

# Concord Public Schools & Concord-Carlisle Regional School District

## Special Education Parent Advisory Council



***Because every student deserves an  
extraordinary education***

Visit our website at  
[www.concordsepac.org](http://www.concordsepac.org)

Concord Public Schools &  
Concord-Carlisle Regional School District  
SEPAC  
Annual Report  
June 2020

The Concord Public Schools and Concord-Carlisle Regional School District Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) respectfully submits this report to the Concord and Concord-Carlisle Joint School Committee.

## **Mission Statement**

The mission of the Concord and Concord-Carlisle Regional School District Special Education Parent Advisory Council is to provide education and information to parents/guardians and the broader community on special education issues and services, to establish better understanding of, respect for, and support of special education, and to work with the Concord Public Schools and Concord-Carlisle Regional School District to ensure that students needs are met under Massachusetts Special Education Regulations 603 CMR 28.07(4)\* and other applicable laws are being met.

## **SEPAC Board**

Shaina Brito, Co-President  
Carol Yelle, Co-President  
Sarah Nichol, Secretary  
Andrea Smith, Events Co-Chair  
Tali Ditman-Brunye, Events Co-Chair  
Becky Robichaud, Technology Chair  
Helen McKinlay, Publicity Chair

## **SEPAC Liaisons**

Casey Atkins, Concord Integrated Preschool  
Megan Carroll, Alcott School  
Betsy Olsson-Mackowski, Thoreau School  
Carolyn Seery Blackham, Thoreau School, ILP  
Sarah Bettencourt, Willard School  
Tali Ditman-Brunye, Willard School  
Fatima Mezdad, Concord Middle School (Sanborn)  
Eva Mostoufi, Concord-Carlisle High School  
Michi Keefe, Concord-Carlisle High School, Pathways  
Joanne Jensen, Out of District

## **School Committee Liaisons**

Eva Mostoufi (Joint)  
Cynthia Rainey (Concord)

It has been a productive academic year for SEPAC and its volunteer Board. Through inclusive programming, collaboration with the District, and outreach to the Community, SEPAC strives to extend its mission. We're delighted to share an overview of our activities for the 2019-2020 school year. We gratefully acknowledge the goodwill, energy, and positive reciprocity of our parents, caregivers, administrator, and educator communities. Together we've created something great. We are providing you with a brief historical [timeline](#) highlighting SEPAC milestones since it was reestablished in 2014.

### **Community Engagement and Impact**

Under the leadership of Andrea Smith and Tali Ditman-Brunye, Events Co-Chairs, SEPAC organized a number of well-attended workshops and focus groups. The objective of these events is to build community among SEPAC members and bring awareness and information to the greater community.

Workshops that were held:

- Parent focus group with Superintendent Dr. Laurie Hunter and Ruth Grube, Director of Student Services. This focus group was designed for collaboration on a vision for special education in the districts. In addition to parents and guardians it included members of the School Committee and a representative from each of the buildings.
- Information and sharing session with the new Director of Student Services, Ruth Grube and Superintendent Dr. Laurie Hunter. This forum provided an opportunity for the community to meet Ruth Grube and share questions and answers.
- Through the Federation for Children with Special Needs MassPAC Plus membership we co-hosted Basic Rights in Special Education: A Workshop for Parents and Professionals with 3 other Districts. This allowed us to offer more sessions to all of our families.
- Elise Wulff, from Aspire at MGH provided an overview of core principles guiding inclusion practices and empower parents to engage these concepts in building their child's success.
- Myrto Flessas from the Bureau of Special Education Appeals presented a workshop on the mediation process.
- A Special Education Information session with Superintendent Dr. Laurie Hunter and Director of Student Support Services, Ruth Grube was held to provide families with information and an opportunity to ask questions regarding remote learning.

- A special board meeting was convened to provide input to the new Middle School Building. SMMA, the architects and project managers presented an overview of the project and Superintendent Dr. Laurie Hunter and Ruth Grube, Director of Student Services were present to hear from the SEPAC community and answer questions.
- Bi-monthly board meetings were held with detailed minutes recorded and published by the SEPAC Secretary, Sarah Nichol. SEPAC follows Open Meeting Laws.

Several other events were in planning stages but were postponed due to the COVID 19 pandemic. These events may be considered in the future and include:

- A follow-up to the parent/guardian focus group held in the fall to share the takeaways and plans developed.
- Susan Brennan was scheduled to provide a workshop on April 2nd about neurodiversity and inclusion. She is a Speech-Language Pathologist, who consults to the ASD Nest Support Project, The Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, and New York University. She developed the Social Development Intervention (SDI), a developmental and social cognitive language intervention, and designed the Subway Sleuths Program at NY Transit Museum to provide social opportunities around areas of interest for autistic train enthusiasts/train enthusiasts on the autism spectrum. She is also the Director of The Social Underground, which provides strengths-based social groups to in NYC and Western MA

Helen McKinlay oversees multi-channel marketing efforts through local newspaper advertising, and school based electronic distribution lists led promotion for events. Helen also maintains connection and idea sharing with the Center for Parents and Teachers and other local SEPACs to exchange information and help reach a broader audience.

