

Hanover Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC)
Annual Status Report
May 24, 2023

Every public school district in Massachusetts is required to establish a Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC). Massachusetts state law assigns both an advisory and a participatory function to SEPACs and membership is offered to all parents and guardians of children with disabilities and other interested parties. The Special Education Parent Advisory Council's duties under state law include, "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 the school district's special education programs." (Chapter 71B, Section 3, also known as Chapter 766. *available at* <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXII/Chapter71B/Section3>)

The Hanover SEPAC is an independent community organization that collaborates with district professionals and functions in an advisory role relative to special education to both the District and the Hanover School Committee. We strive to provide information and support to the special education community.

Hanover SEPAC 2022-2023 Board

Chair-	Diane King
Secretary-	Allison Taylor
Public Relations-	Caitlin Melone
Events Coordinator-	Kate Sullivan
Cedar School Representative-	Katie Davis
Center School Representative-	Melonie Darcy
Hanover Middle School Representative-	Jill Hall
Hanover High School Representative-	Diane DiTullio
At-large Members-	Alicia Clearly, Jill Livermore, Lori Murphy, Allison Sgambato

Introduction

The Hanover SEPAC began the 2022-2023 school year with a spirit of optimism. We created a clear and distinct path toward fulfilling our participatory role with the District, our advisory role with the Hanover School Committee, and furthering our efforts for family engagement and education opportunities. Continued collaboration with stakeholders to provide a free and appropriate education (FAPE) to students, increasing family engagement opportunities, and the well-being of all students guided our work this year.

SEPAC representatives began meeting regularly with district administrators within the first few weeks of school. We engaged in meaningful conversations centered on the special education family and student experience within Hanover Public Schools. Much of this work focused on increasing inclusion experiences for our children and bringing education opportunities to our families. These meetings have been ongoing throughout the year.

Working with our School Committee SEPAC liaison and Director of Student Services, the Hanover SEPAC developed a procedure for the SEPAC's part in the School Committee's policy review. This created a path for us to fulfill our advisory role to the School Committee.

To help further family engagement opportunities, we expanded our board this school year. In addition to creating the Events Coordinator position, we added a representative for each school building. This brought the Hanover SEPAC Board from 8 members in June 2022 to 12 members in September 2023.

What follows is a list of official events, a summary of our notable work over the 2022-2023 school year, and a look ahead.

SEPAC Calendar of Events

(When possible, links to our speaker's websites have been provided)

September 22nd- Board meeting- 11am via zoom

October 5th- **Meet the Administrators Night**
6:30pm Hanover High School Media Room

November 4th- Board meeting-11am via zoom

November 9th- **Basic Rights Workshop: Understanding the IEP**
with Christine Reilly from the Federation for Children with
Special Needs (FCSN)
7-9pm via zoom
<https://fcsn.org>
<https://www.capecodadvocate.com>

January 5th- **Checking in on Our Teens: Learning How to
Check in and Better Understand Your Child**
Dr. Julia Martin Burch, Staff Psychologist from McLean
Anxiety Mastery Program 7:30pm via zoom
<https://www.mcleanhospital.org/treatment/mamp>

January 13th- Board meeting- 11am via zoom

February 6th- **Looking Through the Lens of ADHD**
Katelyn Mabry, ADHD Life Coach
7pm via zoom
<https://www.katelynmabry.com>

March 10th- Board meeting-11am via zoom
March 20th- **"Raising Digital Natives: What's New? What's
Now, What's Next?"**
Katie L. Greer, Internet Safety Expert
<https://www.klgreer.com>

April 11th **Meet the SEPAC & Ask the Advocate**

with Liz Tam from Shoreline Educational Advocacy
7pm Hanover High School Library
<https://www.shorelineeducationaladvocacy.com>

April 27th-

Coffee and Transition Talk

with Kaitlin Morelli, Assistant Director of Student Services
10am- Hanover High School Media Room

<https://tempusunlimited.org>

<https://www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-rehabilitation-commission>

<https://www.mass.gov/orgs/department-of-developmental-services>

June 9th-

Annual Election board meeting-11am via zoom

Initiatives and Special Projects

Family Engagement & Education Opportunities:

The Hanover SEPAC set a goal of increasing family engagement and education opportunities. Over the 2022-2023 school year, we hosted a total of 7 community events. We feel great pride in the events that yielded over 100 participants and equal joy and pride for the smaller, more intimate gatherings of families and experts. Each environment provided a unique educational opportunity.

To engage more families early in the school year, our building representatives set up information tables at each school during fall conferences. When possible, a SEPAC Board member was available to speak with families and answer questions. We distributed our SEPAC flyer and a list of upcoming events.

