

Hanover Special Education Parent Advisory Council

Bi-Annual Report to the School Committee
June 5, 2019

Status Summary

- 2018/2019 Workshops and Events
- Board Meetings with Special Education Staff
- SEPAC Working Groups
- SEPAC ABA Working Group Report
- Planning for 2019/2020

SEPAC Inclusion Statement

(Approved by the Board in June 2017)

Hanover Special Education Parent Advisory Council believes that establishing a successful inclusive environment is in the best interest of all. Successful inclusion varies in complexity, based upon the challenges created by the particular disability/ies. Parents, teachers, community members/leaders and students should work to include, as meaningfully as possible, every individual while acknowledging differing abilities.

The term inclusion refers to an overarching societal ideology, philosophy, and culture. Although each person is unique, individuals with disabilities shall be an equally valued member of our community.

Inclusion allows every member of a community to fully participate and not be left out, pushed to the side, or separated into groups solely based on their disability or perceived limitations. All students shall have the opportunity to learn, play and socialize alongside and together with their peers, regardless of diagnosis or placement, including out-of-district placement.

The school community must foster and communicate a culture with established norms. Our community will not exclude, rather we will cultivate safe learning, playing and social environments with appropriate support and supervision. Our community teaches and practices social skills and acceptance to all students in the least restrictive environment.

Massachusetts Law

- The following is the excerpt from Section 3 of Chapter 71B that pertains to PACs:
- ".... The school committee of any city, town, or school district shall establish a parent advisory council on special education. Membership shall be offered to all parents of children with disabilities and other interested parties. The parent advisory council duties shall include but not be limited to: 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 committee's special education programs. The parent advisory council shall establish by-laws regarding officers and operational procedures. In the course of its duties under this section, the parent advisory council shall receive assistance from the school committee without charge, upon reasonable notice, and subject to the availability of staff and resources. ..."
- A SEPAC is a formally organized group of individuals committed to the best possible services for children with special needs.
- A SEPAC advises the school district on special education programs, training needs, and policy.
- A SEPAC promotes a network of parents and forum to share information.

2018/2019 Workshops and Events

- Meet the Administrators Night (Oct)
- Proactive Parenting Series (Oct-Nov)
- Navigating Middle and High School with School Adjustment Counselors (Nov)
- Basic Rights in Special Education (Feb)
- Anxiety in School Aged Children, Lauren Dargan (April)
- Staff Appreciation Awards (May-June)

Board Meetings

- Per Bylaws, Executive Committee of SEPAC sets meeting schedule for each year
 - Based on feedback, SEPAC Board considering evening meetings to accommodate more parent interests
- SEPAC Board Meetings
 - Director of Student Services, Special Education Staff from each school regularly attend, with additional participation as appropriate by other staff and administrators
- Agenda distributed in advance and meeting minutes recorded consistent with open meeting laws
 - Planning updates, Working Group updates, standing report from the Director of Student Services

Collaborative Conversations

- SEPAC meetings throughout the year with District staff provides for open and collaborative problem solving on a variety of issues, many of which do not rise to a more extensive process
- Creation of a visual chart at the middle school for the scheduling
- District sending out early notices on ESY to parents
- Training for staff who work with our ASD population
- Feedback and input into transportation issues around the transition, with a SEPAC member participating on that committee

Existing SEPAC Working Groups

- Existing Working Group addressing communications to parents of special education staff at the start of the school year
 - Concern raised that parents do not know special education staff for their children when school starts
 - Group has met with school officials and is working on developing best practices, effort will remain ongoing through 2019/2020
- New Working Group approved May 24, 2019 on literacy in district
 - Group to focus on parent concerns on screening, testing and assessment, and reading curriculums and training of staff
 - Group to refine scope and SEPAC will report more on this to the School Committee in the fall at its next update

SEPAC Working Group on ABA Programming

- At its May 24, 2019 meeting, the SEPAC Board approved the attached report and recommendations
 - Reviewed by the District on April 30, 2019 and includes District input
- Working Group reviewed programming for children challenged by autism, focusing on delivery of ABA services
 - Parents had raised concerns regarding the quality and consistency of services and the need for a dedicated group to look at these issues was apparent
 - Separate document distributed to the School Committee on this working group
- Although the District has made progress in recent years and has hired a number of dedicated staff, there are several key target areas the School Committee ought to monitor and require the District to report back on in the 2019-2020 school year.
 - In sum, a number of concerns center on the lack of cohesiveness in planning, staffing, programming and program monitoring.

Planning for 2019/2020

- Continue to build on prior policy work including inclusion opportunities across district settings
- Develop working group process and continue to build parent support and involvement
- Major focus on outreach to parents and the community, making sure folks are aware of the resources SEPAC can offer (e.g., monthly parent outreach events)
- Soliciting for Speaker Topics

Our Thanks

- We look forward to continuing the collaborative effort of ensuring district curricular and programming access for all students.
- We are grateful for this opportunity to report.