Our social media presence, led by Technology Chair, Becky Robichaud, reinforces outreach with a well trafficked website, Gmail, Google Calendar, Facebook Page and Twitter. Information is shared regarding District happenings, area workshops and articles that are of interest to members of our community.

Additionally Becky Robichaud published six [newsletters](#) this year. The Newsletter is distributed to parents/caregivers with students receiving special education services in the Districts as well as the school bulletins and covers topics of interest to the community.

Our Membership Chair position was vacant this year. The Co-Presidents coordinated SEPAC Liaisons. Liaisons attend each School's Open House to provide parents/guardians with information about SEPAC and to act as a contact for each School. This is an important part of connecting parents/caregivers with their specific school.

### **District Collaboration**

We appreciate the partnership and communication between the SEPAC and district administration. SEPAC met regularly with Ruth Grube, Director of Student Services, to discuss matters pertaining to special education in both Concord-Carlisle and Concord-Carlisle Regional High School. Our conversations allow for valuable two-way communication between the SEPAC and the District, providing important updates both regularly and as needs arise.

The SEPAC has representation at the PTG meetings. Participation in this group helps SEPAC have a better understanding of current events in each School and allows for information sharing between parent groups.

We would like to thank the District for supporting our MassPAC Plus membership to the Federation for Children with Special Needs. This membership provides a trained speaker from the Federation for Children with Special Needs to deliver one of 3 Basic Rights in Special Education Workshops and allows us to collaborate with area SEPACs to jointly host the full series of workshops. Our membership this year also provided guidance, and important up-to-date information on school building closure and guidelines for SEPAC due to COVID-19.

### **Advisory Boards**

On January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020 SEPAC submitted a position paper to the Administration and the Concord Middle School Building. We requested an expert in Inclusive Design to serve on the Middle School Building Committee. We met with administration and various other stakeholders. Discussions continued and we appreciate that the Building Committee began conversation with consultants from the Institute for Human Centered Design (IHCD). The Building Committee has placed a pause on the building process. Becky Robichaud and Sarah Bettencourt will serve as SEPAC liaisons to this committee and will participate in conversations with the IHCD.

The Phase 4 COVID-19 District Task Force remote advisory board was created to provide the District with community input for COVID-19 reentry. Becky Robichaud will be the liaison for SEPAC.

### **Joint School Committee Participation**

Eva Mostoufi was appointed as the SEPAC School Committee Liaison and Cynthia Rainey serves as the liaison for matters pertaining specifically to CPS. We would like to thank Eva and Cynthia for their support over the year. We look forward to the School Committee's continued support in identifying a representative for the next school year.

One of our highlights of the year is the presentation of our SEPAC Appreciation Awards to members of the Concord and Concord-Carlisle School District for having made a positive impact on members of the special education community. This is a tradition that we hope to continue for many years to come. However, this year's awards were not held due to the school building closures. We would like to extend our thanks to our administration and all of the educators and staff in the Concord and Concord-Carlisle School Districts.

### **Looking Ahead**

The Tiered Focus Monitoring (TFM) for both the Concord Public Schools and the Concord-Carlisle Regional School District is being conducted. Delays have been experienced due to the school building closures. The SEPAC looks forward to having a pro-active involvement once the review is rescheduled.

The SEPAC will continue to be available to parents/caregivers and the community to provide support, act as a resource, and discuss issues pertaining to special education in both the Concord Public School District and Concord-Carlisle Regional School District.

SEPAC looks forward to continued regular meetings with the Director of Student Services, Ruth Grube either remotely or in person as guidelines permit.

We look forward to continued collaboration with the Institute for Human Centered Design and the new Concord Middle School building project as well as our involvement in the Phase 4 COVID-19 District Task Force.

We look forward to collaboration with administration, teachers and staff to reinforce messaging that all students matter and meeting the needs of students in special education does not preclude but actually enhances meeting the needs of all students.

In closing it is important for us to remember that we are all here for the students. As stated in the District Mission:

The mission of the Concord Public Schools and Concord-Carlisle Regional School District is to educate all students in becoming lifelong learners, creative thinkers, caring citizens, and responsible contributors in a global society.

District core values are:

- o Excellence
- o Engagement
- o Perseverance
- o Inclusion
- o Innovation

The SEPAC respects the Mission and Core Values. We look forward to continued collaboration with the Joint School Committee, the District and the Community.