



*Colorado Special Education Advisory
Committee (CSEAC)
Colorado Department of Education*

“The Power of Partnership”

A Guide for Local Special Education Advisory Committees (SEACs) in Colorado

- **Overview for Committee Members**
- **Resource Guide for School District Special Education Directors**

2010

School District Special Education Advisory Committee Guide

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Partial information for this document was incorporated from the Center for Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education and the Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center, "A Primer for State Special Education Advisory Panel Members and SEA Staff."

Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to provide information for school district special education advisory committee (SEAC) members regarding their functions and purpose. The Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee (CSEAC) is the state level committee which is mandated by federal and state law. While local SEACs are not required by law, the CSEAC encourages local school districts to establish one. Many school districts in Colorado and throughout the country use advisory committees to provide advice and recommendations to improve services for students with disabilities. This guide is intended to assist school district SEAC members and the local special education director in the development and implementation of an effective and efficient local SEAC.

The role of the local SEAC in shaping quality services for children with disabilities is critical. The benefits of creating a local SEAC are extensive. Established committees report increased involvement, strengthened communication and improved relationships among district stakeholders. Local SEACs help ensure that students with special needs receive the most appropriate education. In many school districts, the local SEAC has been used to provide suggestions to improve performance indicators from the State Performance Plan and services for students with disabilities. When district-wide collaboration improves, programming for students with and without disabilities is strengthened, setting the stage for increased student achievement.

This resource is intended as a guide only. Every school district is unique and each SEAC must address the needs of their school district and stakeholders. The intent is to provide information for the development and organization of a local SEAC. Contributing information from the Center for Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education has been utilized in the creation of this guide. In addition, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has implemented a new website for special education advisory members and educational agency staff: www.stateadvisorypanel.org.

“Those of us who have had the privilege of serving on a local SEAC understand the significant benefits of this committee for all involved. Bringing parents, general and special educators, administrators, and other community members together with a common and specific focus on the education of students with disabilities is a powerful catalyst for system alignment and change. For parents seeking to have an active voice regarding special education policy and practice, local SEACs truly reflect the partnership necessary to assure the success for all students.”

- **Ed Steinberg, Ph.D.**

Colorado Department of Education, Assistant Commissioner,
State Director, Exceptional Student Leadership Unit

Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee (CSEAC)

The Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee (CSEAC) is a state level committee mandated by federal and state law. Members include parents of and individuals with disabilities, educational service providers, administrators and representatives from a variety of related agencies. Participation is statewide and representative of diverse disabilities. Members are interested in the quality of education received by children/youth with disabilities.

Vision

All learners are respected and challenged with high expectations, their needs are met, and student aspirations for success are fulfilled.

Mission

Our mission is to actively represent children/youth with disabilities and impact decisions made on their behalf to enhance the quality of educational services.

CSEAC Focus

- Provides input and assistance to the State Board of Education
- Advises the State Director of the Exceptional Student Leadership Unit
- Promotes communication, collaboration and partnership among educational service providers, children/youth, parents and administrators
- Serves as a liaison among parents of children with special needs, local educational agencies and the Colorado Department of Education, Exceptional Student Leadership Unit

How CSEAC Functions

CSEAC meets officially five times per year (including a planning retreat) to discuss and initiate action on annual goals and other matters of importance. We receive information on upcoming/current issues and give input on the development of policies and programs. Standing sub-committees are:

- **Public Policy and Legislative** – Stays aware of and disseminates information affecting education of children/youth with disabilities. A state legislator is included on this sub-committee.
- **Communications** –Formulates and carries out plans to exchange information statewide

- **Membership Nomination** – Searches for and proposes new committee members for two-year terms
- **Bylaws and Procedures** – Proposes changes to bylaws and procedures, as necessary
- **State Performance Plan** – Advises on the development and implementation of the Colorado State Performance Plan for Special Education

