Special Education Parent Advisory Groups

SPAN START
Engaging Parents of Students with Disabilities

Building Membership:

- A majority of members should be parents or caregivers of children receiving special education services.
- Be sure to include families of children in out-of-district placements.
- Include students receiving special education services or former recipients as members.
- Conduct outreach to ensure that the parent advisory group is representative of the special education services received, placements, programs, ages, disabilities, schools attended and racial, ethnic and gender diversity.

Providing Input on Systemic Issues:

- District policies and procedures
- Funding issues
- Staffing and professional development needs
- Facility issues such as accessibility, location of programs
- Inclusion/LRE
- Transition
- Related services
- Extended school year

Holding Productive Meetings:

- Announce meeting dates and agenda items early enough to give interested parties an opportunity to plan to attend
- Create opportunities for active participation
- Build agendas with input from multiple people
- Use "people first" language in reference to individuals with disabilities
- Keep minutes of all meetings and make minutes available on request
- Hold regular meetings at least quarterly
- Start and end meetings on time
- As a group, agree on the process for making decisions

Developing Effective Practices:

- New member orientation
- Established by-laws for the group's operations
- Annual meeting to set goals and priorities
- Provide interpreters and other necessary services as needed
- Develop close working relationship with other district groups
- A report of group activities and suggestions should be presented to the local Board of Education, at least annually



35 Halsey St, 4th Floor
Newark, NJ 07102
(973) 642-8100/-8080 fax
spanadvocacy.org

Engaging Parents of Students with Disabilities is a partnership between the New Jersey Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (NJOSEP) and SPAN Parent Advocacy Network.

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Special Education Parent Advisory Groups are required for all school districts in New Jersey. The purpose of these groups is to provide opportunities for parents and community members to offer input to their districts on critical issues relating to students with disabilities.

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

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.

Understanding the Purpose:

- To provide direct input on the policies, programs and practices that impact services and supports for children with disabilities and their families.
- To increase the involvement of families of children with special needs in making recommendations on special education policy.
- To advise on matters that pertain to the education, health and safety of children with special needs.
- To advise on unmet needs of children with disabilities.

Keeping the Focus on Input:

- Keep a policy focus: make sure the SEPAG keeps its focus on providing input on special education policy issues.
- A SEPAG is not a "support group" or a place for a "gripe session".
- Avoid getting bogged down in busy work; such as doing carnivals, information fairs, fund raising, and organizing speakers.
- There may be both a parent advisory group and a support group in a district.

Training and assistance are available for developing and implementing SEPAGs in your school district. For more information, contact SPAN's START-EPSD Project.

E-mail: **start@spanadvocacy.org** or call SPAN: **(973) 642-8100 x 123.**