

SEPAC Bill of Rights

Definition of a SEPAC

A Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) is a volunteer organization comprised of parents of students receiving special education services and other interested parties. SEPACs are required by and governed under Massachusetts Law (Chapter 71B, 603 CMR 28.07(4), and 603 CMR 28.03 (1)(a)(4)). The role of SEPACs is to educate the community and advise the school district in matters involving special education students and their families to improve educational access and quality of life. For a SEPAC to function, an agreement of certain rights is essential.

Fundamental Rights of a SEPAC

THE RIGHT TO EXIST.

- Massachusetts General Law requires every school district to establish a Special Education Parent Advisory Council, assigned an advisory and participatory function. Membership is open to all parents of children with disabilities in the district and other interested parties.
- These parties are entitled to expect the district to make extraordinary efforts to recruit and support parent leaders in the establishment of a SEPAC.

THE RIGHT TO BE SELF-GOVERNING AND PARENT LED.

- The SEPAC is entitled to establish bylaws regarding officers and operational procedures and govern itself pursuant to those bylaws.
- The SEPAC is entitled to be led by parent leaders.

THE RIGHT TO EXPRESSION OF CONCERNS FREE FROM RETALIATION.

- The ability to freely express both individual and community concerns is vital to a mutually beneficial relationship between the district and the SEPAC. SEPAC members should be able to express these concerns without fear of retaliation from any member of the district.

THE RIGHT TO BE CONSULTED IN DECISIONS THAT INVOLVE US.

- The SEPAC is charged with advising and educating the district and the community. In order to be effective, the district must actively seek the input and participation of the SEPAC. District policies, procedures, and hiring decisions that directly affect special education students and their families should always be discussed with collaboration in mind.

THE RIGHT TO ADVOCATE FOR ALL.

- The SEPAC is entitled to advocate for all students, aged 3 to 22, for all disabilities, visible and invisible, regardless of prevalence of any specific disability within the district.
- The SEPAC is entitled to request and receive assistance from the district to enable them to communicate effectively with families in their preferred language.

THE RIGHT TO SUPPORT FROM THE DISTRICT.

- The SEPAC is entitled to access to the same district resources as any other organization. Meeting locations, information sharing, and presence at district sponsored events should be encouraged at all levels.
- The SEPAC is entitled to a designated liaison within the district's administration and on the district's School Committee. SEPAC leadership is entitled to regularly meet with to the designated liaisons to advise on special education programs, policies, concerns, and safety.
- The SEPAC is entitled to guidance and support from the district on how to operate in compliance with open meeting law.

THE RIGHT TO BE ACTIVELY PROMOTED AND VIGOROUSLY ADVOCATED FOR BY THE DISTRICT.

- The SEPAC is entitled to expect the district to share and discuss information about the organization with families at all IEP meetings. The district should also work to promote SEPAC awareness throughout all community services (e.g., Library, Fire, Police, Recreation, etc.)

THE RIGHT TO BE TREATED WITH RESPECT BY THE COMMUNITY.

- Special education students and their families are members of their home communities. As members of the school community, their input and participation should be sought and valued on par with their peers. The district should not only support, but actively encourage inclusion through policies and education of the community as a whole.

THE RIGHT TO INCLUSION IN DISTRICT ACTIVITIES.

- Inclusion is a primary goal of special education students and their families. District activities and events should be accessible to all students and families.

THE RIGHT TO EDUCATE AND CREATE RESOURCES.

- The SEPAC is entitled to collaborate with the district to maintain a library of historical SEPAC information. Including, but not limited to bylaws, leadership, meeting notes, and calendars of events.
- The SEPAC is entitled to work in partnership with the district to advise parents, annually, of their rights, regarding special education.