Building a state (CSEAC) and local (SEAC) Network of Communication

Through the power of partnerships, CSEAC is interested in building relationships with current local special education advisory committees (SEACs) and supporting the formation of new committees within the state. CSEAC would like to maintain a current, annual list all SEACs. Local SEACs are able to communicate by a specific listserv through the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). Please report contact information to:

Colorado Special Educational Advisory Committee

Colorado Department of Education
 Exceptional Student Leadership Unit
 1560 Broadway, Suite 1175
 Denver, CO 80202
 Phone: 303-866-6943
 Fax: 303-866-6811
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/cseac.asp>

Benefits of Stakeholder Collaboration

- Builds communication, partnering and trust between families and school districts
- Assists with district changes, policies and educational programming
- Works in partnership with other advisory groups in the district
- Increases student success through family and professional partnerships
- Supports school programs and professionals
- Builds positive relationships
- Creates understanding of school district structure, policies and administration
- Allows for sharing unique perspectives

Local Special Education Advisory Committees

Functions

Each district needs to define the role of its SEAC. The responsibility of the members is to advise and not to advocate for an individual position or agenda. Advise means to inform, counsel, recommend, suggest or guide. To advocate means to plead your case or position, to favor an individual case or argument. The advisory committee is to provide advice based on data and good judgment. The following are the **possible duties and responsibilities** of a local SEAC:

- Advise on special education related topics and goals at the district level, including the needs and priorities of students with disabilities
- Represent students with disabilities and impact educational decisions made on their behalf
- Advise district on developing and implementing educational programs
- Provide input on special education matters
- Serve as a source of information between district and families
- Educate participants on special education topics
- Provide a forum for parents and staff to share ideas
- Inform members of proposed legislation concerning special education
- Share district success stories while maintaining confidentiality
- Submit regular reports and recommendations to the superintendent for transmission to the local school board
- Stay abreast of national and state rules, regulations and policies regarding the education of students with disabilities
- Report special education information to other district committees (e.g., District/School Accountability Committees, etc.)
- Provide a yearly report on accomplishments and activities to the Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee to help create impact at the state level

Role of School District Special Education Director

Although the role of the school district special education director or representative in relation to the SEAC will vary among school districts, generally most directors have the following roles:

- Provides a “state-of-the-school district” report at SEAC meetings
- Provides relevant and current information to SEAC
- Serves in an ad hoc capacity
- Assists with agenda development

- Reports on relevant issues
- Reports progress on indicators from the State Performance Plan
- Supports the SEAC in carrying out its functions
- Reports on performance of students with disabilities on statewide assessments

Membership

It is important to create a committee that is reflective of the make-up of the district and community. A school district may create a membership form or maintain an open door policy where all are welcomed to learn and contribute. Local SEACs are encouraged to have an open forum inviting guests to attend meetings. Diverse membership representation may include:

- Parents with children in preschool, elementary, middle and high school
- General and special educators at various grade levels
- Student(s) receiving special education supports and services
- Adults with disabilities
- School staff with disabilities
- Postsecondary student with a disability
- Related service personnel
- Community and interagency representatives
- McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Liaison
- School Board member
- Special education administration
- General education administration
- Representation of various disabilities
- Representation of various cultures and languages
- Representation from charter schools

Building Stakeholder Representation

One of the most significant contributions that each SEAC member makes is that of representing a constituency. The role of each SEAC member is advisory, not advocacy, in nature. The SEAC should consider methods that facilitate on going communication between members and the public. The following suggestions may be helpful when reaching out to stakeholder groups:

- Establish core planning group when developing a local SEAC
- Obtain recommendations for family recruitment from; administrators, parent resource groups, disability organizations, participants in leadership trainings and other advisory boards
- Determine percentage of parents, professionals and community members

- Distribute information at IEP meetings
- Advertise information to families through; district website, newsletters, local TV channel, district emails, bulk district mailings, school distribution, other school groups, reverse calling system
- Develop and disseminate a survey on SEAC priorities
- Create a link from the school district website. Provide opportunities for public input at the SEAC meetings
- Conduct a presentation or discussion at other public meetings, events and conferences
- Create and disseminate a SEAC brochure or flyer
- Invite a contact of a stakeholder group to a SEAC meeting
- Meet at different schools within the school district
- Include community members, such as, health care, vocational, disability service, social service representatives. This may also involve the Lions Club, Elks Club, rotary clubs, local councils and churches.

