



includenj

Special Education Parent
Advisory Group

Developing an Effective
SEPAG

Welcome



- About IncludeNJ
- What is a SEPAG
- Why start a SEPAG
- SEPGA mission, vision and by laws
- SEPAG structure and roles
- Tips and strategies for starting a SEPAG
- SEPAG checklist



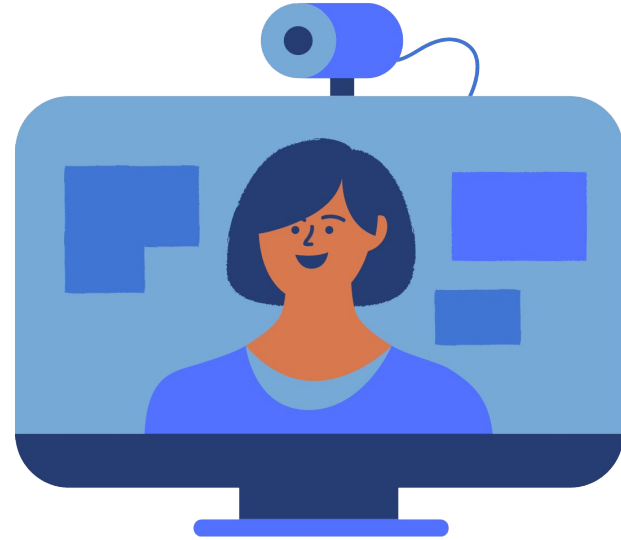
Training course

SEPAG

Successful Working
Together

Meeting Etiquette

- Please refrain from sharing any personal information.
- Please be mindful of time when you are speaking. Everyone will have an equal amount of time to share their story.
- We are not here to judge. We are here to support each other.
-



About Us

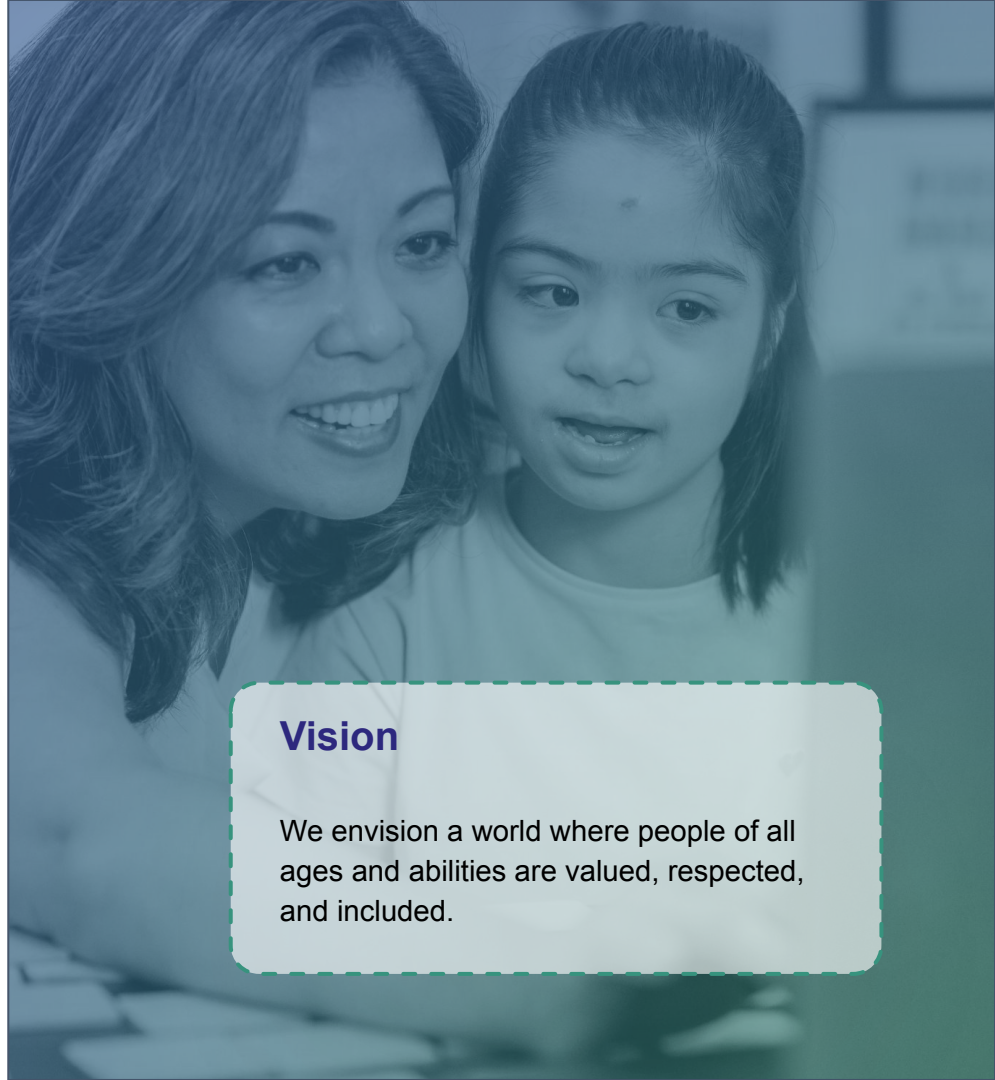
IncludeNJ is a nonprofit corporation supporting parents, guardians, caregivers, and families to advocate for inclusive education for people with disabilities.

