



Attleboro Special Education Parent Advisory Council (ASEPAC)
2013/2014 Annual Report

Prepared for:

Dr. Marisa McCarthy Director of Special Education and Student Support Services
Mr. Kenneth Sheehan Superintendent Attleboro Public Schools
School Committee Attleboro Public Schools

SEPAC Overview:

In accordance with federal and state special education laws and regulations and in adherence with all the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) directives and advisories pertaining to the creation and functioning of special education parent advisory councils, Attleboro Public Schools has established and will continue to foster the Attleboro Special Education Parent Advisory Council (ASEPAC). ASEPAC receives its statutory authority from the Chapter 71B, Section 3 of the Massachusetts General Laws. This authority is also codified in the Code of Massachusetts Regulations (CMR), 603 CMR 28.07(4).

ASEPAC Mission Statement:

The mission of ASEPAC is to facilitate understanding, respect and support for all children with special education needs in our community.

ASEPAC's duties include, but are not limited to:

- Advising the district on matters that pertain to the education and safety of students with disabilities
 - Meeting regularly with school officials
 - Participating in the planning, development, and evaluation of the school district's special education programs
 - Organizing a Basic Rights Training as outlined in the statute:
 - *Each school district shall conduct, in cooperation with the local parent advisory council, at least one workshop annually within the school district on the rights of students and their parents and guardians under the special education laws of the commonwealth and the federal government and shall make written materials explaining such rights available upon request*
- M.G.L. c. 71B, § 1

ASEPAC Board Members serving for 2014/2015 as elected on May 15th 2014:

Angela Ferreira Chairperson
Susan Akell Co-Chairperson
David Nerenberg Treasurer
Michelle Brouillard Workshop Coordinator
Marilyn Mourcharite Secretary
Vacancy - Public Relations

ASEPAC Meetings:

The Officers had three board meetings in the Balfour Room of the Attleboro Public Library this school year and the full ASEPAC body met monthly in the Brennan Middle School library. In keeping with the state's Open Meeting Law, our meetings are posted at least 48 hours in advance, minutes are kept, and agenda/attendance sheets are maintained by the ASEPAC Secretary in compliance with the Public Records Law.

ASEPAC 2013/2014 Accomplishments:

The Board worked hard to achieve goals and objectives on behalf of all students, families and staff in the Attleboro Public Schools. We continued our outreach efforts to members, educators, school PTOs, and the public in general. Some highlights are:

- Introductory meetings with school building Principals to introduce ASEPAC and to collaborate on ideas on how to reach more families with general education inclusion students who are receiving special education services. Additionally these meetings highlighted the workshop trainings offered by ASEPAC for the 2013-2014 school year and we encouraged Principals to invite their staff to attend. ASEPAC aligned their workshop training topics with the Special Education departments' goals of addressing compliance and behavior. Any staff members who attend ASEPAC trainings receive a certificate of attendance, which can be submitted toward PDP's. ASEPAC also sought input from Principals on ways to extend outreach to families with students receiving special education support with general education placements.
- Participation in Blue Pride Night at Attleboro High School to help foster outreach to families with students receiving special education support services.
- Implementation of a website administrator to keep the ASEPAC website up to date with meeting announcements and disability related resources for families and staff. Our website is located at:
http://www.attleboroschools.com/central_office/special_education/attleboro_sepac/index.php
- Implementation of a Facebook page to provide public meeting announcements and to provide links to disability and special education resources for families and staff. Our Facebook page is located at:
<https://www.facebook.com/AttleboroSEPAC>

- Participation at the Transition Expo hosted by Attleboro Enterprises, Inc. In addition to promoting this event through our local list serve and the MassPAC statewide list serve we hosted an information table in the community resource room, which further supported our outreach goals. Additionally, ASEPAC offered childcare at this event so that more families in the community could attend and participate.
- ASEPAC created a procedures guide booklet for each ASEPAC officer position to help attract new volunteers and to clarify how parent volunteers can perform the duties they are elected to fill.
- ASEPAC hosted the 2nd annual Winter Family Dance at the Congregation Agudas Achim. This event provided a fun evening for students receiving special education services and their families.
- ASEPAC hosted a regional SEPAC networking event in March at the Attleboro Public Library. This event was facilitated by a staff member from the Federation of Children with Special Needs and SEPAC's from 4 other communities were represented.
- ASEPAC worked with Business Manager Mr. Rose to clarify the financial responsibilities of ASEPAC funds as outlined in an advisory memo from MassPAC:
 - *A SEPAC may engage in fund-raising activities, but is not required to do so. The following provides additional detail on funds raised or contributions received for support of the SEPAC in the public and private context.*

