



***PTA believes that all children have the right to a quality public education, which allows each child the opportunity to reach their fullest potential. PTA is committed to the belief that all children can learn and that school and family collaboration is essential to successful academic and developmental growth.***<sup>1</sup>

Echoing this National PTA charge is Fairfax County SEPTA's mission of: ***Empowering and connecting families, students and educators to ensure students with disabilities develop their full potential as community members.***

Fairfax County SEPTA also believes that we have a responsibility to represent the unique needs of our membership and the local FCPS special education community. To this end, through extensive outreach via surveys, public feedback events and forums, review of our social media platform discussions, collaboration with our active advocacy committee, and direct email and phone communication with members of the community, the Fairfax County SEPTA Executive Board has identified several advocacy priorities that will guide our work to ensure that every FCPS student with a disability can achieve to their highest potential and that the professionals who work with them have the tools and resources to support them accordingly.

The following advocacy priorities will direct our advocacy for the upcoming 2023-2024 school year and beyond:

**Local Advocacy Priorities:**

- Literacy
  - FCPS is in the process of restructuring its approach to literacy instruction to align with the Science of Reading. SEPTA believes it is important to ensure that all students, across all settings, are taken into account during this transition, and that evidence-based practices are universally implemented with fidelity.
- Restraint & Seclusion
  - FCPS is now required to have ceased all use of seclusion. Despite the banning of seclusion, SEPTA continues to receive reports from parents and educators that it is being used in multiple schools and settings. To date, FCPS has not publicly posted an updated Behavior Education Plan for the 2023-2024 school year. SEPTA believes that it is critical to continue to monitor this process and provide feedback to ensure the safety of students and staff.
- Health and Wellbeing
  - SEPTA believes it is critical to provide input regarding the impact of FCPS COVID-related procedures and policies on students with disabilities including, but not limited to, ventilation and air quality.
  - Additional concerns regarding communicable diseases that affect school-age children will be monitored regarding the unique needs of students and staff with disabilities.
  - Mental health and emotional wellbeing concerns for students have been on the rise and SEPTA is dedicated to addressing the ways in which students and staff with disabilities are uniquely affected by these concerns. SEPTA is also committed to advocating for accessibility of FCPS services and programming meant to address mental health and wellness and the ways in which students and staff with disabilities are uniquely affected by these concerns.



- School refusal has increased nationally, disproportionately impacting students with disabilities. There is a lack of systemic knowledge and support in addressing this complex issue, which needs to be addressed consistently across the system using evidence-based approaches that partner with families rather than blaming and further alienating struggling students and households.
- Special Education Enhancement Plan and AIR Comprehensive Special Education Program Review (Independent Audit)
  - In the fall of 2022, FCPS received an extensive report with the results of the [AIR Study](#). FCPS is in the process of designing a [Special Education Enhancement Plan](#) to address issues identified by AIR. SEPTA believes it is important to provide input and feedback regarding the results and recommendations of the audit's findings.
- Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) Reform
  - FCPS' IEE process is biased against families and independent practitioners. SEPTA believes that multiple issues must be addressed including, but not limited to: release of reports to families, ability for practitioners to make recommendations based on student needs without fear of repercussion from FCPS, and pay equity for services rendered.
- IEP Reform and Parental Rights
  - SEPTA believes that a positive school-family relationship is built on mutual understanding of and respect for the legal provisions of the special education processes. As such, SEPTA believes that changes to any of these processes must be well publicized and explained such that families understand the rationale and legal parameters pertaining to the rights of students, families, and FCPS.
  - Fairfax County SEPTA believes that parent input into the special education of their children and the policies and procedures governing it is critical to student success. Any changes that are made to that process in FCPS should preserve the parental voice and parental rights.
- Adapted Curriculum
  - FCPS has limited support and resources for students accessing the adapted curriculum as well as limited curriculum materials for adaptive curriculum staff. SEPTA believes it is important to identify problems impacting this population and advocate for further support for these students and staff.
- School Year and Extended School Year (ESY) Readiness
  - SEPTA believes it is critical for school staff to be appropriately prepared for incoming student needs prior to the start of school or ESY in order to ensure that all students with disabilities are able to engage in a free appropriate public education (FAPE) beginning on the first day of school.
- Staff Equity and Support
  - SEPTA values the "T" in PTA as vital partners in supporting our children. Like our students, special education staff have unique needs. SEPTA believes it is critical to advocate for special education staff needs so that they may do their jobs effectively and with all necessary resources.
- Accessibility in All Curricula, Materials, and Facilities
  - SEPTA believes FCPS must invest in accessible curricula, supports, and resources to provide FAPE for all students including, but not limited to those who are: blind/low-vision, Deaf/hard of



