

Arlington Special Education PTA MONTHLY MEETING MINUTES

From Thursday, March 5, 2026

7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

In-person & Virtual Zoom Meeting

President's and Vice-President's Report

Presented by Sascha Foertsch and Laura Swanson.

Treasurer's Report

- Monthly financial report shared with the membership.

Membership Update

- 103 paid memberships to date.

Fundraising

- General fundraising updates provided.
- Jake's Ice Cream fundraiser scheduled for March 11, 4:00–8:00 PM.

Advocacy

For more info on advocacy, see: <https://www.arlingtonsepta.org/advocacy/>

Access to Accelerated Classes and Option Schools for Students with Disabilities (SWD)

- SEPTA composed a report on potential barriers to access of SWDs to advanced academic services at APS. The report is available here:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xa5SqPh7h5xaH10EKiYsGkJM7PzQDHKb/view>
- Report finds that, among all high schools, HB Woodlawn does better than other APS schools in giving SWDs access to AP classes. In this context, concerns were raised that HB Woodlawn has been turning away students based on pull-out service needs and below-grade-level academic performance.

Suspensions of Students with Disabilities

- Discussion of how families can object to suspensions and advocate for their children.

HB 501 Implementation

- Rollout has not been smooth. Although forms have been translated, parents report inconsistent access to them.

Student Use of Devices

- SEPTA is developing talking points and is seeking parent input on how students are using devices in school.

Upcoming Survey

- A survey on parent pain points is forthcoming — members are encouraged to watch for it and respond.

SOL Cut Scores

- A robust discussion was held in January with the new Virginia administration.

Langston Program Merger and Move

- The final decision has been made. SEPTA is considering how best to engage on next steps.

Open SEPTA Board Positions

- President / Vice-President
- Treasurer
- Secretary
- Mini Grants Chair
- Awards Chair
- The VC of Communications is also looking to transition out of the role.

Parent Liaisons

- Reminder: A WhatsApp chat group is available for liaisons.
- Current liaison vacancies (as of 3/5/26): Fleet, Hoffman Boston, Innovation, Nottingham, Taylor, and Dorothy Hamm.
- For next year, SEPTA is seeking a Parent Liaison Co-Coordinator volunteer to shadow Kristin and take over the position thereafter.

Upcoming SEPTA Events

- March 11: Jake's Ice Cream fundraiser.
- Now open: Nominations for the SEPTA Awards.
- May: Free IEP Transition Workshop for Military Families, SEPTA Awards ceremony.

Early Childhood Working Group Presentation

Presented by Cameron Childs, APS Early Childhood Specialist. Slides should become available here: <https://www.arlingtonsepta.org/monthly-meetings/>

Purpose

- Take a comprehensive look at early childhood education in APS.
- Explore the possibility of establishing one or more early childhood centers.
- Final recommendations will be presented at the beginning of June.

Guiding Questions

- What are the needs of our youngest learners?

- How are students with disabilities included in current programs?
- What are the essential components of a strong early childhood program?
- How do center-based and school-based models compare?

Working Group Priorities

- Review enrollment data.
- Examine how a center model might align with inclusive practices.
- Evaluate current programs — what is working and what can be improved.
- Develop draft recommendations.
- Present findings to the School Board.

Working Group Sessions

Session 1 — Guiding Principles

- Equity and access
- Continuity and consistency
- Inclusive practices
- Family engagement
- Supporting early childhood educators

Session 2 — PreK Landscape

- Imbalance between program capacity and enrollment
- Issues with access
- Existing program models
- Feasibility of early childhood centers

Session 3 — Inclusion

- Inclusive classroom models
- Potential benefits of an early childhood center

Session 4 — Current Program Strengths and Weaknesses

- Review of what is working well and where gaps exist across current programs.

Next Steps

- A survey and a PreK–2nd grade experience inventory will be distributed via ParentVue to families with APS program experience.
- Final recommendations will be delivered in June.
- The School Board has indicated interest in considering one or more early childhood centers.

Q&A and Discussion

- Members expressed concern about the limited level of family participation in the working group.

- It is unclear what the School Board originally asked the working group to deliver.
- Some attendees felt the working group appears predisposed toward creating an early childhood center.
- Questions were raised about how a new center would be financed, given existing budget pressures.
- More parent voices are needed — particularly to understand what would attract families of non-SWD peers to enroll.
- This conversation is not solely about Integration Station and students with disabilities; it concerns programming for all young children.
- Of the roughly 25 people in the working group, members asked how many are parents.
- Attendees asked whether working group notes can be shared with interested parents.
- Integration Station is well represented in the group by parents, administrators, and teachers.
- More information is needed from the parent population about what would draw them to APS programs and why families decline offered seats.
- Only about 800 children are enrolled in APS early childhood programs — members asked why APS is not serving more.
- Budget and feasibility study should be central to any recommendation.
- The working group has broad goals; establishing a center is not a foregone conclusion and remains an open question.

Access for Students with Behavioral Needs

- Concerns about SWDs with behavioral challenges being suspended or expelled from private preschool programs.
- A consistent suspension policy is needed across all early childhood programs.
- In APS, preschool students are generally not suspended; early intervention is prioritized and children are not removed from programs.

Integration Station as a Model of Excellence

- Members asked whether the working group is studying the practices that make Integration Station successful. Responses:
 - The model and instructional practices have been examined through Session 4.
 - Outcome data will be reviewed for students who have come through the various programs to assess academic trajectories and program impact.
 - Other programs are also strong — staffing, ratios, and programming differ at Integration Station because it is a center devoted entirely to early childhood education, so direct comparisons to CPP programs are not entirely fair.
- Has the working group examined why parents choose not to enroll their children in APS early childhood programs?
- APS has approximately 350 seats for SWDs, while around 60 children receive services at private preschools, typically with fewer service hours.
- Families can attend the June School Board meeting where recommendations will be presented and may sign up in advance for public comment.

Closing

Meeting adjourned. Members are encouraged to follow up on advocacy items, board vacancies, and upcoming events.