

Know Your School District: Tips for Parent Members of Local Special Education Advisory Councils (SEACs)

Becoming familiar with your school district will help you to be a more effective member of your local SEAC. Special education operates in relationship to regular education. By understanding how the SEAC and the special education program fit into the big picture of the school district, you may be able to more easily identify the shared concerns and goals between regular education and special education. The following information will help you understand some of the requirements your school district has to meet for all students.

General Education Curriculum

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) makes it clear that students receiving special education services have a right to be involved and make progress in the general education curriculum. By knowing and understanding the curriculum being used in your district, your SEAC will be in a better position to suggest ways to make it more accessible to students with disabilities. Likewise, by being aware of any specialized education programs that are available to students in the district and the requirements for those programs, your SEAC can be more effective.

Policies and Procedures

Students who receive special education services are also part of the general education population. They are subject to the policies and procedures that govern all students in the district.

District policies are often published in booklets for students and on district Web sites. These policies may include:

- Absenteeism and tardiness
- Attendance area boundaries
- Attendance policies
- Bullying and harassment
- Deadlines for enrollment

- Graduation requirements
- School choice
- School discipline
- School year calendar
- Transportation

Policy Decisions

SEAC members have an important role in shaping policy decisions at the school district level. They can help identify issues, influence decisions, and improve school programs. They do not have to be education experts to ask good questions. By becoming involved in the SEAC, parents have the opportunity to move from advocating for their own children to advocating for all children in the district and working toward increased achievement for all students.

In order to understand how policy decisions are made in the school district, you may want to take time at your SEAC meeting to ask helpful questions such as:

- How are district policy decisions made?
- What steps are used to adopt new or revised district policies?
- At what point might a SEAC advisory recommendation be made in order to be relevant and effective in the process?
- Which kinds of decisions require governing board (school board) authority and approval and which are delegated to administration?

School District Responsibilities

School districts are required to submit performance data to the Minnesota Department of Education and to comply with periodic special education monitoring. By being aware of this accountability process, SEAC members can be more effective in their advisory role. Here are three major components of school district responsibilities.

SEAC Web site:

www.mnseacinfo.org



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1) **No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has reporting requirements for school districts.** A school report card is issued for each school and school district each year.

To access these report cards go to the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) Web site at <http://education.state.mn.us>. At the top of the page, click on “Academic Excellence,” then scroll down to “School Report Cards.” You can search by school or district. The report cards provide the following:

- Student population and demographics
- Attendance rate
- Graduation rate
- Report on Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)
- The district ranking for the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) and the Basic Skills Test (BST)

2) **Each school district is periodically monitored by the Minnesota Department of Education’s division of special education compliance and assistance.** You may want to ask the special education director when your district was monitored and ask to see the results. In areas where

improvement is needed, action plans to remedy the problem are required. The SEAC may be helpful in identifying and participating in action plan strategies. For example, a SEAC may make recommendations for gathering required parent stakeholder survey data for its district.

3) **IDEA requires each state to have a performance plan that sets targets in the state’s efforts to implement the requirements and purposes of IDEA.** Local school districts provide data to the MDE. The statewide data on yearly progress toward established indicators is reported in the State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR). Some of the indicators are directly related to parent involvement, which is an area in which SEACs may have a role in developing effective strategies at the school district level. District data profiles are available on the MDE Web site at http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Learning_Support/Special_Education/Statewide_Performance/State_Local_Outcome_Data/index.html.