As we were making plans for the upcoming year, the Hanover SEPAC identified mental health as an area of focus. Working closely with Dr. Sue Egan, we reconnected with Dr. Julia Burch from the McLean Anxiety Mastery Program. We began to design what ultimately became our first speaker event entitled, *Checking in on Our Teens: Learning How to Check-in and Better Understand Your Child*. Dr. Burch engaged audience members as she discussed typical teen behavior, when to worry, communication strategies, and resources for parents. This event was held in January, via Zoom and had well over 100 participants. We received great praise of Dr. Burch from the community.

Building off of that success, the Hanover SEPAC secured two additional speakers. In February, we hosted Katelyn Mabry, ADHD Expert, for her presentation, *Looking Through the Lens of ADHD*. Ms. Mabry shared information, strategies for helping children regulate emotions, and tips for developing executive function skills. This virtual event was widely attended by our parent/guardian community with close to 100 participants.

In conjunction with Hanover Public Schools and the Hanover Foundation for Educational Enrichment (HFEE), the Hanover SEPAC welcomed Internet Expert Katie Greer in March. Ms. Greer presented on the potential dangers of the Internet and strategies for healthy technology management to both the parent/guardian community via Zoom and in person to our students at Hanover Middle School and Hanover High School. Ms. Greer was well-received by both students and staff. Over 100 parents/guardians logged on to the evening presentation.

The Hanover SEPAC continued our practice of offering multiple events to families with special education advocates. Early in the year, Christine Rielly from the Federation for Children with Special Needs (FCSN) joined us via Zoom for our Basic Rights Workshop. In April, Liz Tam from Shoreline Educational Advocacy joined us in person for our “Meet the SEPAC & Ask the Advocate” event. Both advocates presented on the IEP and the IEP process.

We continued to tap into the skills and talents of our district professionals for Coffee and Transition Talk. Assistant Director of Student Services Kaitlin Morelli brought together families, school staff, and representatives from Tempus Unlimited, the Department of Developmental Services, and MassRehab for this event. Attendees were given the opportunity to speak individually with agency representatives as they enjoyed coffee and treats served by students from the Cedar Cafe. This event was yet another success!

The Hanover SEPAC is extremely grateful for the collaborations that allowed us to bring so many unique and valuable education opportunities to our community.

Participation in the School Committee’s Policy Review:

Throughout the year, Hanover SEPAC board members engaged in discussions about District policies. We provided relevant feedback to the Policy Committee for consideration as they continued their work.

Office Hours:

The Hanover SEPAC has continued to hold office hours on Thursdays from 9-10 am over Zoom with the SEPAC chair. Office Hours give parents/guardians the opportunity to share their thoughts and ask questions about special education. One can find the Zoom link for Office Hours on our Facebook page and the district website.

Annual Staff Recognition Awards:

Each year the Hanover SEPAC gives families the opportunity to recognize staff members who have had a positive impact on their child throughout the school year. We ask families to write a brief letter explaining their reason for the special recognition. The SEPAC then prints the recognition letters and presents them to staff at the end of the school year. This has been a much celebrated event in the past and we look forward to continuing the tradition. The Hanover SEPAC is accepting submissions through May 26th. Follow the link to submit yours!

[Hanover Special Education Staff Recognition Award Nomination 2022/2023](#)

Updating By-laws:

The Hanover SEPAC continued efforts to re-write and update our by-laws. A vote to adopt the new by-laws will be held at our June board meeting.

Recommendations:

1. The Hanover SEPAC recommends that the District continue to collect data and feedback from parents/guardians about their special education experience in Hanover schools. This information may lead to identifying areas of focus for the District and/or topics for future SEPAC events. The Hanover SEPAC recommends the SEPAC Board and the Director of Student Services work collaboratively to ensure the tools used for data collection are meaningful to both the District and families.
2. The Hanover SEPAC recommends District professionals and the SEPAC Board continue collaborating on ways to increase inclusion opportunities offered to Hanover students.
3. The Hanover SEPAC recommends that the SEPAC Board and the School Committee's SEPAC liaison work to look for new opportunities and to define new procedures for the Hanover SEPAC to carry out its advisory role.
4. In the spring of 2023, DESE released the new Individualized Education Program (IEP) format. DESE has stated that all districts should begin using the new format

in either the fall of 2023 or the fall of 2024. When District plans are solidified, the Hanover SEPAC recommends communicating the expected timeline to the community. In addition, the Hanover SEPAC recommends that the District offer multiple parent/guardian informational opportunities to ensure understanding of the new format within the community. Distribution of information may include educational emails with links to resources, districtwide Zoom, in-person, daytime and evening information sessions, and/or building-specific information sessions. Whichever mode of information distribution is deemed appropriate, our recommendation is to have multiple offerings in a variety of settings in order to reach many families.

The Hanover SEPAC is grateful for the supportive nature of our district professionals and looks forward to continued collaboration with the entire Hanover community to work in the best interest of all children.