

Prince George's County SECAC Meeting Minutes  
October 27, 2020

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Board members in attendance: Troy Sampson, chairman; Sarah Wayland, vice chairman; Jamie Anfenson-Comeau, secretary; Janie Payne, treasurer; Pamela Talley, community outreach manager; Ayo Bello, listserv manager; Bonnie Razler, social media manager.

Others in attendance: See attached screen capture of attendees.



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Troy Sampson welcomed everyone to the virtual SECAC meeting held via the Zoom platform at 6:31 p.m., introducing board members, Prince George's County Public Schools partners.

Mr. Sampson said that 2020 has been a difficult year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but that the school system was doing the best it can in these trying circumstances.

Trinell Bowman, associate superintendent of the PGCPSS department of special education, introduced school board member Pamela Boozer-Strother.

Ms. Boozer-Strother thanked everyone for being in attendance and shared greetings from the Board of Education chairman and board members.

Ms. Bowman announced several Family Support Center virtual sessions, including Parent Survival Skills for Distance Learning, a monthly virtual support group beginning Nov. 12; Support for Parents of Students with Challenging Behaviors, a monthly virtual support group beginning Nov. 19; and Strategies to Help Sustain Attention During Distance Learning, held Nov. 7 from 10 a.m. to noon.

Ms. Bowman also announced that a Transitioning Youth Virtual Fair will be held on Oct. 26.

She also announced that PGCPSS is moving forward with educational assessments. For students who need face-to-face assessments, centers will be available in the northern, central and southern portions of the county. All of the face-to-face sites are following all all CDC guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Currently, assessments will be done for students in four categories: Students who have not been assessed for a disability, students at age 8, when "delay" is no longer a viable category, children exiting Early Childhood Centers and students transitioning out of PGCPSS, who may need a re-evaluation for other programs and services.

Kiara Pusey, PGCPSS assistive technology consultant, discussed the use of assistive technology and Universal Design for Learning, which may include videos and songs that accompany messages in stories or lessons.

Francesca Crobak, PGCPSS assistive technology consultant, said IT is the use of technology in lessons, including hardware and software. Assistive technology devices are any equipment used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of people with disabilities.

Ms. Pusey said that a future meeting should explore the needs of students and the uses of tools. She said the four-part framework looks at the student, the environment, the tools and the student's performance.

Ms. Crobak listed a number of built-in tools for devices, including Apple accessibility features.

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Ms. Pusey said the Google G Suite has a number of built-in features and tools.

Ms. Crobak said that built-in speech-to-text features may use voice commands to format and edit documents. She said that the Chrome web store has read aloud text-to-speech features.

Ms. Pusey said Newsela makes available news articles at different reading levels.

Ms. Crobak said that Clever is a digital learning platform available to students.

Ms. Pusey said that other digital resources available to students include graphic organizers and visual aids for writing, including helpful word lists and editing checklists.

Ms. Crobak said there are augmentative/alternative communications tools for people with severe speech and/or language disorders, and include communication boards.

For more information, email [at.office@pgcps.org](mailto:at.office@pgcps.org).

Robin Houston, PGCPs instructional specialist for the deaf and hard of hearing program, said it is important to monitor accessibility features within platforms, visual split attention, fatigue and accessible language.

She said that during distance learning, hearing impaired students must keep their eyes focused on the speaker on the screen, thus increasing fatigue.

Ms. Houston said there is no single, cookie-cutter approach to providing support. Every student is unique, and adding more accommodations doesn't always equal better support. She said the school system utilizes a multidisciplinary team, working with each family. She said the biggest takeaway is the need to be flexible.

She said her office has been providing workshops on teaching visual lessons and adding captioning, practicing Google/Zoom etiquette, implementing "deaf methods and strategies" and understanding the impact of hearing loss in the virtual classroom. They have been providing American Sign Language classes for parents, social time for students, ASL interpretation for pre-recorded lessons, virtual after-school enrichment activities and teaching students to use accessibility features in different platforms.

Ms. Houston gave tips for optimizing student learning spaces.

-Encourage consistent use of amplification devices

-Assist students in setting up a study area with little to no distractions or competing noises.

-Create a learning space in an area of good lighting with noise and reverberation (echo) reduction.

-Manage sensory information.

