



Chelmsford Special Education Parent Advisory Council

Presentation for the School Committee Spring 2018

Summary

- About Chelmsford SEPAC
- 2017-18 Review
- Benefits of an active SEPAC
- Children's Rights
- Concerns and Recommendations
- 2018-19 SEPAC Goals

What is a SEPAC?

A SEPAC is a parent run organization, but it is not a PTO.

- Since 1986 MA state law has required all public school districts to maintain a SEPAC
- The school district is charged with assisting the SEPAC in maintaining its operation and activities
- SEPACs may engage in fundraising activities, but it is not required to do so
- Funds raised by the SEPAC must be deposited with the municipal treasurer and held as a separate account for the SEPAC
- The SEPACs must comply with the Open Meeting Law, including officers being sworn in by the Town Clerk and signing certification of knowledge of the OML

SEPAC Responsibilities

- Advising the school committee on matters that pertain to the education and safety of students with disabilities
- Meeting regularly with school officials to participate in the planning, development and evaluation of the school committee's special education programs
- SEPAC's are required to establish by-laws regarding officers and operational procedures



SEPAC Advisory Duties

- Collaborate with the school district to provide the required Basic Rights of Special Education training for parents and professionals annually.
- SEPAC may organize and host other trainings that are of interest to families and staff involved with special education.
- Provide an annual written report to the administration and school committee regarding special education within the district
- In the course of its duties the SEPAC shall receive assistance from the school committee without charge, upon reasonable notice, and subject to the availability of staff and resources

Chelmsford SEPAC Mission Statement

- Inform parents about their rights regarding Special Education
- Disseminate information about programs and services in the school system
- Help direct parents to advocacy and support services
- Inform parents about special education legislation
- Provide input to the school committee on the district's special education programs

SEPAC Leadership & Members

Co-Chairs Alison Barnes Kristen Eriksen

Treasurer Bethany Rappoli

Secretary Laurie McCarron

School Liaisons Heather Sexton Kendra Barbanti Cara Dellaterra Laurie McCarron Kate Henderson

Jamie Dillon Bethany Rappoli Amy Domow Bethany Morrill

Members Voting membership is open to parents and guardians of children with disabilities who are receiving services through the in the Chelmsford Public School District.
General membership is welcome to any resident of Chelmsford or person affiliated with the Chelmsford School System



Highlights from 2017-18 School Year

- Meeting dates established for the 2017-18 in August
- First official meeting following the Guidelines for SEPAC held in September
- Wright's Law workshop in October
- Panel discussion on Anxiety, Social-Emotional Challenges, Social Skills, and Behavior as Communication in November
- First parent elected board member in January
- Chelmsfordsepac.weebly.com published in February
- Visions of Community conference in March
- Basic Rights in Special Education workshop in March
- Coordinated Program Review SE32 requirements fulfilled by March 16 deadline
- SEPAC Resource Section at Chelmsford Public Library announced in April
- Lending a Hand community event in April
- Chelmsford Special Needs Parent Support Group introduced in April
- Reading workshop co-hosted with Decoding Dyslexia of Chelmsford in May
- Hosted "Zen Den" at Byam's Walk-A-Thon in May

Meeting Summary

September

- o Approximately 30 attendees
- o Determined that standing by-laws would be used until an elected parent board could review and revise
- o Established that there would be SEPAC school liaisons and a nomination committee
- o Shared resources: special education process, contact information for community organizations

October

- o Superintendent overview
- o School Committee Liaison introduction
- o Nomination committee and process for electing parent board established

November

- o Coordinated Sib-Shop with Simply Social Kids for January
- o Discussions to answer parent questions related to CPS Budget and special education programming

Meeting Summary Con't

January

- o Elected parent board: chair position filled
- o Established SEPAC Facebook rules to protect the identity of students
- o Discussion of SEPAC Structure, including: advising the school committee, providing support to parents, and community outreach projects

March 12

- o Elected parents to fill the remaining board positions: co-chair, treasurer, secretary
- o Officially announced SEPAC website
- o Established subcommittee for: Bylaw Revision, School Committee Presentation
- o Shared Resources: Guest speaker from Decoding Dyslexia of Chelmsford

March 27

- o Shared Resources: Guest speaker from AANE, handouts from Vision of Community
- o Q&A with Amy Reese

April 24

- o Shared Resources: Guest speakers from Chelmsford Special Education Parent Support Group
- o Began discussions for outreach programs, fundraising
- o Announced positions that would open in May and planned election procedures

Public Relations

- o Social Media: "SEPAC - Chelmsford, MA, USA" community on Facebook
- o Website: chelmsfordsepac.weebly.com
- o Networking: MassPAC, PAC-2-PAC, Regional SEPAC Leadership, Decoding Dyslexia
- o Community Support: Friends of Robert's Field, Chelmsford Public Library, Chelmsford Special Education Parent Support Group



Budget Report

The SEPAC budget for the 2017-2018 school year was \$500.

- o Funds managed by the District

Funds allocated to provide for the District's MassPAC membership

- o Among other benefits, membership provides for the annual Basic Rights Training that Districts are required to provide.

As a new SEPAC, we are in the process of exploring options for obtaining additional funds.

- o This may include establishing a Friends of the Chelmsford SEPAC organization.
- o SEPACs may but are not required to attempt to raise funds to support their operations.

Benefits of an active SEPAC

The benefits of an active SEPAC from Regional feedback

- puts the school district in compliance with the law
- equal knowledgeable parents - which can mean better IEP meetings and possibly better outcomes for the students.
- can offer exceptional parent engagement opportunities
- can provide actionable input to program development, with the potential to strengthen and improve in district programs - this has the potential of reducing out of district placements and related transportation costs.

Children's Rights

There are 4 major laws that relate to children with special needs and education - about accommodations, instruction and services.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (including LRA and EI)

Massachusetts Special Ed Law and Regulations (formally known as ch. 766)

American Disabilities Act

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act



Advisory Concerns

- (1) Communication surrounding special education services can lack consistency, clarity, timeliness
- (2) Parents feel disconnected
- (3) Reactive approach to addressing student needs
- (4) Coordinated Program Review included many items that were rated as "partially implemented" or "not implemented" for special education and civil rights standards

SEPAC Recommendations

- (1) Maintain an active SEPAC. SEPAC information openly distributed to parents throughout the special education process and throughout the school year. Collaborate with SEPAC to provide parent workshops, including Basic Rights. Provide information to parents on the standardized protocols for specialized transportation and extended school year programming.
- (2) Collaborate with SEPAC to provide supports and resources to build relationships between parents, familiarize parents with education processes, and increase opportunities for families with out of district placements to feel connected to our community.
- (3) Proactive approach to addressing student needs.
- (4) Continue efforts to achieve the goals listed on the CPR.

2018-19 SEPAC Goals

- (1) Provide SEPAC community outreach at Open House
- (2) Host True Colors Workshop
- (3) Attend A.P.P.L.E. Institute
- (4) Complete Special Education Needs Assessment Survey
- (5) Apply for ALEC Grant
- (6) Continue building a collaborative relationship with administration and school committee
- (7) Establish SEPAC guidelines for open dialogue between parents and collaborative dialogue with the District
- (8) Continue building a collaborative relationship with PTO and BSA groups