PUBLIC FUNDS:

Because a SEPAC is a public body established by a school committee, any funds raised or contributions received by a SEPAC are public funds, subject to the laws governing grants or gifts to the school committee. (M.G.L. chapter 44, section 53A and chapter 71, section 37A). This means funds raised by the SEPAC must be deposited with the municipal treasurer, held as a separate account, and become part of the district's End-of-Year Pupil and Financial Report.

A gift to a public school district or other governmental entity is fully deductible, even though the entity does not have separate 501(c)(3) recognition, so long as the gift is used exclusively for public purposes, accepted by the School Committee, and deposited into a fund established by School Committee vote with a defined public purpose. (A charitable

contribution is defined in Section 170(c) of the United States Tax Code and includes gifts to governmental units, 501(c)(3) organizations, and certain gifts to veterans' organizations, fraternal groups and cemetery companies).

ASEPAC 2013/2014 Presentations:

- September 19th Meet & Greet with Mr. Sheehan Superintendent of Attleboro Public Schools and Dr. Marisa McCarthy Director of Special Education and Student Support Services
- October 17th Basic Rights presented by the Federation for Children with Special Needs (in collaboration with the Norton SEPAC)
- November 21st The Impact of Anxiety and Depression on Learning & Attention presented by Child & Family Psychological Services/Integrated Behavioral Associates
- December 19th Parent Support Night
- January 16th How to Write an IEP presented by Gail Maher Student Services Coordinator and Rodica Portal Team Chair for Attleboro Public Schools
- February 20th Student Dance
- March 20th Think Differently: A New Approach for Understanding & Helping Children with Challenging Behavior presented by ThinkKids
- April 17th Special Education Transitions presented by Attleboro Special Education Department
- May 15th Parent Support Night and Officer Elections

ASEPAC Feedback and Concerns:

ASEPAC appreciates the time and willingness of Dr. McCarthy to make herself available for meetings and phone calls to help address the needs and concerns of ASEPAC families and students. ASEPAC officers meet monthly with Dr. McCarthy to address concerns brought forward from PAC members as well as to provide feedback on information shared by Dr. McCarthy with regard to changes within the district pertaining to special education. ASEPAC would like to summarize a few of the concerns that we have shared with Dr. McCarthy.

1. Assistive Technology (AT) continues to be an area where APS needs to improve upon to appropriately provide support for students receiving special education services. Building accessibility into new technologies and curricular materials as they are developed will help to ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities into the full array of learning opportunities that are available to all students. IDEA 2004 requires IEP teams to consider the AT needs of all children with disabilities. (20 U.S.C. 1414 (d)(3)(B)(v)). Further, IDEA 2004 requires schools to provide AT training for the teachers, child and family. (20 U.S.C. 1400 (2)(E) & (F)) The concerns of ASEPAC with regard to AT span across several areas as noted:

- a. With the lack of infrastructure in buildings and the inability to maintain a wi-fi connection, accessing specialized programs and software via technology devices is prohibitive and often prevents students from accessing the curriculum as identified within the support accommodations documented in IEP's. Our inability to implement infrastructure that supports required technology for students as outlined in their IEP has a direct impact on teachers and students by limiting the capabilities of supporting specialized instruction and utilizing technology tools in a meaningful way for students receiving special education support services.
- b. Additionally, it is critical that proficient professional development and training take place in order for school staff to support students who are utilizing technology in support of attaining the goals and benchmarks as defined in their IEP. Parents have shared concerns that implementation of AT is not taking place in a timely manner as well as a lack of maintaining consistent use of AT either due to technical problems encountered or lack of training to support the day to day use of the technology. While the district has benefitted from having an expert dedicated as the AT Specialist, the amount of time allocated for this position as compared to the AT support needs within the school district leaves students and teachers without the ability to fully utilize AT tools in an efficient and consistent way. ASEPAC feels the district needs to consider increasing the time allotted for the AT Specialist to address this concern.
- c. Thoughtful and careful planning must be implemented for a student with AT as part of their IEP as the student transitions from classroom to classroom within the same school as well as school to school when a student is transitioning from elementary to middle and finally high school placements. The implementation needs to be seamless so that when transitions take place the student and the staff can be ready to utilize AT tools instantly.