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-Adjust accessibility features on your devices and software. Ms. Houston noted that it is possible to add closed captioning and adjust the playback speed on YouTube videos.

-Take frequent brain breaks, so students can come back refreshed and ready to learn.

Lisa Spencer, PGCPs director of instructional technology and support, noted resources on the Parent Distance Learning Page on the PGCPs website. She said that for school-issued Chromebooks and iPads, parents will not be able to download apps and programs on their own, but if they find a needed accessibility app or program, to contact the T3 team and they will be able to push it out to the device. The email to contact is [T3@pgcps.org](mailto:T3@pgcps.org).

Ms. Spencer also noted there is a hotline for tech support on the site and a troubleshooting resource page. For iPad tech support, email the T3 team.

Jennifer Halloway, PGCPs instructional specialist for instructional technology, said the Microsoft accessibility page lists a number of tools, features and apps.

There are also free web-based tools such as Rewordify, which simplifies difficult words, Mathshare and Natural Reader, which converts text to speech.

The PGCPs site also includes a link to Parent Autism Resources.

Mr. Sampson opened questions by asking how proficient teachers and staff are in utilizing these tools.

Ms. Spencer said it has been a learning process, but teachers and staff are improving in a "trial by fire." She said the school system is training teachers to serve as technology coaches in schools for other teachers.

Mr. Sampson asked if parents are getting confused by the number of different apps, programs and resources available.

Ms. Spencer said it can be confusing, especially when students have five different Google Classrooms, each set up differently, and that all depends on what teachers are comfortable with. She said that there is also technical support for parents.

Mr. Sampson shared a question from the Zoom chat, asking if Zoom classes can be recorded.

Ms. Spencer said there are privacy concerns surrounding recording of classes. However, teachers can record lessons without including students or their names.

A parent asked if the school system has updated Zoom to accommodate screen sharing.

Ms. Spencer said that some of the teacher Zoom settings may be changed.

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The same parent also asked why the school system keeps pushing Microsoft when students do not have access.

Ms. Spencer said that all students do have access to Microsoft Office 365, as it is a Maryland state requirement.

Another parent said that many families are finding that distance learning isn't working for their students, and are moving to homeschooling. How can homeschooling families be supported?

Ms. Bowman said she will be speaking with the homeschool coordinator, but that a lot of the school system's resources are available on the PGCPs website for anyone to use.

The parent said her son is on the autism spectrum, and that programs in Clever are very helpful, but that they will lose access to that once her son is no longer enrolled. She was told the PGCPs curriculum is copyrighted and not available to parents, and that other resources that students connect to are not available either. She said that in times of COVID-19, families have got to do what they've got to do, and they need the school system to support them.

Mr. Sampson shared a question from the Zoom chat asking if there is a way to automatically place a Zoom meeting on a child's calendar.

Ms. Spencer said to check with the child's teacher, and see if they are adding it on Google Classroom.

Mr. Sampson shared another question from the Zoom chat, regarding students with disabilities and truancy, and how is that being addressed?

Ms. Bowman said there is a code around difficulties with technology access, but the expectation is that students are attending virtual class as if they were present in person. There is some flexibility in terms of independent work times, and Pupil Personnel Workers are working to call parents, sending letters and reaching out to families. They can only give a "pass" on nonattendance if there are technology issues, although they are working as diligently as possible to be flexible with students and families.

Mr. Sampson shared another question from the Zoom chat, regarding dedicated aides and paraprofessionals. Is there any thought to allowing parents to have some sort of make up system?

Ms. Bowman said paraprofessionals and dedicated aides are part of the reopening and distance learning plans, but that at this time, no staff are going into anyone's homes to provide on-site support. As per the Maryland State Department of Education, there are certain requirements for in-person learning.

Mr. Sampson shared another question from the Zoom chat asking if PGCPs utilizes breakout rooms in Zoom.

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Ms. Bowman said yes.

A follow-up to the question from the chat asked if breakout rooms could be utilized by a dedicated aide.

Ms. Bowman said yes.

Another question from the chat asked what the number of required hours are for synchronized learning.

Ms. Bowman said that the number of hours are set by the Maryland State Board of Education, and that the information would be provided to SECAC (**Secretary's note: information can be found at <http://marylandpublicschools.org/Pages/default.aspx>**)

Another question from the chat asked if parents can sit in on their child's lessons?