Mission

IncludeNJ's mission is to support parents, guardians, caregivers, and families to advocate for inclusion, equity, and belonging in education for students with disabilities ages 3 to 21.

Vision

We envision a world where people of all ages and abilities are valued, respected, and included.





Committed to ensuring every student has access to inclusive education and receives the support they need to thrive.



Scan for more information from includenj.org.

About us

IncludeNJ is dedicated to supporting and empowering families of students with disabilities by advocating, networking, and educating them about inclusion. Our goal is to ensure that every student has access to inclusive education and receives the support they need to thrive.

We offer a tiered system of resources, coaching, support, and advocacy to ensure accessibility for all families.

Expertise in Inclusive Education

- **Resources Parents Need:** advocacy, resources, and education tailored to help them navigate the education system effectively.
- **Expertise in Special Education and Inclusion:** as former special education directors, our experts eliminate obstacles to parent-school collaboration for inclusive student education.
- **Building Cooperation:** we foster a collaborative partnership between parents and their child's school for a more inclusive education experience.

Tiered Services

Tier 1: Free

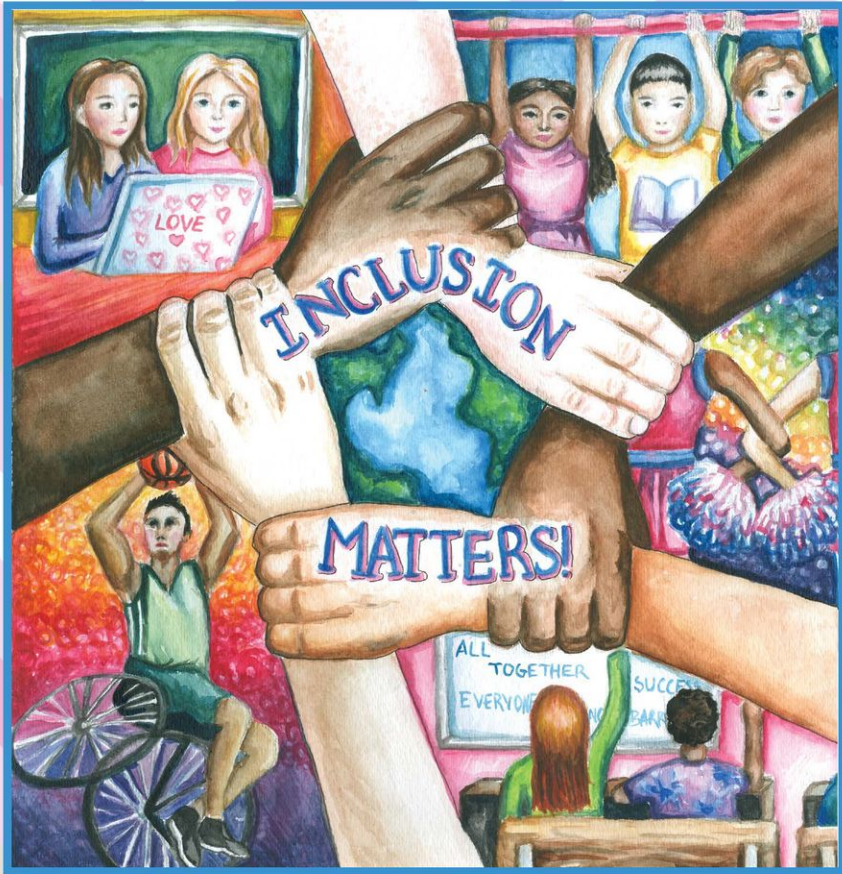
Includes a review of the student's IEP and related documentation, a list of recommendations to advocate for inclusive opportunities, and resources to support caregivers in interactions with school and district personnel.

