond their capacity. It is also creating inconsistencies between classes, schools, and grade levels.

Elementary Special Education Department Chairs

- An enhanced autism classroom teacher advocated for the department chair position to be retained at the elementary level in future budget cycles. She described the additional burden on special education teachers to scaffold instruction and support diverse learning profiles that is alleviated when this position exists at a school.

Emergency Response to Students in Distress

- A community member addressed what they referred to as the criminalization of students with disabilities through fear-based language, punitive crisis responses, and police involvement. They criticized the use of stigmatizing language, and urged FCPS to mandate trauma-informed crisis prevention training and ensure staff responses are restorative instead of punitive.

IEP Implementation

- A community member described an issue in which IEP implementation had not been corrected seven years after an initial complaint on the same accommodation.

Neurodiversity Affirmation Training

- A community member discussed the many ways in which the division would benefit from expanded training in neurodiversity-affirming practices. Teacher licensure doesn't require specific training in neurodiversity, and there is a great need to better understand behavioral profiles, communication support, sensory needs, and more in a manner that doesn't pathologize or diminish these students.

Privacy of Student Records

- A community member discussed ongoing concerns about student record disclosures by FCPS. She described difficulty obtaining complete disclosure records for her child, presented evidence which questioned the accuracy of the disclosure log produced by the division, and raised concerns about the handling of corrective action related to prior findings of noncompliance by FCPS.

Sensory Swings in Classrooms

- Sensory swings have been removed from classrooms, which the Dept. of Special Services has indicated is due to improper installation and lack of supporting research for their efficacy. Research was shared regarding the vestibular and developmental benefits of these swings and noted their common usage in surrounding school divisions as well as FCPS playgrounds.

Speech-Language Service Availability in Preschool

- Families are still reporting barriers to obtaining evaluations and services for speech-language related developmental delays in preschool aged students.

Technology Use in Instruction and Testing

- A parent who is also an experienced instructional designer commented on how the use of technology for testing is not inclusive to students with various needs, and the inappropriate implementation of instructional technology affects students with disabilities the most. All processes, tools, and performance expectations need to be designed with accessibility first, or we will fail the students.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (OCR)

- Kimberly Richey has been confirmed as the Assistant Secretary for the Office of Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education. Her previous roles affecting Virginia schools have been as a Deputy Superintendent for the Virginia Department of Education and as Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS).

E. Interim Recommendations

The following recommendations were approved by the ACSD and forwarded to the Clerk of the School Board prior to and separate from this report:

Date Approved	Recommendation	Summary of Rationale
January 14, 2026	The Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities requests that the School Board assign a school board member to serve in the vacant role of ACSD liaison as soon as possible, so that the individual can begin attending ACSD meetings in time for their guidance to be represented for the remainder of the program year.	It is critical for the ACSD to receive information from the school board in a timely manner in order to fulfill our Virginia-mandated regulatory responsibilities to advise the school board on issues affecting students with disabilities within the division. This is particularly necessary during final preparation of the Annual Report, which happens in the Spring months of the program year.
February 11, 2026	The Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities (ACSD) accepts the updates to the ACSD Bylaws as submitted, in order to align the committee bylaws with updated requirements in the Community Advisory Committee Operating Manual (July 2024). These bylaws will become effective following review and approval by the School Board.	Extensive updates were required to the ACSD's Bylaws in order to ensure alignment with the updated Community Advisory Committee Operating Manual. This bylaw revision incorporates all of those required changes.
March 11, 2026	The Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities recommends that FCPS develop and publish expanded division-wide information on permitted items and appropriate use of equipment in sensory- friendly spaces and sensory rooms, including swings, crash pads, mini trampolines, sensory loungers, sensory tents, stability balls, and other sensory supports.	Based on observations of effective sensory spaces in other jurisdictions and an increase in student emotional regulation challenges, there is a research-supported need for these tools.