Ms. Bowman said parents cannot be provided with a login and must access their student's login, but absolutely, they can sit in with their child, depending on the needs of students.

Ms. Spencer added that parents should not jump in to ask questions of teachers during class time.

Mr. Sampson thanked everyone for attending, and said the next meeting, Supporting Your Child with Reading Resources You Can Use, will be held Nov. 17 at 6:30 p.m.

Mr. Sampson closed the meeting at 8:15 p.m.

CHAT TRANSCRIPT from Zoom:

From Trinell Bowman to Everyone: (7:36 PM)

Yes. We will share all website links.

From Lisa Spencer to Everyone: (7:37 PM)

Please feel free to email [T3@pgcps.org](mailto:T3@pgcps.org) for technical assistance or training resource and support.

From Pamela Boozer-Strother to Everyone: (7:38 PM)

Great to join you this evening! Pamela Boozer-Strother Board of Education Member, District 3 [pamela.boozerstrother@pgcps.org](mailto:pamela.boozerstrother@pgcps.org) 240-484-8634

From LaShaun Rodgers to Everyone: (7:56 PM)

Thank you for having presentations on how to access and use technology during quarantine. I will be contacting IT Support because multiple virtual formats can be confusing for me as a parent.

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From Theresa Atkins-Bailey to Everyone: (7:56 PM)

I am new to this meeting but what happened to our dedicated aides, paraprofessional teachers or extra support help that was provided in our school? Maybe it is the school my son goes to but he needs the extra support with keeping up on his work and assisting him on doing class work? My child has an IEP but the school really isn't working with it.

From Me to Everyone: (7:56 PM)

related question - I've been hearing that kids who cannot attend class because of attention or disability-related issues are being coded as truant. This is the kind of thing that forces families to homeschool. I feel like we need to figure out how to deal with this somehow.

From Trinell Bowman to Everyone: (7:59 PM)

Natasha White Jones, PhD  
Instructional Supervisor  
McKinney-Vento Program, Home Schooling Office & Home and Hospital Teaching  
Prince George's County Public Schools  
[natasha.jones@pgcps.org](mailto:natasha.jones@pgcps.org)

20:03:57 From Sarah Wayland : Attendance issues put a LOT of stress on families.

20:04:16 From Darth Vader Irby : our experience was that our teacher was marking us on absent on Wednesdays even though we were in school with specialists and doing our work, and it required 4 emails to get it fixed. that kind of stress is problematic for families, and it was the final thing that pushed us out.

20:06:00 From Sarah Wayland : "Darth Vader" - you are not the only one, for sure.

20:07:19 From Sarah Wayland : One of our parents was able to get an aide to come into the home through the Autism Waiver to provide Dedicated Aide support.

2:07:39 From Lisa Gottman : I am on leave from work to be my daughter's dedicated aide because if she is left on her own, she leaves class and goes to YouTube. Dedicated aides need more money! The para-professional checks in with us twice a week. Our Special Education Manager also checks in twice a week.

20:08:45 From Shee New : where do I find the number of hours for synchronized learning?

20:08:50 From Theresa Atkins-Bailey : Can you provide what or how the dedicated aides are supporting. I understand not in the homes but even zoom calls or phone calls to check up. my son had autism and exactly what Mr. Troy said, I agree. What can I do as a parent to get more support? Thank you.

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20:10:52 From Tosheka Leslie : Can request a daily pass to be able to sit with our children in class?

20:11:55 From Devin Yearwood : I've had to hire a private tutor once a week to help my son. I am fortunate to be working from home but it can be challenging at times. My son has not had a dedicated aid since elementary school & he's now in HS

20:12:24 From Darth Vader Irby : If I'm not sitting with my son every moment, he cannot attend to the screen, and even with me there, he has trouble focusing. you aren't alone, Lisa. (this is Elle Irby.)

20:12:29 From Tosheka Leslie : My son is not retaining the information being taught throughout the day. I am finding myself up to almost midnight (with him) to try to reteach his lessons in order to get the independent work done.

20:12:54 From Elizabeth Bello : How do we address lack of professionalism from Teachers during distance learning?

20:13:38 From Sarah Wayland : <https://pgcabs.org/2020/08/30/whats-best-for-our-kids-during-a-pandemic/> (discussion about number of synchronous hours)