

Serving on Local Special Education Advisory Committees

*How to be an effective parent representative on
Rhode Island special education committees*



Curriculum adapted by
Rhode Island Parent Information Network
300 Jefferson Boulevard, Suite 300
Warwick, RI 02888
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Curriculum adapted by RIPIN 2017 from the National Technical Assistance Center at PACER Center©2008, PACER Center

Why are Special Education Advisory Committees (SEAC) needed?

- Parent involvement and parent-professional collaboration *key factors in improving outcomes for students with disabilities.*
- The mechanism put in place to provide the opportunity for collaboration to take place is the state-level Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC).
- Rhode Island's legal requirement gives ALL districts the responsibility and authority to *ensure parents have the opportunity to be involved.*



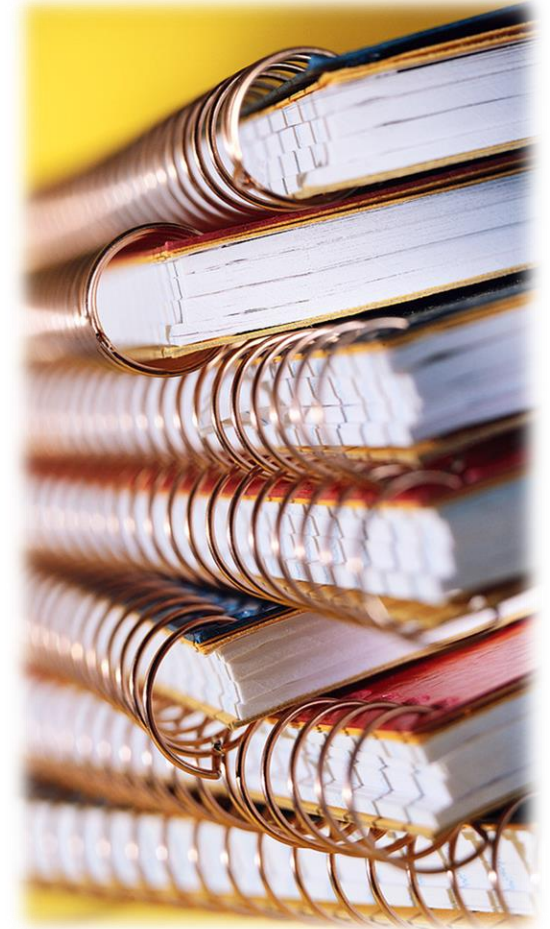
Why might I want to be involved?



- Increase parent involvement in your district
- Build support for special education
- Foster community understanding of special education
- Learn about resources
- Research has shown that parent involvement helps improve student achievement.

What must I be willing to do?

- Share your experience as a parent
- Contribute to discussions about the needs of families in your district:
 - Basic understanding of laws and rules
 - Willing to learn



What do I need to know?



- Basics of state and federal special education law
- Education and special education policies in your school district
- Who the decision-makers are in your area

How will the committee operate?

Important to know:

- Who coordinates the meetings
- Who determines the agenda
- Who receives the committee's recommendations
- The expectations for follow-through with recommendations



How can I be an effective committee member?



- Know your role - request a job description, if available
- Consider your ability to fully participate when agreeing to join the committee
- Shift perspective to long-range, systems change issues for all children, not just one

How can I be an effective committee member?

Become familiar with:

- Outcomes of children with disabilities in your district
- Staff and parent concerns that affect outcomes for children with disabilities



What might I do on the committee?

- Support activities on behalf of students with disabilities
- Help build cooperative relationships between general and special education
- Support the special education budget at school committee and school board meetings
- Advise district policymakers
- Recommend priorities for the district's strategic plan
- Support school staff in developing or improving special education services
- Ask questions

What might I do on the committee?

- Identify and distribute information on promising practices
- Help other parents in the district understand special education
- Help educators understand the perspectives of parents of students who receive special education services
- Serve as sounding board for parent and professional concerns
- Develop advocacy strategies for parent groups and the district
- Recommend district improvements, based on local student evaluation data

Issues to Consider: *District*

- What major issues your district faces, if any
- Whether the issues affect the education of students with disabilities
- How your committee can help resolve the issues