Tier 2: Sliding Scale

Our support team will act as an advocate if Tier 1 fails to resolve the challenges to the student's right to inclusive education. On behalf of the student and family, the advocate will attend meetings and communicate with school and district personnel.

Tier 3: Legal Referral

Referrals to vetted attorneys who champion inclusive education.



GRAND PRIZE WINNER, HELEN YANG, GRADE 9
WATCHUNG HILLS REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL, WARREN, NJ

**“INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS,
INCLUSIVE LIVES”**
POSTER CONTEST 2015

Core Values

- **Every parent, guardian, caregiver, and family** is strong, supported, and filled with optimism about their child.
- **Every child** is thriving and resilient.
- **Every community** benefits from the power of engagement.
- **Every school community** supports caring connections, celebrates diversity, nurtures resilience, and strengthens belonging.

What is a Special Education Parent Advisory Group - SEPAG



Parent Driven & Led



District Wide



State Mandated



Outcome Oriented

⁸ N.J. Department of Education

“Each district board of education shall ensure that a special education parent advisory group is in place in the district to provide input to the district on issues concerning students with Disabilities.”

New Jersey Administrative Code
6A:14-1.2(h)

Key Points

Parent run organization

Empower, Engage, Educate

To bring awareness and changes to systemic level issues within special education

Parents are core
members of the
SEPAG

The regulation allows parents and to create and run an advisory group that meets local needs. SEPAG requirements open the door to collaboration that can make a difference.



SEPAG Role:

To bring awareness to systemic level issues within special education.

To advise and make recommendations to the school district on issues that affect students with special needs.

To increase the involvement of families with children with special needs in school activities.

To help with development of SE district policies and procedures.

SEPAG's are not

An advocacy assistance group, which focuses on upholding rights for children and advocating for change from outside the system;

A limited campaign dedicated to addressing a single issue or immediate concern; or

A special education PTO or PTA, which might plan carnivals, classroom activities, dances, fundraisers, or other events.

What is the purpose and function of a SEPAG?

A SEPAG gives parents the opportunity to provide direct input to their school district about policies, programs, practices, and services that have an impact on students with disabilities and their families.

An effective SEPAG can increase the proactive involvement of families by inviting input that can be used to shape local special education policy.

An effective SEPAG that uses parental input can:

- help improve educational outcomes and well-being for all students, including those with disabilities;
- help identify unmet needs;
- help shape the development of programs, services, and policies
- improve district culture and climate.

**A SEPAG, by definition, is parent-driven,
and parent-led**

**Membership of the SEPAG is up to the
group**

**SEPAG membership should be as diverse
and inclusive as possible**



Overview

More than 600 SEPAG's in the State of NJ

It takes time, effort and commitment to build and sustain an effective SEPAG

Form a small group of parents to get the ball rolling



Start

How to start a SEPAG

Develop an initial roster of potential SEPAG members. Seek representation from parents within the district who have children with different special needs, of different ages, in different schools, and in different types of programs, including public and private out-of-district programs.

