

To: Concord School Committee
Concord-Carlisle School Committee

Date: May 24, 2016

Subject: 2016 SEPAC Annual Report

The Concord Public and Concord-Carlisle Special Education Parent Advisory Council (Concord SEPAC) respectfully submits the attached report of its activities from September 2015-May 2016 and its recommendations to the School Committee

Concord SEPAC Board:

Mary Tambor, Co-president
Becky Robichaud, Co-president
Joanne Jensen, Secretary
Aiyana Currie, Treasurer
Donna Roman, Publicity Chair
Heather Tunnecliffe, Events Chair
Tali Ditman, Membership Chair

Annual Report of the Concord Public and Concord-Carlisle Regional SEPAC

The mission of the Concord Public and Concord-Carlisle Regional SEPAC is to:

- Provide education and information to parents and the broader community on special education issues and services
- To establish better understanding of, respect for, and support of special education
- To work with the Concord Public School District and Concord-Carlisle Regional School to ensure that students' needs are met under Massachusetts Special Education regulations 603 CMR28.07(4) * and other applicable laws.

Since 1986, Massachusetts Special Education Law has required school districts to establish a SEPAC and charges the SEPAC to advise the school committee and administration on "...matters that pertain to the education and safety of students with disabilities."

Addressing Our Mission

Education:

Each year we hold workshops for the district parents. Through the efforts of our Publicity Chair and our aim to promote the SEPAC as an organization that serves the needs of all children on an IEP, not just those children with the most significant needs, we have increased our attendance at all of our events.

1. Parent Workshops

- a. Each fall, the SEPAC hosts a Back-to-School Coffee with a presentation by the Director of Special Education. It is our hope to expand the presentation to include a panel of special education staff and/or administrators.
- b. In January, the SEPAC along with the district, hosts an IEP Basic Rights Workshop. The district is required to offer this workshop each year. The purpose of this workshop is to help parents be the best advocate for their child through the IEP process.
- c. This spring, we hosted the first in a series of Transition Workshops presented by Heather Mahoney, the Transition Specialist at CCHS. "Transition" is a term in special education that refers to post-secondary planning for any student on an IEP beginning at 14 years of age. This series of Transition Workshops will continue next year.
- d. Our goal is to plan one or two additional workshops each year addressing topics most requested by parents in our community.

** "(4) Parent advisory participation. Each school district shall create a district wide parent advisory council offering membership to all parents of eligible students and other interested parties. The parent advisory council duties shall include but not be limited to: advising the district 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 the school district's special education programs. The parent advisory council shall establish bylaws regarding officers and operational procedures, and in the course of its duties, the parent advisory council shall receive assistance from the district without charge, upon reasonable notice, and subject to the availability of staff and resources."*

2. Monthly Newsletter
 - a. Every parent or guardian of a child on an IEP receives this newsletter with information about upcoming SEPAC meeting and events, timely notifications, as well as tips or the latest research on a topic parents may find helpful or interesting.
3. Website
 - a. Information about our SEPAC can be found on our website concordsepac.org. In addition, there are resources on testing and outside organizations and professionals that can support parents and children.
4. Accept The Challenge
 - a. In the 2016-2017 school year we plan to broaden our education mission to students and teachers. In collaboration with the district and the elementary school principals, we are working to bring the Accept The Challenge program into our three elementary schools.

Accept The Challenge is a program that through simple classroom activities promotes understanding and empathy of individual differences and challenges, while teaching students to learn to work as a community to support one another. The program concludes with an assembly where a presenter talks with the students about what they have learned, and shares information about famous and successful people who have prospered despite their challenges.

Outreach

The Concord SEPAC believes that all students benefit from the supports that are introduced into the schools for students with specific needs. To that end we reach out to the broader community to establish better understanding, respect for, and support of special education through various means.

1. Social Media
 - a. We have an active Facebook Page that is continually growing with followers. By posting events, articles and positive messages our aim is to bring our community together. It also serves as a vehicle for connecting our SEPAC members with their SEPAC and outside organizations that share a similar mission.
2. School Liaisons
 - a. This position has been rejuvenated in an effort to increase communication and connections between each school and the SEPAC board. The liaison is an essential part of growing membership, creating school support for SEPAC, and fostering our ability to support parents and families.
3. Out of District (OOD) Networking Group
 - a. Parents of students attending out-of-district schools can feel disconnected from the community in which they live. The SEPAC felt it was important to find a way for those parents to connect with each other. Through monthly coffees and social opportunities, these parents have had the chance to connect, share information, and develop supportive relationships. A future goal is to help their children also make connections in their hometown.

Concord Integrated Preschool (CIPS) Working Committee

The CIPS Working Committee was formed by the SEPAC in April 2016. Serving on the committee is:

- CIPS Teachers (Jen DeFrancesco, Nancy McGregor)
- CIPS Specialist (Donna Balmuth)
- CIPS Special Education Parent (Casey Atkins, Co-Chair)
- CIPS Community Parent (Meghan Vigne)
- CIPS Past Special Education Parent (Anne Kilroy, Co-Chair)
- CIPS Past Community Parent (Susan Deysher)
- SEPAC Member at Large (Becky Robichaud)
- Community Member at Large (Kara Stokes)

The CIPS Working Committee will serve April 2016 until April of 2017 with the purpose of providing recommendations along with the rationale to support those recommendations, to the Concord Public School District on matters pertaining to the Concord Integrated Preschool. The goals of the committee are to focus on assessment of classroom space, the integrated model, the playground, and the programming structure.

The SEPAC and CIPS Working Committee have been working with Jessica Murphy and appreciate the close attention Jessica has given to addressing the most immediate of the preschool concerns.