Diverse Representation

Increasing the involvement of parents on committees, particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, is a frequent challenge for school district staff. Many school districts make a good faith effort to assemble diverse committees that are representative of the community population and are struggling to attract a more diverse group of parents and service providers to advisory committees. Suggestions for increasing committee diversity may include:

- **Committed leadership:** Success depends upon the leadership within the school district. Leadership must commit resources and personnel time, towards increasing diversity. It is essential to discuss with members before planning SEAC activities. Having diversity must be a goal from the beginning. School districts need to try and recruit a diverse staff and provide ongoing professional development to increase awareness of diversity issues.
- **Go to the people first:** When getting started, personally contacting individuals face to face is the most effective way to increase participation. Convey that your interest in diverse representation is real and for the long term. Take steps to build networks and relationships between departments and diverse individuals and groups. Utilize school newspapers, district website and community publications to seek diverse membership.
- **Identify formal and informal leadership within diverse communities:** Community leaders can help identify people who might be candidates for the SEAC. Have conversations with individuals or groups who are outside of education. Contact community-based organizations such as housing, economic development, human service agencies, health care representatives, professional and disability-related organizations, such as, Autism Society of Colorado, Mile High Down Syndrome Society, PEAK Parent Center, etc.

SEAC Operating Procedures

One of the key elements to a SEAC is operating procedures. This may include by-laws, procedural manual, operating guidelines, norms or SEAC regulations. Every SEAC should have an understanding of its operating procedures.

The SEAC may revisit the operating procedures annually to determine if revisions are necessary. The operating procedures should reflect the school districts policies pertaining to the establishment, purpose and responsibilities of the SEAC. This includes information describing how the SEAC will conduct business and the structure of the organization. It often serves as a comprehensive resource to provide information to the public about the role and responsibilities of the SEAC. Each district may consider all or some of the following procedures.

Suggested Content for Operating Procedures (By-laws/Norms):

General –

- SEAC name
- SEAC purpose
- School district policies regarding SEAC membership functions and procedures
- Relationship between the SEAC and school district director/representative
- Establishment of executive committees and subcommittees
- Voting procedures

Membership –

- Process for an individual to be appointed to SEAC
- SEAC members – with the name of the stakeholders group they represent
- Membership tenure and term limits
- Quorum requirements
- Travel compensation
- Process for replacing a member
- Process for resigning
- Membership roles

Communication –

- Methods for dissemination of information to the public and community
- SEAC leadership and officers – appointment procedures
- Identify qualities for effective facilitation
- Use People First language
- Ground rules for discussion –
 - Respect others' ideas and feelings
 - Participate and give others an opportunity to speak
 - Listen carefully

- If not understanding, ask for clarification
- Work for a win/win situation
- Seek a decision you can support

Meetings –

- Provisions for persons with disabilities (e.g., interpreters)
- Determine frequency of meetings (e.g., monthly, quarterly, etc.)
- Establishing the agenda for meetings
- Method for receiving public comment/input/questions
- Decision-making process (e.g., consensus, voting)
- Procedure for public meeting notice

Orientation/Annual Planning Meeting

One of the most useful activities for SEACs is an orientation and planning meeting, especially on an annual basis. Orientation meetings can be a positive and beneficial experience for new, as well as, returning SEAC members. Plan to review the responsibilities of the committee and overviews of existing school district policies governing the group. This event can provide an opportunity to summarize SEAC activities for the past year and celebrate accomplishments. Planning for the upcoming year increases capacity for effective change. In addition, conducting an orientation prior to, or in conjunction with, the annual planning meeting can provide a common level of knowledge for SEAC members.