Please note the following information on assistive technology from the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities website (located at: <http://nichcy.org/laws/ata>)

- i. *As technology has come to play an increasingly important role in the lives of all persons in the United States, in the conduct of business, in the functioning of government, in the fostering of communication, in the conduct of commerce, and in the provision of education, its impact upon the lives of the more than*

50,000,000 individuals with disabilities in the United States has been comparable to its impact upon the remainder of the citizens of the United States. Any development in mainstream technology would have profound implications for individuals with disabilities in the United States. (Findings and Purposes, Assistive Technology Act of 1998, Finding 3)

ii. The Assistive Technology Act was first passed by Congress and signed by the President as the Technology-Related Assistance Act of 1988. It's often called the Tech Act for short and has been reauthorized in 1994, 1998, and 2004.

2. Relocation of the Insights program from Willet Elementary School to Thacher Elementary School. While many of the reasons for the relocation are logical and beneficial, ASEPAC outlined a concern to Dr. McCarthy that the district needs to be mindful that separation and seclusion of sub-separate programming needs to be prevented. Once the transition to Thacher is complete then only 2 out of the 5 elementary schools in our district will have sub-separate programming. In order to have true inclusion and diversity within our schools all general education students and students with disabilities should have school experiences together with as many opportunities for inclusion as possible. This not only benefits students with disabilities but also students in the general education population. In previous district Coordinated Program Reviews by the DESE this issue has been documented and required the special education department to provide corrective action.
 - a. The Department of Education notes the legal standard (both state and federal) for special education facilities and classrooms adhere to the following: The school district provides facilities and classrooms for eligible students that
 - i. Maximize the inclusion of such students into the life of the school
 - ii. Provide accessibility in order to implement fully each child's IEP
 - iii. Are at least equal in all physical respects to the average standards of general education facilities and classrooms
 - iv. Are given the same priority as general education programs in the allocation of instructional and other space in public schools in order to minimize the separation or stigmatization of eligible students; and
 - v. Are not identified by signs or other means that stigmatize such students

3. Confidentiality for students who are receiving special education services is mandated by federal and state law. When incidents occur at a school within the Attleboro Public School district at no time should an administrator identify a student to the public or the local media as being a student who is disabled or as a student who is receiving special education services.
4. We feel that post-secondary transition planning and implementation for students with disabilities that will *not qualify for adult services* upon completion of special education must be pursued with a strong focus and a high level of expertise within the Attleboro school district.
 - a. As reported from the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council in July 2012:
 - i. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that 1 in 88 children in America have an autism diagnosis, and these rates continue to rise. Seven years after high school graduation, one in three young adults with autism have no paid job, college or technical school experience, and another 500,000 children with autism will reach adulthood in the next decade.
5. ASEPAC has requested that Dr. McCarthy pursue establishing an Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment programming partnership with a participating college to benefit students pursuing their transition training goals at Attleboro High School. The ICE Partnership Program provides dual enrollment opportunities to high school students, age 18 - 21, who have intellectual and developmental disabilities in an inclusive college experience. We feel this kind of opportunity will greatly improve the quality of transition services provided to students and improve their long-term success after special education services end.

The officers of ASEPAC look forward to serving in the 2014/2015 school year and we are proud to be part of an effort of continued improvement within the Attleboro Public Schools special education services department.

Respectfully submitted,

Angela Ferreira Chairperson
Susan Akell Co-Chairperson
David Nerenberg Treasurer
Michelle Brouillard Workshop Coordinator
Marilyn Mourcharite Secretary