

Fairfax County Special Education PTA
2025-2025 Advocacy Priorities
Adopted October 14, 2025 by the General Membership



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.¹

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

The following advocacy priorities (alphabetical by level of locality) will direct Fairfax County SEPTA advocacy for the upcoming 2025-2026 school year and beyond:

LOCAL:

- **Accessibility in All Curricula, Materials, and Facilities**
 - FCPS continues to refine its approach to literacy instruction to align with the Science of Reading and the Virginia Literacy Act. SEPTA believes it is important to ensure that all students, across all settings, are taken into account during this transition, that staff are sufficiently trained and supported, and that evidence-based practices are universally implemented with fidelity.
 - SEPTA believes FCPS must invest in accessible curricula, supports, resources, and specialized programming 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 students in self-contained, adapted curriculum classrooms.
 - SEPTA believes FCPS must ensure that all students have equitable access to all FCPS facilities, including, but not limited to: accessible parking spaces during high traffic times, emergency plans and procedures, playgrounds, cafeterias/lunchrooms, school buildings, events, sensory-calming spaces, etc.
 - SEPTA believes school staff must be appropriately prepared for incoming student needs prior to the start of the school year and extended school year (ESY) 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.
 - SEPTA believes that FCPS must strengthen its capacity to provide prompt and appropriate educational and therapeutic services to students whose disabilities may limit access to the typical school environment due to chronic health, behavioral, and/or disciplinary factors resulting in the need for homebound and home-based services. FCPS must address the overuse of suspensions that often drives the need for home-based instruction. FCPS must also improve clear, proactive communication with families about options, procedures, and special education rights related to these services.
 - SEPTA continues to support the implementation of changes to align with recommendations from the 2022 [AIR Study](#) which audited special education services across the system.
- **Health and Well-being**
 - SEPTA continues to receive concerning reports from families regarding the discipline of students with disabilities, and students with disabilities are still disproportionately represented in FCPS'



discipline data. SEPTA believes that it is critical to continue to monitor this process and provide feedback to ensure the safety of students and staff.

- SEPTA will continue to highlight the unique needs of students and staff with disabilities and chronic health concerns.
- Mental health and emotional well-being concerns for students continue at record high levels nationally, and SEPTA is dedicated to addressing the ways in which students and staff with disabilities are uniquely affected by these concerns, as seen in the [Fairfax County Youth Survey data](#). SEPTA is also committed to advocating for accessibility of FCPS services and programming addressing mental health and wellness.
- School avoidance and refusal continue to increase 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.

- **IEPs 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, consequences, and legal parameters pertaining to the rights of students, families, and FCPS.
- Fairfax County SEPTA believes that parent input into the special education services 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 family voice and rights.
- FCPS' Independent Educational Evaluation (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, the ability for practitioners to make recommendations based on student needs without fear of repercussion from FCPS, and pay equity for services rendered.
- 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 identification and support for students who have overlapping or less commonly understood needs.

- **Local Funding for FCPS**

- Various institutional challenges, such as funding, space, and staffing, affect students' ability to access the full continuum of special education services and inclusion opportunities. SEPTA will continue to advocate for full and increased funding from the Board of Supervisors to increase FCPS's ability to support special education staff and students.

- **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.
- SEPTA consistently fields concerns from staff regarding high case loads and a lack of adequate



staffing, support, and resources. We are concerned about the impact that these issues have on staff mental and physical health, in addition to students' access to services and curriculum. SEPTA believes it is critical to explore and support efforts to improve staff retention, recruitment, and training to address these concerns.

- Lack of planning time has long been a concern shared with SEPTA by special education staff across all school levels. SEPTA believes FCPS must improve equity in planning time between special education staff and general education staff at all school levels.
- SEPTA believes it is important to research best practices and provide input/feedback on FCPS's practice of multi-grade level classrooms and the impact these environments have on staff and student achievement.
- SEPTA often hears concerns from staff that they fear retaliation in various circumstances, even with the Ombuds office now in place. SEPTA continues to support efforts to change this aspect of FCPS culture so that staff feel safe in sharing their concerns or questions.
- SEPTA recognizes that there is an abundance of professional development required of teachers each year, and that the effectiveness of that training is often in question. SEPTA supports efforts to: review and revise professional development (PD) to better streamline PD requirements; to address questions related to mandatory vs. optional PD; and to improve the effectiveness of PD - both in-person and asynchronous.

STATE:

- **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 support legislation and procedures that ensure that manifestations of our students' disabilities are not criminalized.
- **Dyslexia / Literacy Instruction**
 - SEPTA will continue to follow and advocate for additional state legislation impacting literacy requirements across all placements and grade levels.
 - The Virginia Literacy Act requires the use of state-approved evidence-based literacy curriculum in core and supplemental instruction and intervention. SEPTA believes that these interventions must include materials that are accessible to all students, including students accessing the Virginia Essentialized Standards of Learning (VESOLs). Neither the VESOLs nor the current state-approved literacy interventions address the needs of this subset of the disability population.
- **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 neurodiversity-affirming instruction and support 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.
- **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.



- SEPTA supports amending [8VAC20-110-130](#) to include an exception for students actively communicating with their schools to receive homebound instruction, so that students seeking approval for homebound instruction are not automatically withdrawn at 15 days absent.
- **Minimizing Large Age-Ranges in Self-Contained Classrooms**
 - SEPTA believes that classrooms serving students in grades K-6 in a single room are not evidence-based best practice. We support state legislation that would restrict the age range of students permitted in self-contained classrooms.
- **Staffing**
 - The ratios for special education teacher-student caseload and specialized student support positions are set by the state legislature. SEPTA believes that increasing support positions and decreasing student caseloads will benefit students with disabilities, their families, and the staff who work with them.
 - State regulations have created a variety of processes to quickly certify special education teachers. SEPTA believes that new special educators require additional support and training in order to take on the full roles and responsibilities of teaching and case management.
- **VDOE Accountability and Processes**
 - SEPTA is concerned about the lack of consistent oversight from VDOE of local districts compliance with IDEA, State Complaint, and Due Process outcomes. These outcomes disproportionately weigh in favor of local districts. We support exploration into the cause(s) and resolution(s) of these disproportionalities.

NATIONAL:

- **Federal Funding**
 - SEPTA supports the federal government meeting its IDEA-enacted commitment of funding 40% of special education expenditures.
 - SEPTA supports unimpeded transfer of Congressionally appropriated funding to local districts and opposes federal freezes of such funding.
 - SEPTA opposes shifting federal IDEA funding to state block grants, as this shift reduces oversight, protection of rights, and equitable distribution of funds.
- **Dismantling of the Department of Education**
 - SEPTA opposes the dismantling of the DOE's special education provisions, roles, and responsibilities.
 - SEPTA opposes the reduction in and removal of the DOE Office of Civil Rights staff, as filing complaints to OCR is a vital federal resource for defending the civil rights of students with disabilities.