Consideration for the orientation planning session:

- Welcome, introductions, and warm-up activity
- Create an open, welcoming environment
- Provide social opportunities to build a sense of community
- Discussion of participants' understanding regarding their role on SEAC
- Brief historical background of SEACs past accomplishments
- Review operating procedures
- Review SEAC last annual report
- School districts policies related to SEAC
- Update on the current SEAC activities and involvement
- A discussion of what “advisory” means to panel members
- Explanation of meeting purpose and process
- Assignment of SEAC members to serve in various roles
- Discussion of school district director’s role on SEAC
- Discussion and implementation of a consensus-building process

Setting Priorities

Establishing priorities is important for any group or organization. An identified purpose and function are critical factors in directing the decisions and actions of a SEAC. While each school district has its own unique challenges and structure, there are methods of building unity in SEAC membership that will assist an advisory committee in its efforts to provide guidance to the school district in serving children with disabilities. It is recommended that a SEAC not take on too many projects. It is suggested to decide on three or four critical issues to address during the school year. Below are two considerations that may assist in planning for this process.

- Conduct an annual meeting to provide orientation for new members. All SEAC members should attend to foster positive relationships and a team approach
- At this meeting, decide on the priority issues SEAC will address during the year. The priority areas may be selected by using current data
- Keep the focus on students with disabilities

Consensus Building

It is recommended that SEAC use consensus decision-making rather than voting when the committee comes to an agreement on decisions. Consensus is a process for decision-making that involves all members and the final decision is one that all members can live with and support. Each school district must experiment and design the process that works best for its SEAC.

Members of committees should focus on expressing and addressing each other's interest rather than their own position. This provides a more effective way of making decisions when issues are complex and reaching decisions is difficult. Decisions through consensus will often be implemented faster and easier because all stakeholders have agreed to support decisions. Consensus allows members to disagree, have different perspectives, yet, work to educate the committee about their opinion rather than advocating positions. Common characteristics of consensus decision-making include that all members:

- Participate
- Are responsible for success
- Keep themselves informed
- Are open to being educated by each other
- Share a common understanding
- Consider multiple options
- Compromise
- Make decisions by modifying options
- Live with and support final decisions

SEAC Activities and Projects

Possible SEAC activities and projects may include:

- Develop resource directory
- Develop committee brochure
- Develop calendar of events
- Organize resource fair
- Advise on current issues
- Develop family trainings/workshops, such as; Special Education 101, Transition Services, Response to Intervention, Positive Behavior Supports, Social Skill Building, Conflict Resolution, Bullying, Homework Help, Academic Instruction (Math, Reading), Disability Services, 504 vs. IEPs, Related Services (OT, PT, SP/L), Parenting 101
- Provide trainings and information for families with ELL needs
- Establish peer programs within schools
- Awards, appreciations and recognitions for students, staff and community members
- Invite guest speakers, such as, PEAK Parent Center and Denver Metro Community Parent Resource Center
- Plan an evening with legislators, school board members, administrators to discuss educational issues and concerns
- Organize a parent coffee gathering
- Participate in county/community mobilizing efforts
- Provide an electronic forum where families can post questions and receive information
- Sponsor family members to attend conferences with a staff member from their school
- Report information to School Board
- Translate information/documents for families
- Create family information binder or folder
- Develop strategies to sustain membership

Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) **Meetings**

Some of the key factors impacting the success of SEAC meetings are leadership, attitudes, using data, planning and development of agendas. The length of meetings should be dictated by the focus or purpose of the meeting. It is important that SEAC members view their participation and actions as impacting school district special education initiatives and programs. Below are strategies to consider when planning SEAC meetings.