Create a private list of emails for parents to reach out to each other.

How to start this..... CREATE YOUR OWN IDENTITY

How to start a SEPAG

Decide on membership roles and responsibilities

Chair and Co-Chair

Secretary

Treasurer

Communication facilitator

Materials Production

Working committees

Building level SEPAG liaisons

Board of Education liaison

Superintendent Liaison

PTO/PTA Liaison

Others.....

Develop a meeting schedule for the year.

**A suggested framework might be:
monthly “parent-led” meetings;
4-5 informational outreach meetings with topic
and speaker that bring together families and
schools;
and quarterly meetings
with key district leaders to present input and
suggestions.**

Mission and Vision

Develop a short mission statement to guide the SEPAG's work

The mission of the SEPAG is to support the special needs of students and families by giving input on policy and programs.

To empower families through knowledge and understanding and to provide a forum for families to have a voice on behalf of their child

The mission of the SEPAG is to facilitate collaboration among students, parents, staff, the Board of Education, and the community in order to promote inclusion and understanding of, respect for, and support of all children with special needs in our community

Our mission is to facilitate communication among students, parents, community members, administrators, and the Board of Education, for the purpose of improving the quality of district-wide special education policies, programs, and practices.

SEPAGs are required for all school districts in New Jersey. N.J.A.C. 6A:14-1.2(h) states that: “Each board of education shall ensure that a special education parent advisory group is in place in the district to provide input to the district on issues concerning students with disabilities.”

The (district name) SEPAG offers the opportunity to raise questions, to voice your concerns, and to provide direct input to administrators regarding Special Services. SEPAGs also provide parents and families opportunities to learn about district programs, services and resources.

Sample SEPAG Bylaws

- The SEPAG will provide input and make recommendations on special education policy, programs, and practices to the district.**
- SEPAG members will act as liaisons to share comments and concerns with school leaders.**
- A secretary will be appointed to coordinate activities, attend meetings, and take minutes at SEPAG meetings. Meeting minutes and an agenda will be distributed prior to all meetings.**
- Meetings will be held at a variety of times and locations and will be announced on the SEPAG website.**

Sample SEPAG Bylaws

- Notices will be available in every school and will be distributed to parents, including those in out-of-district placements, via print and e-mail.**
- Principals, PTO presidents, and Child Study Teams will assist in identifying parents who may want to be part of the SEPAG.**
- The SEPAG will work to ensure that membership reflects the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity of the school community and includes members from each preschool, elementary school, middle school, and high school, as well as at least one parent of a student receiving services in another school district.**

How to start a SEPAG

- ★ Establish meeting dates and frameworks for meetings (open public meetings, parents only, SEPAG planning committee)
- ★ Develop and send out a survey to all parents
- ★ Create meeting agenda's and distribute prior to meeting.
- ★ Create vision and/or mission statement
- ★ Establish annual priorities and goals
- ★ Ask membership to prioritize goals and priorities
- ★ Create communication frameworks (newsletters, brochures, social media, etc.)

How to start a SEPAG

- Forge a network of communications channels.
- Set up SEPAG website and facebook account
- Create a SEPAG one page flyer
- Create private distribution lists for parents of children of disabilities; remember that not all parents have email, but almost all will have phones, so text messaging can be a very useful tool.
- Ask the PTA/PTO to send out email blasts – they have generic lists for all parents.
- Give printed materials to Child Study Teams and special education staff for distribution.

