

QUICK FACTS

Best Practices for Ensuring Collaboration Between Special Education Parent Advisory Groups (SEPAGs) and Boards of Education (BOEs)

The New Jersey Administrative Code for Special Education mandates that:

Each district board of education shall ensure that a special education parent advisory group is in place in the district to provide input to the district on issues concerning students with disabilities" (N.J.A.C. 6A-1.2(h)).



START Statewide Technical Assistance
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A SEPAG gives families the opportunity to provide direct input to their school district about policies, programs, and practices that impact students with disabilities. At the same time, a strong partnership between SEPAGs and BOEs is important for developing and maintaining meaningful family engagement in schools. Together SEPAGs and BOEs can make a positive difference in improving special education programs and services for students with disabilities and their families. Here are some best practices for consideration when ensuring collaboration between SEPAGs and BOEs.

1. Local Board of Education members are aware of the NJ Special Education Code requiring each school district to have a parent-driven SEPAG and recognize the SEPAG's advisory role.

- Parent leaders of a SEPAG provide an overview of the SEPAG's advisory role, annual goals, and activities to the BOE in a public meeting and update the BOE on SEPAG's progress regularly.
- BOE members participate in the NJ School Board Association Special Education Symposium and learn about special education requirements under federal and state laws and regulations.
- BOE members seek input from the SEPAG on the status of special education services, programs, and outcomes for the students with disabilities in the district;
- BOE partner with a SEPAG to include special education as part of the district strategic plan;
- Invite BOE members to connect with the START at the NJFEHUB to learn about SEPAG's purpose and function.

2. A member (or members) of the local BOE attend the SEPAG meetings, and a SEPAG representative serves as a liaison between the SEPAG and BOE's special education subcommittee, if such subcommittee exists

- Special Education administrator and a BOE member participate in the public meetings hosted by a SEPAG and provide updates on the status of the district's special education services and initiatives;
- SEPAG representatives meet with the special education administrator at least quarterly to share ongoing feedback, discuss concerns raised by families, and develop an action plan to resolve identified concerns;
- BOE includes a SEPAG representative to its special education subcommittee, if such subcommittee exists, to provide direct input to the board on proposed plans and initiatives impacting special education in the district.

3. The BOE shares information about district policy and practices, annual school budget, and solicits input on other special education-related areas with the SEPAG before making decisions or proposing changes that impact special education programs and services

- The board policies are publicly available on the district's website, and BOE seeks input from a SEPAG when it proposes to change board policy pertaining to special education.
- A SEPAG liaison serves on the BOE budget committee.
- SEPAG members attend BOE's public hearing meeting and comment on the proposed annual budget;
- SEPAG invites an opportunity for the BOE, the business administrator, and a special education director to explain the proposed school budget and how it would impact special education programs and services in the district, as well as to receive input from the SEPAG.

4. The SEPAG submits and presents its annual report to the BOE on SEPAG activities and discusses the SEPAG recommendations at a BOE meeting.

- SEPAG and BOE work together to create and maintain a positive and supportive climate and culture for special education students and families;
- Collaborate with BOE to decide best methods to provide assurance that SEPAG's recommendations are considered and continue discussion around possible solutions with a timeline for further action.

5. The SEPAG makes their meeting agendas and minutes publicly accessible on the SEPAG's section of the school district's website, SEPAG's social media account, or the SEPAG's website

SEPAG creates opportunities for families of students identified for special education to provide direct input to the BOE and district administration by facilitating parent meetings and engaging them in effective collaboration to benefit the local school community. **See Quick Facts "How Can SEPAGs Turn Input into Action?"** for additional tips and strategies.

6. The SEPAG and BOE have developed a way to communicate with each other to discuss challenges and issues impacting students with disabilities and their families and find solutions to resolve them collaboratively.

SEPAG and BOE facilitate a two-way communication (via email, phone calls, face-to-face meetings, workshops, surveys, etc.) for families to provide meaningful input to the BOE and to receive information from the district about all areas of policy, programs, resources, and topics that impact students with disabilities and their families.

Thank
you!

The New Jersey Family Engagement Hub would like to thank all parents, SEPAG members, and school district staff for their contributions toward the development of this quick reference guide



Access the SPAN SEPAG Guide

