

Hanover Special Education Parent Advisory Council

Bi-Annual Report to the School Committee
November 14, 2018

SEPAC Board

- Co Chairs: Michelle Gardner and Jacqueline Porro
- Public Relations Officer: Allison Taylor
- Secretary: Noreen Riley
- Treasurer: Michelle Cardona

Board Meetings

- Per Bylaws, Executive Committee of SEPAC sets meeting schedule for each year
 - For 2018/2019, SEPAC Board to hold monthly meetings
 - SEPAC Board Meetings typically include interested parents and SEPAC Board members, 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
 - Planning updates, Working Group updates, standing report from the Director of Student Services

The Mission

SEPAC Inclusion Statement

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 General Laws

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.

PROGRESS

- Under the current leadership, in recent years, the **SEPAC Bylaws** have been written and adopted.
- We have also been **formalizing the infrastructure** with the coordination of the District leadership – the SEPAC is regularly being offered a seat on committees that are established by leadership to assess district wide issues– for example, School Councils and Transportation Committee with Dr. Raab, etc.
- We have formalized **operational procedures** creating a process for evaluating parent concerns and recommendations. Our **“working group” format** allows the SEPAC to designate individuals to a group tasked with investigating parent concerns. That working group then reports back to the SEPAC board with their findings. In the event that the finding of the group reveals that the issue should be given the attention of District leadership and School Committee consideration, the SEPAC works to advise those groups through meetings or presentations at School Committee meetings.

SEPAC Working Groups

- SEPAC approved a new process for reviewing issues of concern to members in a more formal structure
 - Delegation to working group to study issue and report back to SEPAC
- First Working Group is addressing communications to parents regarding special education staff on the Team 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
 - The Group will report back to SEPAC at its January Board meeting
 - We will update the School Committee at our next update (or sooner should there be a need)
- Second Working Group to review programming for children challenged by autism, including delivery of ABA services
 - Concern raised by parents is that the district does not have systematic processes or protocols in place
 - The group is currently developing a scope and sequence of work and will report back to the SEPAC Board at its November Board meeting with an action plan

2018/2019 Workshops and Events

- Meet the Administrators Night (Oct)
- Proactive Parenting Series in collaboration with the PTA (3 part series Oct-Nov)
- Navigating Middle and High School with School Adjustment Counselors (Nov)
- Basic Rights in Special Education (Feb)
- Staff Appreciation Awards (May-June)
- Additional events include social events (Dec), additional speakers in the spring and soon to be announced monthly parent coffee times

Planning for 2018/2019

- 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 and inviting speakers

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.