

SECAC Meeting April 16, 2024

Executive Board Members in Attendance: Janie Payne, chairperson; Jamie Anfenson-Comeau, vice chairperson; Sarah Wayland, ex-officio adviser.

Others in Attendance: See Attached Screen Capture.

Note: This meeting was held in collaboration with the Prince George's County Public Schools' Family Support Center.

Marsie Torchon, program coordinator for the Family Support Center, opened the meeting at 6:32 p.m. via the Zoom online meeting platform, noting that April is Autism Acceptance Month.

Ms. Torchon introduced the SECAC executive board members in attendance and PGCPSS special education department partners in attendance.

Ms. Torchon introduced the first speaker, Noor Pervez, community engagement manager for the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN).

Mr. Pervez said that ASAN is a policy organization run by and for the autistic community, with the motto, "Nothing about us, without us."

Mr. Pervez said that ASAN works on public policy advocacy, doing legal work around issues that affect autistic people in society across the life spectrum, allowing autistic individuals to live within their communities with the supports they need.

Mr. Pervez said AASAN provides information on policy positions, policy toolkits, and scripts for talking to elected officials about positions.

Mr. Pervez said ASAN also works on education, including community outreach, the history of the disability rights movement, the history of autism rights, and supporting autistic advocacy.

Mr. Pervez said ASAN also provides leadership training, including a leadership training program for individuals in a post-secondary training or college program. While it was once offered in person, since the pandemic it has been offered online.

Mr. Pervez said we recognize "autism acceptance" is important because it gives a chance to lift up all autistic voices, including those from marginalized populations who might otherwise be left out of the conversation.

Mr. Pervez said autism falls under the disability umbrella, and that it is part of a movement, a history, a culture, and that this is particularly important to remember when talking about children. Autistic children grow up to become autistic adults, who go on to

make books, art, music, go to church, temple or mosque, and are a part of the community and a part of history.

Mr. Pervez touched on the idea of neurodiversity, saying that there are all different kinds of brains and that is great.

Everyone has needs, Mr. Pervez said, but some people's needs might be more specialized than others.

Mr. Pervez said that when we talk about Autism Acceptance we are talking about how these needs need to be met, and this is not a reason to be scared or angry or upset, but are just a part of life.

All autistic people need support inclusion, to be around people who support us, Mr. Pervez said.

Because the diagnostic tools used for testing for autism are based around white, cis-gender boys, and because of barriers to access in testing for low-income families, there has been a diagnostic disparity, Mr. Pervez said, but that has begun changing somewhat. He noted that in the past year, there has been an increase in the diagnosis of young latinx children, which is a good thing, he said.

Mr. Pervez said that to help students with autism, look for unmet needs, such as access to alternative assistive communication methods, understimulation and overstimulation, and lack of resources at home.

Mr. Pervez also said it is important to presume competence. Even if they do not communicate traditionally, do not assume that they do not understand.

Mr. Pervez took questions from the audience.

Mr. Pervez recommended the website autismacceptance.com.

ASAN's website is autisticadvocacy.org/.

Ms. Torchon introduced Betty Atkins, former PGCPs special education instructor and Relationship Development Intervention (RDI) consultant with Guiding Exceptional Parents.

Ms. Atkins said that when she began working in special education with PGCPs, there were 13 students diagnosed with autism in the county.

In 2007, she attended a lecture by Dr. Steven Gutstein, the developer of RDI, and decided that she wanted to bring RDI to Prince George's County. It took 2.5 years for her to become certified as an RDI consultant, and she began the first RDI program within PGCPs in 2009.

RDI is a developmentally-based, family-centered intervention designed to address core deficits of autism.

Ms. Atkins retired from the school system in 2022 and began working for Guiding Exceptional Parents, which now contracts with PGCPs to run its parents' group.

Ms. Atkins said the goal of RDI is to get children on a path to becoming independent thinkers.

Ms. Atkins showed clips of a boy and his family undergoing RDI.































Ms. Atkins said that families are required to complete six sessions of training prior to joining the group. RDI is a parent-led therapy. The next parent intake will be held in the fall.

RDI is available to anyone who lives in Prince George's County free of charge, paid by PGCPs through its contract with Guiding Exceptional Parents. Sarah Wayland noted that PGCPs is the only school system in the country that offers RDI.
















































Ms. Atkins took questions from the audience.

Ms. Torchon closed the meeting at 8 p.m.

ATTENDEES:

	Jamila Blackwell		
	janie Payne		
	Kamilah House		
	Kathy Walker		
	michelle blakey		
	Pamela Talley		
	Samantha Dawson-Williams		
	Sarah Wayland (she/her)		
	Theresa Smith		
	vanessa ridgeway		

Q Find a participant

- JA** Jamie Anfenson-Comeau (Co-host, me)   
- MT** Marsie Torchon (Host)   
- NP** Noor Pervez (Co-host)    
- SI** Spanish Interp... (Co-host, interpreter)    
- AS** ANGELA SALMERON (Co-host)   
- YY** Yvette Young (Co-host)   
- AB** Alicia Baines  
- DG** Deanna Gonzalez  
- DG** debra garris  
-  Ebony Powell  
-  Frances Carter-Johnson  
-  Irin Wills-Allen  
- JB** Jamila Blackwell  
- JP** janie Payne  
- KH** Kamilah House  
-  Kathy Walker  
- MD** Maria Diaz Perez- Interpreter (Interpreter)   

Invite

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