

Calcasieu Parish School Board SEAC Handbook

The purpose of this handbook is to provide operational guidance for the Calcasieu Parish School Board's local Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) regarding its statutory purpose and related functions. Louisiana law¹ requires each local public-school superintendent and the administrative head of each charter school or other public school to create a SEAC not later than January 1, 2020.

Vision

- All learners, including students with disabilities, are respected and provided equitable opportunities to meet challenging educational expectations.

Statement of Purpose

- To provide advice and feedback regarding special education policies, procedures, and resources and engage in outreach to the community at large to increase the level of knowledge, support, and collaboration with respect to special education. The intent of the SEAC is to provide thoughtful insight in support of students with disabilities.²

Focus

- Promote communication, collaboration, and trust among educational service providers, students, parents, and school district administrators.
- Serve as a connection to the community at large regarding the role of public schools in addressing the needs of students with disabilities.
- Assist with development of annual report to the Superintendent in May of each year regarding SEAC activities.

How SEAC Functions

The responsibility of the SEAC members is to advise and provide feedback to the Superintendent, not to advocate for an individual position or agenda. *Advice* may be defined as opinion about what could be done about a situation or problem, or feedback regarding an appropriate course of action.

- Advisory groups provide input rather than governance.
- Advisory groups do not have any formal authority to issue directives. They do not set policy but may make suggestions for consideration by school district administrators.

¹ Act 274 of the 2019 Louisiana Legislature.

² References to students with disabilities and special education are specific to eligible students with disabilities identified in accordance with Louisiana Department of Education Bulletin 1508. The operation of SEAC does not apply to students identified under Bulletin 1508 only as Gifted or Talented without a qualifying disability.

SEAC functions to provide advice and feedback based on information and good judgment. The following are possible duties and responsibilities of the SEAC:

- Advise and provide feedback on special education topics and goals at the district level, including the needs and priorities of students with disabilities.
- Advise and provide feedback on development and implementation of educational programs.
- Serve as a source of information between the school district and families.
- Provide a forum for the sharing of parent and staff ideas.
- Inform members of proposed initiatives affecting special education.
- Participate in annual report to the Superintendent.
- Engage the community at large by promoting increased knowledge, awareness, and collaboration regarding special education.

Membership

SEAC members are unpaid volunteers appointed by the Superintendent. The membership will consist of at least 8 (EIGHT) persons.³ At least fifty percent of the SEAC must be parents or legal guardians of students with exceptionalities, other than gifted and talented, who are residing in the Calcasieu Parish School District and receiving special education services provided by the Calcasieu Parish School Board under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) and Louisiana Department of Education Bulletin 1706.⁴ One high school student with an exceptionality, other than gifted and talented, and one person who represents an entity that serves students with disabilities or families of students with disabilities and who is not an employee of the school governing authority may be counted to meet the 50% requirement. To the extent practicable, selected parent members will represent different student age levels and disabilities. The remaining At least one SEAC members will be selected from teachers, principals, or paraprofessionals employed by the district and at least ten percent of the membership will include other special education stakeholder(s). No member of the Calcasieu Parish School Board shall be a member of the SEAC.

Chairperson

The Superintendent shall designate the Chairperson of the SEAC. The Chairperson shall be responsible for calling the Panel's meetings, presiding over the meetings, and establishing the agendas for the meetings.

³ At least fifty percent of the designated council members must be parents of students with a disability.

⁴ SEAC does not include representatives of students identified with the exceptionalities of Gifted and/or Talented only.

Terms of Membership Service

SEAC members shall be appointed to an initial three year term. Members in good standing may reapply and may be reappointed for a second term at the discretion of the Superintendent.

Terms begin on the first Monday in October and end on the last Friday in September.⁵ All members must meet SEAC attendance and other requirements outlined in this Handbook. The Superintendent shall be responsible for selecting a new applicant in the event of a vacancy. A member may be removed and the member's seat declared vacant if absent from two of the three scheduled meetings without reasonable notice to the Chairperson; if the parent representative and his/her child are no longer residents in the boundaries of the school district; or if the member is no longer employed by the organization or agency he/she was appointed to represent. The Superintendent also reserves the right to remove a member who exhibits repeated disregard for the SEAC ethical standards, other procedures established in the SEAC Handbook, or any other behavior which the Superintendent deems contrary to the safety or well-being of SEAC members or those who attend the SEAC meetings.

Membership Qualifications

No special skills are required to be a SEAC member. However, each SEAC member must agree to the following:

- **Put children first.** A qualified SEAC member should believe that every student deserves an equal, quality education and should have a true commitment to the successful future of all students in the district.
- **No personal or political agenda.** SEAC members may not promote their own personal or political agendas. SEAC members must have a passion for public education and believe that all students with disabilities are entitled to a quality education.
- **Provide leadership.** A SEAC member must be committed to engaging in respectful dialogue, building consensus, and working collaboratively with other SEAC members.
- **Appreciate diversity.** A SEAC member respects the diversity of cultures and abilities across the district and demonstrates a willingness to address the needs of all children their families.
- **Follow applicable policies, laws, and regulations.** A SEAC member must agree to follow federal, State, and local school district requirements, including confidentiality rules and district safety policies.
- **Demonstrate integrity.** A SEAC member must be a person who demonstrates honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness and adheres to SEAC ethical standards.⁶
- **Engages in community outreach.** A SEAC member understands the importance of sharing information regarding special education and engaging the community at large in educational discussions and planning for special education students in the district.

⁵ The inaugural SEAC established by law on or before January 1, 2020 will begin its initial term on January 14, 2020 and membership shall continue until April 30, 2021.

⁶ SEAC Ethical Standards are attached.