Individual vs. Systemic Issue

Individual

- Personal issues about a child
- Specific incidents
- Advocacy for a single child
- Issues about a specific school staff member

Systemic

- *Collects information to identify patterns and trends
- *Brainstorms to create effective systemic solutions
- *Helps develop policies and procedures that will have an impact on the special education community
- *Works collaboratively with administrative team

Communication and Collaboration

Select liaisons from the SEPAG to:

- *Collaborate with PTO/PTA for joint activities
- *Provide updates at board of education meeting
- *Provide updates at superintendents administration meetings
- *Connect with community leaders
- *Connect with community resources, such as social services organizations, libraries, colleges and universities, recreational programs, and other organizations that can provide expertise and resources.
- *Provide updates at district child study team meetings
- *Host information table at “back to school” events

Our SEPAG lets parents voice concerns and connect with the school and community to learn and communicate in friendly settings – and it goes beyond that. Our core group meets regularly with our District Supervisor to discuss bigger-picture issues that parents share, and suggest solutions that make the most of school and community resources.

– Parent member of a SEPAG

Being part of our SEPAG community has helped to create new initiatives in our district.

– Parent member of a SEPAG

Working collaboratively with our district administrators resulted in the development of new policies and procedures.

– Parent member of a SEPAG

Having an involved and informed SEPAG has helped me as a school administrator develop more effective school initiatives.

- School Administrator

SEPAG PLAN

- MONTHLY OPEN FORUM DISCUSSIONS
- MEETING TOPICS AND AGENDAS PROVIDED.
- TEAM MEMBERS WILL GATHER INFORMATION AND DELIVER A LIST OF AVAILABLE RESOURCES TO THE COMMUNITY ON DIFFERENT SUBJECT MATTERS
- GUEST SPEAKERS WILL ALSO BE BROUGHT IN TO ADDRESS SPECIFIC TOPICS



The New Jersey
Administration
Code (NJAC) 6A:14-1.2

Each district board of education shall ensure that a special education parent advisory group is in place in the district to provide input to the district on issues concerning students with disabilities.

SEPAG Contacts

Angela Logosso - President

Kiersten Coughlin - VP

Amanda Ghattas - Community Outreach

Ally Groom - Secretary

Email:
AndoverregionalSEPAG@gmail.com

Andover Regional School

Bringing the school and
community together

Special Education Parent Advisory Group SEPAG

Special
Education
Parent
Advisory
Group





OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Andover Regional School District's Special Education Parent Advisory Group (SEPAG) is a positive, solution - based advisory group focused on empowering the parents and guardians of children in our district's Special Education programs. Our volunteer parent and administrative resources work collaboratively with the families of children in our Special Education programs to aid in facilitating an understanding of the rights and resources provided by the State of New Jersey Administrative Code 6A:14-1.2(h).

More importantly, we aim to bring together a community-based forum for parents, guardians, students, staff, the Board of Education and community partners. We strive to use this forum to share information, discuss matters of relative interest and concern, and promote inclusion, respect and support for all children. SEPAG accomplishes this through meetings, presentations and workshops where everyone is invited to participate; whether in person or via email or social media. All families have a shared and vested interest in our educational programs. Andover's School's SEPAG Committee welcomes ALL parents/guardians of students in Pre-K through 8th Grade who are interested in learning more about how to best support their child(ren) during their academic career.

Q&A

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A SEPAG GROUP?

A SEPAG gives parents/caregivers the opportunity to provide direct input to their school district about policies, programs, practices, and services that have an impact on students with disabilities and their families. An effective SEPAG can increase the proactive involvement of families by inviting input that can be used to shape local special education policy.

WHO CAN BE A MEMBER OF SEPAG?

Parents are the core members of a SEPAG District. Parents do not need special training or background knowledge to be a member of a SEPAG. Other members may include: School leaders, including the District Supervisor of Special Services and/or members of the Board of Education, Teachers, Child Study Team members, other school professionals, students/former students, other parents committed to improving education in their district community, Leaders and other citizens.

Andover SEPAG Facebook Page

Join..... And share with Andover parents.

Complete survey and share with parents.

Post resources for parents.

Engage with other parents.

Join Andover SEPAG

“Thank you for all you do. Your supports and efforts do not go unnoticed. There is strength in numbers and now no parent will have to fight alone.”

