Fairfax County SEPTA

2026-2027 Advocacy Priorities

In line with National PTA's positions on students with disabilities, Fairfax County SEPTA's mission is to empower and connect families, students, and educators so that students with disabilities develop their full potential as community members. These priorities apply across all ages, grade levels, disability categories, educational settings, and programs, and encompass both existing and emerging issues within SEPTA's mission. SEPTA uses these priorities to guide advocacy efforts at local, state, and federal levels on issues affecting students with disabilities and their families.

Budget & Staffing

- Advocate for increased and timely, sustainable local, state, and federal funding—including full federal IDEA funding—to ensure staffing, accessible curricula, specialized programming, and resources necessary to provide FAPE for all students.
- Advocate for increased special education staffing, reduced teacher caseloads, and improved recruitment, retention, and meaningful training so staff have the resources to meet students' needs.
- Oppose federal freezes of congressionally appropriated funding to local school divisions.
- Oppose shifting federal IDEA funding to state block grants, which reduce oversight, protections of rights, and equitable distribution of funds.

Staff Training & Resources

- Advocate for adequate staffing, manageable caseloads, resources, and equitable planning time—including over the summer and before ESY—to support staff well-being and ensure students receive FAPE and access to services and curriculum from day one.
- Provide input to support the implementation of the new limits on multi-age classrooms.
- Advocate for a safe, supportive workplace culture where staff can raise concerns without fear of retaliation.
- Support streamlined, effective professional development that prioritizes staff needs and improves outcomes.
- Advocate for neurodiversity-affirming disability, accessibility, and literacy training in educator preparation programs and licensure requirements.

Accessibility & Inclusion

- Advocate for evidence-based literacy instruction aligned with the Science of Reading and Virginia Literacy Act, with accessible materials, targeted interventions, and trained staff to support all students with disabilities across grades, placements, and settings, including VESOL learners.
- Advocate for equitable access to all FCPS facilities, programs, and activities, including accessible parking, emergency procedures, playgrounds, cafeterias, and sensory-calming spaces.
- Advocate for accessible mental health and wellness services and programming that address the needs of students and staff with disabilities.
- Support implementation of recommendations from the 2022 AIR Study to strengthen special education services across FCPS.

Adopted by the SEPTA Membership on November 5, 2026

Related Services and Evaluations

- Advocate for appropriate, timely evaluations for related services and address concerns regarding evaluation denials for students that have clear deficits in the area(s) of concern.
- Advocate for equitable access to related services based on individual student needs and review service availability and delivery to identify and address gaps.
- Advocate for a fair, transparent, and equitable Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) process, including timely release of reports to families, practitioners' ability to make recommendations based on student needs without fear of FCPS reprisal, and equitable compensation for services rendered.

Discipline & Disproportionality

- Advocate for stronger monitoring and addressing the disproportionate discipline of students with disabilities through root-cause analysis and equitable, safety-focused practices that recognize disability-related needs and prevent criminalization.
- Advocate for evidence-based, consistent, family-centered approaches to school avoidance and refusal that address underlying needs without blaming or further alienating students and families.
- Advocate for reducing the overuse of suspensions that contribute to exclusion from instruction and increase the need for home-based services.
- Advocate for reducing changes to Student Rights and Responsibilities (SR&R) to once every five years, allowing time for meaningful public engagement, uniform training, shared understanding, and continuity.

Educational Technology, AI, & Data Privacy

- Protect student and family privacy through transparent data practices, minimization of data sharing with technology providers, and secure handling of personally identifiable information (PII).
- Promote equitable, responsible, and accountable use of AI in education, ensuring AI technologies do not exacerbate existing inequalities within the education system, and reducing the spread of misinformation through meaningful family and educator input, professional development, oversight, and safeguards against bias—especially in special education decisions and IEP development.
- Advocate for accessible, evidence-based educational technology that meets the needs of students with disabilities, including those with IEPs and Section 504 plans, and supports rather than replaces essential educator expertise.
- Advocate for cell phone, device, and peripheral policies that protect access and privacy for students who rely on phones or connected devices for medical, mental health, safety, self-regulation, education support, or communication needs, including augmentative and alternative communication (AAC).

Family Engagement & Procedural Safeguards

- Advocate for transparent, clearly communicated special education process changes that preserve family rights, input, and Virginia's existing parental consent protections in the IEP process.
- Advocate for consistent procedures and cross-departmental collaboration to improve identification and services for students with atypical learning profiles, overlapping needs, or systemic barriers.
- Advocate for shifting the burden of proof in special education due process hearings to school divisions.

Equity, Individualized Supports, & Educational Accountability

- Advocate for underserved and underrepresented students, including AAC users, bridge learners, twice-exceptional students, and others whose needs may be overlooked in existing policies and programming.
- Advocate for timely, appropriate homebound and home-based educational and therapeutic services, with clear family communication about options, procedures, and special education rights.
- Advocate for individualized, evidence-based education and attendance policies that preserve access for students facing disability-, health-, or school-avoidance-related barriers, protect those seeking homebound instruction, and prevent medically necessary absences from affecting accreditation.
- Advocate for consistent VDOE oversight of IDEA compliance and state complaint and due process outcomes.
- Oppose dismantling the U.S. Department of Education's special education responsibilities and reductions to the Office for Civil Rights staffing.

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