

Minnesota Charter Schools and Special Education Advisory Councils (SEACs)

Parent involvement and parent-professional collaboration have long been recognized as being key factors in improving outcomes for students with disabilities. Minnesota shows its commitment to parent involvement at the local level by mandating local special education parent advisory councils through state statute.¹ Charter schools are public school districts, and as such, Minnesota statute requires each to have a special education advisory council (SEAC). Like all SEACs, the charter school SEAC is responsible for giving advice about special education policy and decisions. This advice is given to the school's governing board. Each charter school is governed by a board of directors made up of parents, teachers, and community members elected by the school community.² Parents and professionals can gain knowledge about the school, other parents, and school staff; contribute by sharing unique experiences; and have an opportunity to give advice and recommendations to school administrators.

There are a number of **unique challenges** for charter schools and their SEACs:

- Unlike other school districts, a charter school is the only school in the district. This means there will be a limited number of parents from which to draw SEAC members. Because of the small population and the structure of the school board, some parents and school professionals may be both SEAC members and governing board members
- Often there is a greater distance for parents to come for meetings

With those challenges in mind, here are some questions to ask if you are **developing a SEAC** at a charter school:

- If there is an overlap of members between the SEAC and the school's board, would it be most effective to form the SEAC as a subgroup of the governing board?
- A district's special education teachers are sometimes members of the SEAC. In the case of charter schools, many of the special education teachers work at the school only part time. How many teachers would be able to attend SEAC meetings and when?
- How often will the SEAC meet? Answering this question will help decide how much geographic territory it is logical to cover (how far people have to come and how often)
- Does your school have children with a wide range of disability categories? How will the SEAC achieve representation of a variety of disabilities?

The following are some tips for **maintaining a SEAC** at a charter school:

- Schedule SEAC meetings for times when parents are already at the school for:
 - school board meetings

¹ Section 8. Minnesota Statutes 2007, section 125A.24 (Parent Advisory Councils)

² <http://www.mncharterschools.org/page/1/home.jsp>

- student activity nights
- other scheduled events
- Example: One charter school schedules SEAC meetings on the same nights as conferences and back-to-school night. A SEAC member reports, “Attendance has been good.”
- Consider including a meal as part of the meeting

More information on SEACs may be found at mnseacinfo.org. Developed by PACER Center under partial funding from the Minnesota Department of Education, this website contains twelve training modules for parents and school districts to use to form and maintain effective SEACs.

Handout funded through grant from Minnesota Department of Education