

Rhode Island's *Special Education Advisory Committees* Technical Assistance Guidebook

Adapted from *Advocacy In Action: A Guide to Local Special Education Parent Advisory Councils* from the Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2019



Special Education Advisory Network (SEAN) Meeting
Thursday, November 7, 2019
Chelo's Post Road, Warwick

NEW ADDRESS:

Rhode Island Parent Information Network
300 Jefferson Boulevard
Warwick, RI 02888

Advocacy In Action: A Guide to Local Special Education Parent Advisory Councils

from the Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2019

- Produced under U.S. Department of Education Programs by the *Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR)*
- Authorization has been granted to reproduce
- Surveyed over 40 Parent Center leaders and staff
- Technical assistance for districts and schools



<https://sepacguide.parentcenterhub.org/>

How to Use This Guide

- **Part I** - Establishing and running an effective SEPAC
- **Part II** - For staff at PTIC's (parent centers)
- **Part III** - Resources and tools

Rhode Island's Basic Requirements

- Must meet minimally 4 times per year
- Must have written agendas and minutes
- Majority of members are parents of students with disabilities (at least 51%)
- Diverse committee
- Annual report at end of school year
- *Increase involvement of parents of students with disabilities in district policymaking and decision making*

How is a SEPAC different from a PTO, an advocacy group or parent support group?

A SEPAC is **NOT**:

- an advocacy group, which focuses on upholding rights for children and advocating for change *from outside the system*;
- a limited effort focused on a *single issue or immediate concern*; or
- a Special Education PTO or PTA, which might plan carnivals, classroom activities, fundraisers, or other events.



An effective SEPAC that uses parental input can:



- Help improve educational outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities.
- Help identify unmet needs.
- Help shape the development of programs, services and policies; as well as improve district culture.

What does 'parent-driven' mean?

Parent-driven means that ...

- Parents determine priorities
- Can offer strategic solutions

Parent-driven does **NOT** mean that ...

- ***Parents do everything!***

The school leaders themselves:

- How can I (district) *support families as they offer advice* and guidance to improve local policy and practices?
- How does our district/school demonstrate that *it values parent's perspectives?*
- How can the district provide *support and structure to the group*, while preserving parent leadership?

SEPAC Quick Start Guide (page 16)



- Best practices
- Strategies for parent engagement
- Communication planning
- Roles and responsibilities
- Diversity is vital to a successful SEPAC.

PART II – Supporting SEPAC's (pages 38 – 51)

- The role of parent centers – SEAN meetings
- RISEAC membership
- Examples from other states, including Rhode Island.
- Leverage requirements for ESSA's emphasis on parent engagement to help establish local SEPAC's (page 48)



PART III – Resources (pages 53 – 67)

- Website resources
- SEPAC Start Up Checklist
- Sample – job descriptions
- Mission statement
- Action sheets



SEPAC On-line Toolkit



An effective SEPAC is more than a meeting – it is an approach and a mindset that truly values the advice of parents.



"When parent advisors are valued and engaged through a local SEPAC, they can work together with school district staff and community leaders to improve education, not only for those with disabilities, but for all children." — Debra A. Jennings (CPIR)

For more information about RIPIN and the other workshops/trainings offered, please contact us at:

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www.ripin.org



RIPIN has moved to:
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