

Welcome to SEPAC Summer School!



WEEK 1 - July 7
TOPIC: The Role of a SEPAC

Homework: please review

DESE Guidance for SEPACs -
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/pac/>

SEPAC Law and regulations



Presented in partnership with Early News, LLC



FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The Role of a SEPAC (Special Education Parent Advisory Council)

Leslie M. Leslie / MassPAC Project Director

INFORMING, EDUCATING, EMPOWERING FAMILIES

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A Seat at the Table

A local SEPAC provides direct input to school leaders about policies, programs, practices, and services that have an impact on students with disabilities and their families.



Its purpose is to advise, advocate, and offer guidance, not to decide policy.

- SEPACs not required under IDEA
- MA state requirement
- Law requires each SEPAC to set their own by-laws and operational procedures
- “Parent Advisory Council”

“SEPACs have tremendous potential to have a positive impact on special education programs in a school district ... and add an important voice to a school district’s dialogue and decision-making.”

DESE Guidance for SEPACs



From [www.idea.org](#) with thanks to [www.nse.org](#)

What the Law Says ...

SEPAC duties shall include but not be limited to:

- **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 special education programs.

Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 71B, Section 3



From [www.idea.org](#) with thanks to [www.nse.org](#)

Annual Rights Workshop



SEPACs are asked to cooperate with their school district in the **district's obligation** to conduct an annual workshop for families on rights under state and federal special education laws.



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Benefits of an Effective SEPAC

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

Advocacy in Action/Center for Parent Information & Resources

- Outreach
- Positive Relationships
- Collaborative Problem Solving
- System Change Based on Input
- Trusted Source of Information
- Information Sharing
- Improved Services and Programs
- Deepened Trust



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Advising the District

“advising the school committee on matters that pertain to the education and safety of student with disabilities”

What is an Advisory Group?



<http://www.servingongroups.org/>

Examples of advisory group actions:

- Making recommendations
- Providing background
- Furnishing pros and cons
- Listing appropriate questions

Board will review, though it is not obligated to follow the advice.



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Addressing Issues

INDIVIDUAL

Taking action on behalf of a single child is “individual advocacy”



SYSTEM

Looking at challenges and issues that affect more than one student or family is “systemic advocacy”

An effective SEPAC invites, collects, and coordinates individual stories and perspectives from parents.

Then, it looks to see patterns or trends that can be addressed through system policies, programs or services.



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Meeting regularly

“meeting regularly with school officials”

- Monthly or quarterly meeting with special education administrator
- Sit on Superintendent's parent leaders group
- Attend School Committee meetings
- Invite School Committee members to attend SEPAC meetings, trainings and/or events

Best Practice:

SEPACs should submit an annual report (in writing and/or in person) to the School Committee.



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Participating

“meet regularly with school officials to **participate** in the planning, development and evaluation of ... special education programs.

Planning & Development Activities:

- Research a specific issue
- Needs Assessments
- Make recommendations
- Select a curriculum
- Conduct trainings

Evaluation Activities:

- Collect and analyze data
- Report results
- Create an Action Plan
- Continuous monitoring for progress and improvement



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Other SEPAC Activities

SEPACs need to gather information from parents and use the input to advise the district.

- Website, brochure, email chain, flyers, Facebook page
- Attend school and community events
- Host a “Listening Night” – Advise the SEPAC!
- Send SEPAC information with IEP Meeting invite
- Host workshops and lectures on topics of interest to parents



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Turning Ideas into Action

The success of the SEPAC hinges on its ability to shape the input from families into concrete issues and to direct that information to district decision makers.

Goal: positive changes in services, policies and programs.

The SEPAC needs a structured process to review input and develop priorities: focus on 1-3 critical issues per year.

*Not all parent input requires SEPAC action.



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Role of MassPAC

MassPAC at the Federation is the statewide organization providing

- information,
- training, and
- networking opportunities

to Massachusetts special education parent advisory councils (SEPACs) and the professionals who collaborate with them.



After almost 11 years as a private non-profit organization, MassPAC became part of the Federation in July 2009.

Annual membership runs from July 1st through June 30th.

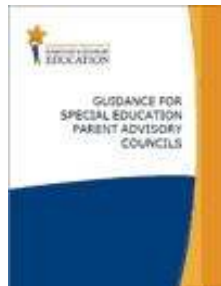
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Homework: Guidance Documents



GUIDANCE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION
PARENT ADVISORY COUNCILS

March 2010

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/pac/>

SEPAC Law and Regulations

M.G.L. c.71B, Section 3 and Section 1C
603 CMR 28:07(4) and 28:03(1)(a)(iv)



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Questions?

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