Facilities-

1. Classroom

a. To address the lack of current space needed to accommodate increasing enrollment of students requiring services and to maintain the integrated model at the preschool, the administration has created an additional classroom that will be a full day program for special education students. This classroom will be fully integrated in the morning and substantially separate in the afternoon to more closely address the specific needs of those special education students. To accommodate this additional classroom they have relocated the occupational therapy area and the sensory motor room, and added an ABA/Multipurpose room. With the addition of the new classroom the nurse's hours have been increased to full time.

2. Playground

a. Teachers and parents have expressed their concerns in regard to the safety and accessibility of the playground. The committee is working with the teachers and administration on addressing these issues. The committee welcomes the immediate response by the administration to install a security gate at the CIPS playground. A committee tour of the playground is planned to assess safety and accessibility with a follow up tour scheduled with Jessica Murphy and Diana Rigby. Past plans for an upgrade of the CIPS playground are being reviewed and playground codes and standards being discussed.

Integrated Model

Studies have shown that the inclusion model is ideal for learning as it provides developmentally appropriate, high-quality, educational opportunities to students with diverse abilities. The administration, teachers, and parents acknowledge this and are committed to maintaining said model. To help the committee better understand state regulations and how other districts implement their integrated preschool program, Alex Chatfield, Director of Early Intervention of Minuteman ARC researched and presented his findings at a recent committee meeting. The committee has a better understanding of the benefits and challenges of maintaining the integrated model and agree that the SEPAC's statement (see below) on the issue was well thought out.

"The Concord SEPAC believes a 50:50 Special Education/Community model is the ideal ratio for an integrated preschool. However because of rolling admissions with the Special Education community, SEPAC acknowledges that this ratio can fluctuate. The SEPAC encourages the Concord Public School District to continue with the current integrated model and to create a strategic plan to accommodate the anticipated influx of students on an IEP to sustain said model."

The committee is still concerned about space and the sustainability of the integrated model and would like to continue this discussion with the administration.

The committee would like to note that the CIPS teachers and service providers do an amazing job of providing a rich and exciting curriculum and classroom environment while adjusting for the needs and abilities of each child. Furthermore, the committee recognizes that comparing programs with other towns can be difficult given the fact that each student population has different needs.

Parent Survey

In April 2016, the SEPAC conducted a survey of parents with children on IEPs to assess parent satisfaction with special education services. The survey was constructed using Qualtrics and a link to the survey was emailed to parents; results were examined using Excel and SPSS. One hundred and forty-five parents/guardians responded to the survey

Concord Integrated Preschool	12
Alcott Elementary School	14
Thoreau Elementary School	16
Willard Elementary School	20
Sanborn Middle School	9
Peabody Middle School	11
Concord-Carlisle Regional High School	41
Other (Out-of-District, private school)	22

Using a 5-point scale, parents rated their agreement with 11 statements. Responses ranged from “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree” and were coded from +2 (“Strongly agree”) to -2 (“Strongly disagree”) to allow for data analysis. A response of “Neither agree nor disagree” was coded as a 0. Overall results showed that parent satisfaction is high, with averages (means) on all the questions greater than 0. However, there was a lot of variability in responses, which some parents being dissatisfied (somewhat and strongly disagree responses, -1 and -2 respectively) to questions on the survey. This variability can be seen by looking at the errors bars on the graphs below. An examination of responses on all questions showed that parent satisfaction was lowest in the middle school, followed by the high school, demonstrating a need to improve communication and supports particularly in these schools. In addition, responses to an open-ended question asking for “Comments” yielded several parents requesting increased communication between members of the team and families in these schools.

DESE Report Card

1. Understanding the Challenge
 - a. Currently students on IEPs make up approximately 15.6% of the Concord Carlisle Regional School District and 18.3% of the Concord Public School District. With a wide variety of disabilities no one program can meet the educational needs of all those students. We are fortunate to have a district that values students with disabilities and works with families to tailor each student’s program according to their needs through their IEPs.
2. Measure of Success
 - a. There are many ways to measure success for students, and while we may not all agree, the state measures the success of students through the standardized testing of MCAS and PARCC.

Each year school districts are issued an accountability report (district report card) based on the standardized test scores and their Progress and Performance Index (PPI). The annual PPI is a measure of the improvement that a group makes toward its own targets over a two-year period on up to seven indicators: narrowing proficiency gaps (in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science); growth (ELA and mathematics); the annual dropout rate; and the cohort graduation rate. The cumulative PPI, which you see on the y axis of our graphs, is the average of a group's annual PPIs over four years, weighting the most recent years the most (1-2-3-4). For a school to be considered to be making progress toward narrowing proficiency gaps, the cumulative PPI for both the "all students" group and “high needs students” must be 75 or higher.

3. Collaborating to Make Improvements
 - a. In comparing the cumulative PPI of “students with disabilities” at each school building, it is clear that there are stark differences in proficiency. The SEPAC acknowledges that there are many factors contributing to the proficiency differences between the schools and are aware that these reports only assess one aspect of student performance however, because the differences in proficiency are so great we are advising that the school committee and the school administration initiate opportunities for the principals and special education teams from each building to meet and share information about instructional methods, adopted programs, interventions, and other factors including testing accommodations, that can impact a student’s academic progress and growth. With the adoption of the new school calendar and early release time on Tuesday we believe there is an opportunity to start this dialogue amongst the schools.

Superintendent Search

The SEPAC respectfully requests to have a SEPAC representative as part of the search committee for the new Superintendent. Only a parent of a child with a disability can truly understand and be able to voice the unique educational needs of such a child.

We believe that a Superintendent who is invested in the success of students with disabilities will foster greater acceptance and a commitment throughout the district to educating our entire community of learners.