“We are so lucky to have such a beautiful strong community of amazing parents. Our kids hit the parent jackpot”

Andover SEPAG survey results



TOOLS FOR CHANGE

Sample Action Sheet – Agenda and Minutes

Members Present: _____ Today's Date: _____
 Recorder: _____ Date/Time/Place of Next Meeting: _____

Agenda Item	Person Initiating	Summary of Discussion/Task List	Action Decision	Person to Follow Up	Target Date Completion
Parent Input: Access to Library- Elem school	SEPAG	Students in third grade are unable to use the library. There are stairs and one child is in a wheelchair so the entire class does not go to library.	Build a ramp so all students have access to the library. TD will contact/access	TD will contact the principal and set a deadline for completion	Principal by Dec 1. Deadline for completion Dec 20.
Parent Input- Social skills instruction needed	SEPAG	Parents concerned that lack of social skills instruction impacts education. Students are bullied and having difficulty participating in group projects. DSS had no funding for social skills.	DSS and SEPAG leaders will reach out to local universities to find students interested in running social skills programs as interns.	DSS & TD SEPAG Co-Leader	Dec 12
SEPAG Input	SEPAG	SEPAG would like visible location on district website and on each school web-site, ability to share contact and meeting information.	SEPAG information will be posted on district and school websites. Parent reps of schools will check to make sure information is updated on school websites.	DSS will contact webmaster to add SEPAG to website under Student Services	At last one week before next meeting
District Input: New Transition Coordinator	DSS	The district Transition Coordinator will be looking at improving programs and transition services.	Parents would like a meeting with Transition Coordinator to share concerns, discuss programs and how parents can help with community job coaching locations.	DSS TD	Hire date Dec Meeting date in Jan
District Input Professional Development	DSS	113 district paraprofessionals will be attending a training on Positive Behavior Supports.	This training may reduce the use of restraint by teaching staff de-escalation techniques and to help students self-regulate their behaviors.		Training is on PD Half day Nov 30
Possible Agenda Items for Next Meeting:			Odds and Ends List Next Meeting Date:		
1. 2. 3. 4. 5.			1. 2. 3. 4. 5.		



List possible topics for discussion at a SEPAG meeting.

Is this topic...

Individual?

Systemic?

Participant Question..... Why should you join?



“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

- Helen Keller

How can I contribute to SEPAG?

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

~ Margaret Mead

What's Next

- Meet with Director and Superintendent
- Present at the Board of Education Meeting
- Set up an initial meet and greet for members only
- Send out survey to plan future agendas and presentations for meetings
- Meetings should be a mix of members only meetings and informational presentations
- Reach out to other SEPAG's in your local communities

THANK YOU!



includenij



Relationships



The Problem



Systemic Change

At the school & district level.

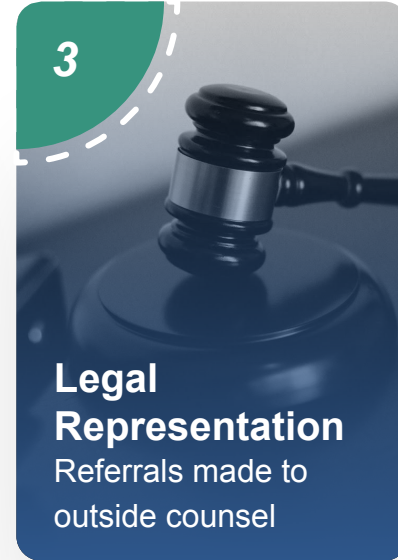


Advocacy

By student's parents / family.

The Solution

IncludeNJ will provide a tiered support model for parents and families.



Accomplishments



To date, 120 parents have received services.

Outcome of services-

- more inclusion
- person-centered planning
- enhanced student outcomes
- parents empowered to advocate for their children
- parents educated on available special education services

Our Community

IncludeNJ is an organization made up of parents, caregivers, advocates, and champions who fight for all students' rights to quality inclusive education.

Please consider joining the movement and collaborating with others with similar experiences to support inclusive education.



@includenj



@include_nj



@includenj

includenj.org