- Use the executive committee or an established ad hoc committee to identify relevant issues for the agenda
- Receive input from the special education director and staff regarding agenda items
- Decide if meetings will be during the day, after school or in the evening. Meeting times could be rotated to provide full participation
- Provide members with a copy of the agenda and materials with adequate time to review before the meeting
- Schedule the meeting room in an area that allows for adequate group interaction
- The meeting location should be accessible for individuals with disabilities
- Consider a meeting location that offers options for children, such as a recreation center
- The SEAC's mission or vision statement could be stated at the top of the agenda
- Use district website to notify meetings to expand public awareness
- Consider travel, food, child care options for SEAC members. Child care may be provided by high school students/groups, or college students
- Avoid domination of discussion by certain members
- Provide interpreters or translators, if necessary
- Provide technology options for members to participate; Skype, conference call, webinar and other virtual options
- Establish a positive and collaborative environment
- Create an atmosphere where all members have a voice and feel respected
- Invite School Board Member or other special education administrators to attend

Planning the Meeting Agenda

- The meeting outcome and purpose should be stated at the beginning of the meeting
- Provide time for follow-up discussions from previous meeting
- Provide time for the special education director or representative to give a report on current issues
- Set specific time for each topic and stay within established timeline
- Indicate the type of action to be taken on each issue
- Follow established voting process (e.g., consensus building)
- Follow planned presentations with an opportunity for response
- Provide time for public comment; either in person or provide a form for written input
- Identify recorder/secretary and a person to facilitate the meeting to maintain focus
- Schedule appropriate time for sub-committee or group work and reporting
- Adhere to agenda timelines
- Mail or email minutes from each meeting to members

Public Comments – Ground Rules

- Provide notice of SEAC meetings in advance
- Determine if public comments will be provided orally or in written form
- Specify a time on the agenda for public comments and input
- Request guests to sign in and for those who wish to provide public comment, to indicate the subject they wish to speak to.
- Maintain confidentiality and privacy standards
- Provide a verbal or visual clue one minute before their time is up

Contents of SEAC public awareness brochures

- Name of SEAC
- SEAC's purpose and responsibilities
- SEAC priorities
- Meeting dates, times and location
- Public comment procedures
- List of membership
- Key individual contacts; phone number, fax, mail and e-mail addresses
- Highlighted activities and projects

Presentation information for SEAC members

- A script for members to follow when addressing groups
- Use transparencies or PowerPoint
- Provide brochures for distribution
- Comment sheets to gather public information

Local SEAC Checklist

The following is a list of suggestions to consider when organizing your local SEAC.

- _____ Identify the SEAC mission, purpose and function
- _____ Determine the role of the Special Education Director
- _____ Create a diverse membership
- _____ Build stakeholder representation
- _____ Establish operating procedures/by-laws/norms
- _____ Hold an orientation/annual planning meeting
- _____ Advertise meetings
- _____ Set priorities
- _____ Establish communication and consensus building strategies
- _____ Determine annual activities and projects
- _____ Review annual accomplishments and next steps
- _____ Join the local SEAC listserv through CDE

SEAC Resources

Colorado Special Educational Advisory Committee

Colorado Department of Education
Exceptional Student Leadership Unit
Phone: 303-866-6943
Fax: 303-866-6767
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/CSEAC.asp>

Colorado Department of Education

Exceptional Student Leadership Unit
Phone: 303-866-6943
Fax: 303-866-6767
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/>

PEAK Parent Center

Phone: 719-531-9400
Fax: 719-531-9452
Hotline: 1-800-284-0251
www.peakparent.org
info@peakparent.org

Parent to Parent of Colorado

1-877-472-7201
www.p2p-co.org
info@p2p-co.org

Denver Metro Community Parent Resource Center (CPRC)

Phone: (303) 365- CPRC (2772)
Fax: (303) 365-2778
www.denvermetroprc.org
info@denvermetroprc.org

Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center (MPRRC)

Phone: 435-752-0238
<http://www.usu.edu/mprrc>

Office of Special Education Programs website

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/index.html>
www.stateadvisorypanel.org

U. S. Department of Education website

<http://www.ed.gov>