Serving on Local Special Education Advisory Committees

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

Curriculum adapted by
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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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