hearing, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) users, students with advanced academic needs, as well as those using adapted curriculum.

- SEPTA believes FCPS must ensure that all students are able to access all FCPS facilities including, but not limited to, accessible parking spaces during high traffic times, emergency plans and procedures, playgrounds, school buildings, events, alternative, sensory-calming settings etc.
- Homebound & Home-based Services
  - Fairfax County SEPTA represents students with a multitude of issues that may temporarily or profoundly affect their ability to access the typical school environment. As such, many students with disabilities will need to access homebound or home-based education during the course of their educational careers. It is critical that FCPS build its capacity to serve homebound and home-based students in a timely manner and in a way that provides for their educational needs according to their IEPs. FCPS must also improve communication with families about homebound and home-based options, procedures, and policies, particularly pertaining to special education services.
- Identification, Services, and Placement for Select Populations
  - Various institutional challenges such as funding, space, and staffing affect inclusion opportunities.
  - Students with atypical learning profiles and those impacted by systemic bias are underidentified, misidentified and are improperly and routinely underserved. SEPTA believes it is important to promote consistency of procedures and cross-departmental communication and cooperation to provide holistic support for students who have overlapping or less commonly understood needs.

#### **State Level Advocacy Priorities that affect our local students:**

- Disproportionate Discipline and Criminalization of Students with Disabilities
  - Office of Civil Rights data shows that students with disabilities experience discipline at a disproportionate rate to their non-disabled peers. SEPTA believes it is critically important to investigate and address the reasons for that disproportionality and work to ensure that manifestations of our students' disabilities are not criminalized.
- Minimizing Large Age-Ranges in Self-Contained Classrooms
  - SEPTA believes it is important to research best practices and provide input/feedback on FCPS' practice of multi-grade level classrooms. We need to understand the impact these environments have on student achievement and best practice instruction.
- Improved Teacher and Administrator Training
  - General education, advanced academic, specials, and electives teachers, school administrators, and other school-based personnel receive little to no training or education regarding the instruction of students with disabilities, particularly regarding accessibility and literacy in inclusive settings. SEPTA believes that this is a systemic issue that must be addressed in higher education teacher and administrator preparation programs, as well as in teacher licensure requirements.
- IEE Reform
  - Safeguards, as described above, must be addressed at the State level to ensure compliance by

**Fairfax County Special Education PTA**  
**2023-2024 Advocacy Priorities**  
**Approved September 27, 2023**

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FCPS.

- Continued Dyslexia / Literacy Requirements
  - SB1865, ensuring that all students falling below the literacy screener benchmark are given intervention aligned with the Science of Reading, went into effect July 1, 2021. SEPTA will continue to follow and advocate for additional State legislation impacting literacy requirements.
- Mandatory Attendance Consequences
  - Dictated by the Commonwealth, some of these mandates negatively impact students with disabilities and students with chronic, acute, or complex medical needs, and their families.
  - These mandates may also negatively affect excellent schools serving high populations of students with complex needs

*Approved at the September 27, 2023, Fairfax County SEPTA General Membership Meeting.*

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<sup>1</sup>[National PTA Position Statement - The Education of Children with Disabilities](#) (Adopted) Adopted: by the 1996 Board of Directors, Reviewed: by the 2001 Convention Resolutions Committee, Amended: by the 2021 Board of Directors