



Know Your School District: Tips for Parent Members of Local Special Education Advisory Councils (SEACs)

Becoming familiar with your school district will help you to be a more effective member of your local Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC). Special education operates in relationship to regular education. If you understand how the SEAC and the special education program fit into the big picture of the school district, it may be easier to identify the shared concerns and goals between regular education and special education. The following information will help you understand some of the requirements your school district is required to meet for all students.

Education curricula

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) makes it clear that students receiving special education services have a right to be involved and make progress in the general education curriculum. By knowing and understanding the curriculum being used in your district, your SEAC will be in a better position to suggest ways to make it more accessible to students with disabilities. Also, by being aware of any specialized education programs that are available to students in the district and the requirements for those programs, your SEAC can be more effective.

Policies and procedures

Students who receive special education services are also part of the general education population. They are subject to the policies and procedures that govern all students in the district. It may be helpful for SEAC members to be aware of how these affect students with disabilities.

District policies are often published in booklets for students and on district web sites. These policies may include:

- Absenteeism and tardiness
- Attendance area boundaries
- Attendance policies
- Bullying and harassment
- Deadlines for enrollment
- Graduation requirements
- School choice
- School discipline
- School year calendar
- Transportation

Policy decisions

SEAC members have an important role in shaping policy decisions at the school district level. They can help identify issues, influence decisions, and improve school programs. They do not have to be education experts to ask good questions. By becoming involved in the SEAC, parents can move from advocating for their own children to advocating for all children in the district and working toward increased achievement for all students.

In order to understand how policy decisions are made in the school district, you may want to take time at your SEAC meeting to ask helpful questions such as:

- How are district policy decisions made?
- What steps are used to adopt new or revised district policies?
- At what point might a SEAC advisory recommendation be made in order to be relevant and effective in the process?
- Which kinds of decisions require a governing board authority (school board) and approval, and which are delegated to the administration?

School district responsibilities

School districts are required to submit performance data to the Minnesota Department of Education and to comply with periodic special education monitoring. By being aware of this accountability process, SEAC members can be more effective in their advisory role. Here are several components of school district responsibilities.

- 1) The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is the nation's pre-K through grade 12 federal education law that requires states to develop systems and policies that focus on equity and continuous improvement **for all students**. To access your school or school district's "report card," go to the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) web site at <https://rc.education.mn.gov/#mySchool/p--3>. You can search by school or district. The report cards provide the following:
 - Academic achievement
 - Progress toward English language proficiency
 - Academic progress
 - Graduation rates
 - Consistent attendance
- 2) Each school district is periodically monitored by the Minnesota Department of Education's division of special education compliance and assistance. For more information see <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/sped/mon/prog>. You may want to ask the special education director when your district was monitored and ask to see the results. In areas where improvement is needed, action plans to remedy the problem are required. The SEAC may be helpful in identifying and participating in action plan strategies. For example, a SEAC may make recommendations for gathering required parent stakeholder survey data for its district.

You may also ask if or how your school district is participating in a Continuous Improvement Process. For more information see <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/cimp>.