



Meeting Summary- January 10, 2022

The meeting was held virtually from 7:00pm-8:00pm.

In attendance:

- Group Organizer- Lauren Galok
- Representing Department of Special Services- Kelly Bond, Nancy Samaha, Samantha Roberts
- Representing BOE- Ralph Addonizio, Kristen Hodnett
- Parent Group Specialist for SPAN- Stefanie Babits
- District Staff- Liz Cross, Sue Vetrano, Erin O'Connell
- Parents- 20 parents attended

Welcome:

Lauren Galok opened the meeting by introducing herself and recognizing Kristen Hodnett, BOE member, and Kelly Bond, Special Services Director, for their support of the creation of the Wall SEPAG.

The Benefits of a SEPAG

A SEPAG, or Special Education Parent Advisory Group, is required for all school districts in NJ. 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 IEPs and 504s. A SEPAG gives parents the opportunity to have direct input on the policies, programs and practices that impact services and supports for their children. With this increased involvement, families now have a way of making recommendations on special education policy and allows them to advise in areas that pertain to education, health and safety, and any unmet needs.

Lauren added that she wants this group to be a solutions- based forward looking group to address systemic issues that affect our children. A SEPAG is most effective when its members focus on input that drives policy, programs, and services. Prior to this meeting, many parents emailed Lauren with suggestions of topics for discussion. They included communication and transparency between the Department of Special Services and parents, closing the learning gap for children with IEPs and 504s brought on by the Pandemic, not just focusing on general education students, adapting the District's social and emotional programs for our children, summer programs in addition to ESY, inclusiveness and more opportunity for our children to "push" into class with their general education peers, and transitions. Lauren also emphasized that a SEPAG is successful when there is an open exchange of ideas between parents and district leaders and a collaborative partnership with district leaders such as policy makers like the BOE and administrators in the Department of Special Services.

Introduction of Kelly Bond:

Ms. Bond introduced herself as the new Director of Special Services and Wall Primary School Principal. “During my career, I have been fortunate to serve in a variety of positions, first as a teacher and then as a Learning Disabilities Teacher-Consultant on the Child Study Team. My administrative career spans a range of positions in special education in both elementary and secondary supervision, as well as Director. Prior to this appointment, I served as the Director of Special Education for East Brunswick Public Schools. I am delighted to return to Wall Township Public Schools, a district I highly respect.” Ms. Bond also led the SEPAG in East Brunswick and brings great ideas and experience to the group.

Parent Discussion:

Lauren opened the meeting for parent questions, comments, and concerns. Ms. Bond introduced the topic of extracurricular activities. Several parents want to learn more information about programs for children with IEPs and 504s and want a way to streamline information when these programs become available. Lauren suggested a partnership with Wall Rec and “L”, parent, volunteered to be a SEPAG liaison for extracurricular activities. Many parents also shared their happiness with the I Can Bike Program offered last summer and Ms. Bond shared that the Department is working on another program to offer this summer.

Another parent would like to see a framework set up where parents can have open conversation. Forums such as a SEPAG Facebook page (public or private) or having an open and closed SEPAG meeting structures were suggested. A participation agreement was suggested by Stefanie Babits of SPAN (sample attached under important links) to help address issues that may arise due to privacy and decorum. “C”, parent, suggested transitioning the “Wall of Different Learners” Facebook page to a “Wall SEPAG” Facebook page.

Another parent suggested adding a FAQs link to the Special Services website as an additional resource and creating a Welcome Committee to help transition new families to the District and program. This may include having building liaisons throughout the District.

Lauren concluded the meeting by informing the group that a survey will be sent via Blackboard Connect to all families of children with IEPs and 504s. The purpose is to collect information such as most convenient time to hold meetings, what topics do you want more information about, and asking parents if they would like to volunteer for different committee and liaison positions within the group. Sending the survey via Blackboard Connect will ensure we are receiving input from all families. Lauren also said that now that a group has been established, an official SEPAG email will be created for the group in lieu of emailing her personal account.

The meeting concluded at 8:03pm. Submitted by Lauren Galok.

Important Resources:

- <https://spanadvocacy.org/programs/start/groups/>
- <https://spanadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Sample-Participation-Agreement-FINAL-English.pdf>

