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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- Website: www.ripin.org

RIPIN has moved to:
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