Application

The district will solicit SEAC applicants via advertisement on Calcasieu Parish School Board's website, social media pages, parent portals, local newsletters, and other parent events. All applicants must complete the Calcasieu Parish School Board's designated SEAC application form by the identified deadline to be considered for membership. Late or incomplete application forms will not be considered. SEAC application forms may be obtained on the CPSB website and by calling the superintendent's office. Assistance is available for applicants who may be unable to complete the application form in writing due to disability. Please call (337) 217-4980 extension 2706 for assistance.

The Superintendent will select from among timely submitted applications, considering the required percentages of the membership categories and making an effort to incorporate the desired range of age/grade levels. Where numerous applications are available for consideration, the Superintendent may employ a random selection/lottery to determine the membership appointments. The selected applicants will be notified of their appointment verbally and in writing within ten (10) business days of the deadline for applications.

If the solicitation for SEAC membership fails to produce a sufficient number of applicants, the school district will repeat the solicitation notice at least one additional time using a different means of advertisement, where practicable. If the repeated solicitation is unsuccessful, the Superintendent may authorize the SEAC to operate with a reduced number of members, fifty percent of whom must be a parent of a student with a disability.

Attendance

In order to promote cohesiveness and to enable an informed advisory process, members are encouraged to attend each SEAC meeting. If a member is unable to attend a scheduled SEAC meeting, it is expected that the member will contact the SEAC Chairperson as soon as the member knows s/he will be unable to attend but not later than 2:00 p.m. on the day of the meeting. In the case of a member missing two consecutive meetings without notice, a member may be removed from SEAC at the discretion of the Superintendent. In cases when a SEAC meeting must be cancelled, every effort will be made to notify members of the cancellation via phone call, text, and/or email. Members also may contact the SEAC Chairperson to check the status of the meeting. Where practicable, notice of a SEAC meeting cancellation will also be posted on the district's website.

Process for Resigning

A member who is unable or unwilling to continue in his/her role as a selected SEAC member may resign the seat by sending written notice to the Superintendent, with a copy simultaneously sent to the SEAC Chairperson. Such notice is requested at least thirty (30) days prior to the next regularly scheduled SEAC meeting in order to provide a reasonable opportunity for the Superintendent to fill the vacancy. Unanticipated resignations shall be submitted as soon as practicable following the member's determination that he/she will no longer be able to fulfill his/her responsibilities.

Replacing a Member

A SEAC vacancy will be filled by the Superintendent for the remainder of the departing member's term. Interim appointees may reapply for the position following completion of the interim appointment.

Meetings

The Special Education Advisory Panel will meet three (3) times per year on dates and times determined by the SEAC membership at the last meeting in May.⁷ All meetings occur from 5:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., generally at The Assessment Building 1618 Mill Street Lake Charles, LA 70601, unless otherwise noted.

The SEAC Chairperson will prepare and advertise an agenda on the school district's website. Minutes of SEAC meetings will be posted on the school district's website.

Meeting Forum

All SEAC meetings are open to the public. Members of the public cannot request to be on agenda. Members concerned about agenda items may send comments to SEAC members the SEAC chairperson. SEAC chairperson contact information will be posted on the school district's website.

Communication, Discussion, and Information Sharing

Agendas

Meeting agendas will be emailed to SEAC members at least two weeks prior to each meeting. Agendas will be posted on the SEAC's CPSB web page. SEAC members are also encouraged to inform members of the community regarding upcoming meetings throughout the year.

Minutes

Minutes of each meeting will be recorded by a school district staff person who will also type the minutes and arrange for distribution to SEAC members and posting on the district's website, generally within 5 days of review by the membership at the next occurring meeting.

Ethical Considerations

Meeting discussions must respect different perspectives, provide members the opportunity to speak, and conform to the SEAC Ethical Standards.

Participation

Members are expected to be present, listen carefully during meetings, actively participate in discussions, and request clarification when needed.

⁷ The date and time of the inaugural SEAC meeting will be determined by the Superintendent.

- **Ground Rules for Discussion**

The Chairperson will call the meeting to order, guide discussion, and adjourn the meeting. Only one member may speak at a time. Member requests for the floor must be made by raising one's hand and awaiting acknowledgment and permission to speak by the Chairperson. Extended discussion may be carried over to the next meeting. Only items listed on the current agenda will be addressed at a meeting. Topics not on the current agenda may be placed in the "parking lot" for future consideration.

- **Stakeholder Input**

Members of the community, including parents of students with disabilities enrolled in the Calcasieu Parish School Board, are encouraged to communicate with SEAC members to share information and topics of general interest for SEAC consideration. SEAC chairperson contact information will be posted on the district's website.

- **Confidentiality**

All SEAC members are bound by strict confidentiality requirements. Members will be instructed regarding FERPA and State law requirements relating to prohibitions on the disclosure of personally identifiable information. When appropriate and necessary, documents shared with SEAC may be redacted to protect sensitive personal information.

SEAC members are not authorized to release, share, publicize, or otherwise disclose SEAC-related documents, reports, and other information to the public through any means (verbal, video, written communication, electronic transmission, social media, etc.) without the express written consent of the Superintendent or Superintendent's designee.

Decision Making

The SEAC membership serves in an advisory capacity. SEAC is not a decision-making body and has no voting authority. Accordingly, advice, suggestions, and other information considered by SEAC members will be shared with the Superintendent in its annual report. Decisions regarding special education programs and services will be made by school district officials, consistent with IDEA and other applicable requirements.

Staff Participation

A staff person will be assigned to type agendas and record minutes of all SEAC meetings and arrange for meeting space or other meeting accommodations as needed. Staff assistance may only be secured for SEAC meetings at the direction of the Superintendent.

Orientation/Annual Planning Meeting

Public notice shall be published annually listing the names of SEAC members and including a description of ways in which interested parties may express their views to SEAC members.