

# St. Charles Parish Public Schools



## Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) Handbook

Revised December 2024

St. Charles Parish Public Schools  
Special Education Advisory Council Handbook

The purpose of this handbook is to provide operational guidance for the St. Charles Parish Public Schools (SCPPS) local Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) regarding its statutory purpose and related functions. All meetings of the Special Education Advisory Council shall be subject to the same policies and statutory provisions as regular, special, and committee meetings of the School Board.

### **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.<sup>2</sup>

### **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

### **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.
- A majority of the committee membership shall constitute a quorum for holding a meeting and making recommendations.

SEAC functions to provide advice and feedback based on information and good judgment. The following are 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
- 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 consists of at least eight (8) persons. If a council has fewer than eight members, the Superintendent shall provide an explanation of his/her decision to establish with fewer than eight (8) members. The explanation shall be provided to the council, and the council shall include it as an addendum to the report required.

- Fifty percent of the SEAC must be parents or legal guardians of students with disabilities who are receiving special education services provided by SCPPS, none of whom shall be employees of the School Board. To the extent practicable, selected parent members will represent different student grade levels and disabilities.
- One high school student with a disability 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 Board may be counted to meet the requirement.
- To the extent practicable, selected parent members will represent different student age grade levels and disabilities.
- At least one member shall be a teacher, principal, or paraprofessional who serves students with disabilities and employed by the district.
- At least 10% of membership shall be special education stakeholders not represented by council members described above.
- **No member of the SCPPS 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 Council's meetings, presiding over the meetings, recommending membership to the Superintendent, and establishing the agendas for the meetings.

## **Terms of Membership Service**

SEAC members shall be appointed to an initial two-year term. Members in good standing may reapply and/or may be reappointed for an additional term at the discretion of the Superintendent. Terms coincide with the academic school year. 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 equitable, 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 and 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.
- **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.

## Application

The district will solicit SEAC applicants via the district website and other similar means such as parent portals, school newsletters, or local newspaper. All applicants must complete the SCPPS designated SEAC application form by the identified deadline in order to be considered for membership. Late or incomplete application forms will not be considered. SEAC application forms may be obtained on the district website at [wearescpps.org](http://wearescpps.org) and by calling 985-785-3157. Assistance is available for applicants who may be unable to complete the application due to disability. Please call 985-785-3157 for assistance.

The Chairperson will make a recommendation from timely submitted applications, giving consideration to the required percentages of the membership categories and making an effort to incorporate the desired range of age/grade levels to the Superintendent. Where numerous applications are available for consideration, the Superintendent may employ a blind or random selection/lottery to determine the membership appointments. The selected applicants will be notified of their appointment in writing within twenty-five (25) 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 as detailed in the membership portion.

**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 8:00 am 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 canceled, every effort will be made to notify members of the cancellation via phone call, text, and/or email. Members may also 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 to fill the vacancy. Unanticipated resignations shall be submitted as soon as practicable following the member's determination that s/he 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 Council will meet a minimum of three (3) times per year on dates and times determined by the SEAC membership at the last meeting of the school year.

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

A written report shall be prepared by SEAC members and submitted to the Superintendent and the Special Education Advisory Panel in May of each year regarding its activities. The Superintendent shall ensure that the report is posted on the School Board's website, and all reports shall be submitted to the state Department of Education.

## **Meeting Forum**

All SEAC meetings are open to the public, except in those instances allowed as provided by state law. Members of the public cannot request to be on an agenda.

At the beginning of each regular meeting of SEAC, time will be provided for public comments. To ensure sufficient time for SEAC to address items on its meeting agenda, the total time provided for public comments will be limited. The time provided to individual speakers for comments will also be limited. (The total time allotted for comments is usually 10-15 minutes, and speakers are allowed 2-3 minutes each.) Speakers may be asked to sit in a designated area until called upon by the Chairperson to speak.

## **Public Comment**

Persons wishing to provide public comments will be asked to fill out a speaker card. Persons wishing to speak must acknowledge on the speaker card that they have read these requirements. Persons will generally be called upon to speak in the order speaker cards were received. However, in cases of large numbers of persons wishing to speak, cards may be drawn randomly at the discretion of the Chairperson.

If persons who have signed up to speak do not have an opportunity to do so because time runs out, they may provide written comments on the comment card provided for this purpose. Any person may provide written comments without signing up to speak.

- The Chairperson will announce, “This is the time SEAC has dedicated to receive public comments. Do we have anyone who has signed up to speak?”
- If someone has signed up to speak, the Chairperson will make the following statements:
  - “Speakers will be provided [two to three] minutes to address the SEAC on any issue directly related to the agenda.”
  - “There will be no dialogue, including no question and answer, between speakers and the SEAC members; however, SEAC members will be listening carefully and visitor comments will be recorded.”
  - “After public comments have concluded, speakers are welcome to remain, but no further opportunities to address the SEAC will be provided during the meeting.”
- If no one has signed up to speak, the Chairperson will conclude meeting.

Speakers and visitors are expected to provide comments in a respectful manner. If the Chairperson deems a speaker or visitor to be disrespectful, that person may be warned or asked to cease any further comment or disrespectful behavior. Noncompliance may result in ejection from the meeting.

## **Visitors**

All meetings of the SEAC are open to the public, and visitors are welcome. A visitor is anyone present who is not an appointed SEAC member. Comment cards will be made available at the sign-in table. Visitors are asked to sign the attendance sheet upon entering and asked to read these participation procedures. Visitors will also be asked to sit in a designated area.

Visitors who do not wish to sign up to speak during the open comment period are welcome to provide written comments on the cards provided. Visitors are observers and may not actively participate in the meeting. Where applicable, the Chairperson will ensure that a reasonable number of handouts are available for visitors (or projected electronically to enable the participation of the visitors).

### **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 SCPPS website. 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 post on the district's website, generally within ten (10) business days of the SEAC meeting.

- **Ethical Considerations**

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

- **Member Participation**

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

- **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 SCPPS, are encouraged to communicate with SEAC members to share information and topics of general interest for SEAC consideration.

- **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.

No liability or cause of action may be taken against the public school district, or any officer or employee thereof for any action taken by members of the Special Education Advisory Council.

### **Staff Participation**

A staff person may be assigned to type agendas and record minutes of all SEAC meetings and arrange for meeting space or other meeting accommodations as needed.

### **Orientation/Annual Planning Meeting**

Notice shall be posted annually to the district website listing the names of SEAC members. Interested parties may express their views to SEAC members by emailing them at the email address provided on the district website.