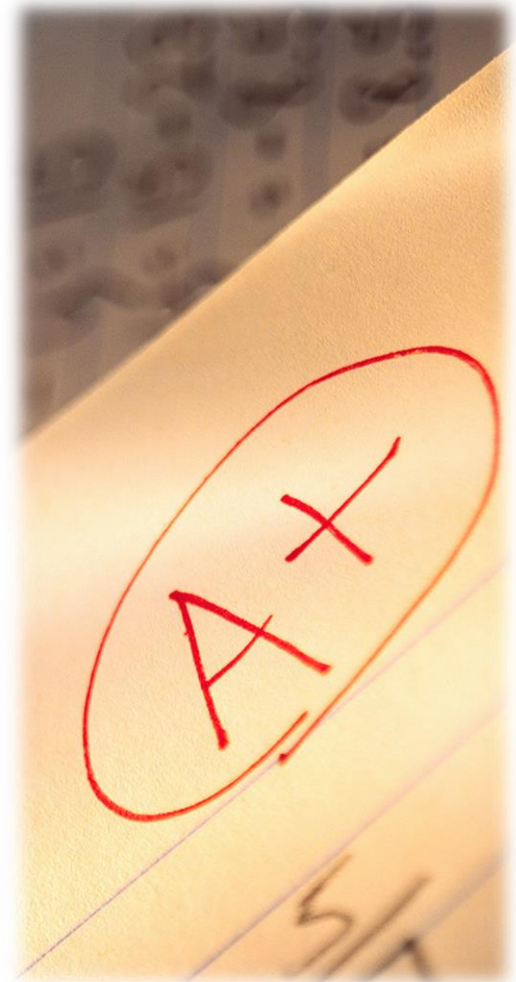
Issues to Consider: *SPP/APR*

- Review your state's Annual Performance Report (APR) and State Performance Plan (SPP)
- Compare your district's outcomes on the Part B and Part C indicators with the state average and SPP goals



Issues to Consider: *Outcomes*

- The numbers of special education students in the district
- Current outcomes for students with disabilities in the district
- The percentage of students who receive services primarily in regular education settings
- The percentage of students who receive services in segregated settings



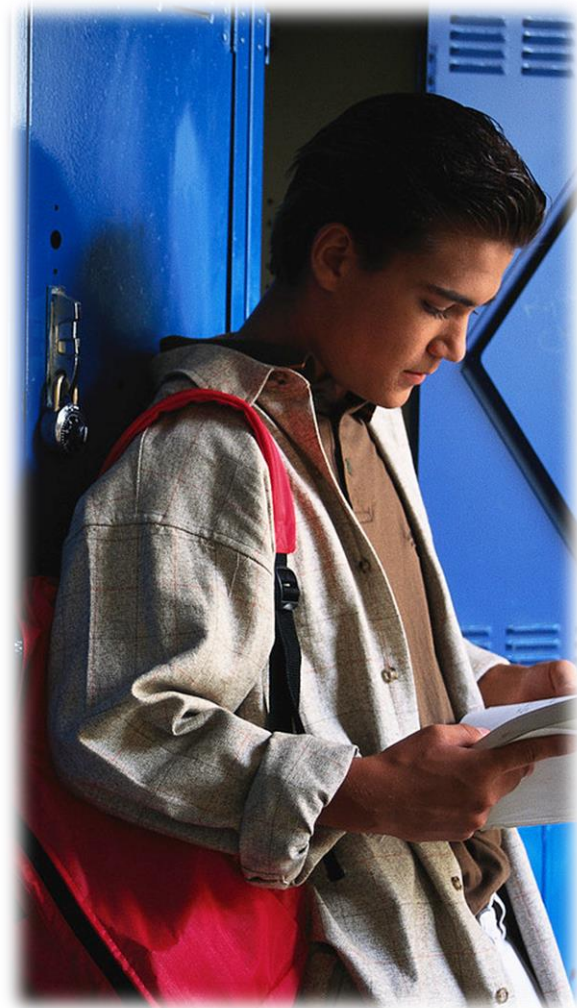
Issues to Consider: *Graduation Rates*

- The percentage of all students in the district that graduate on time (normal timelines)
- The district's dropout rate
 - Students without disabilities
 - Students with disabilities
- Any steps your district is taking to reduce dropout and increase graduation rates



Issues to Consider: *Discipline*

- Student suspension rates in your district (for students who do and do not have disabilities)
- Number of students placed in Interim Alternative Educational Settings (IAES)
- Major behavior concerns that result in IAES placement, and district planning to address the concerns



How can I help other parents?

- Help the district to understand the need for parent-friendly materials
- Represent all parents of children with disabilities in your role on the committee
- Ensure appropriate district communication with families of children with disabilities
- Support high expectations for their child
- Model home-school collaboration and respect
- Share information with parents about whom to contact for district information or to have their rights explained

What resources are available to help me?

- Your local Parent Center:
www.ripin.org
- National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education:
www.ncpie.org
- Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships:
www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/center.htm
- U.S. Department of Education's "Especially for Parents" site:
www.ed.gov/parents/landing.jhtml
- Building the Legacy: IDEA 2004:
idea.ed.gov/



Summary

- You have an opportunity to make a difference in your school district
- You do not need to be an expert – just willing to learn
- Building positive parent-school partnerships will help all children



For more information about RIPIN and the other workshops we offer, please contact us at:

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