

SEPAG 3/16 Minutes

Committee Members present:

Kelly Martins
Danit Schwartz
Jannie Chung
Yael Shafir
Juana Reyes

Administration Present:

Floro Villanueva
Patricia Eichenlaub

Kelly Martins - Welcoming remarks and introduction

Introductions - Committee Members

Discussions on slides led by Kelly Martins

Please see website for slides: <https://www.closterschools.org/SEPAG>

Strengths and Concerns Slide Discussion with attendees

Programs and activities requested added by the audience:

- After school care - place to socialize/hangout after school
- lunch buddy
- in-class buddy system
- stress can be alleviated if there is a plan to explain transitions between schools
- planning for academic futures - how can we prepare our students for college/What are the options and what types of support are available
- younger kids - early intervention/in-school options information is needed
- It would make it easier if we knew what to expect at the IEP meetings and understand the options and information

Suggestions/concerns shared by attendees:

Parent Comment: IEP reports can be scary – Can we create a flowchart to illustrate the process/roadmap?

Parent Comment: A lot of times you don't know what to ask at an IEP meeting. Help us navigate IEPs so we know what to ask.

Parent Comment: How do you know if your child needs an IEP and what are the options? Schools can facilitate the education of parents and identification of problems.

Parent Comment: What training is offered to teachers on how to identify issues/concerns for students?

Parent Comment: What are some of the things we should be looking out for in our kids? What does a disability look like? Kids present the same disabilities differently – how can parents and teachers access this information?

Parent Comment: Would teachers benefit from additional training about issues related to special education? A concern was shared that sometimes the comments from some general education teachers to some special education students can seem misinformed – perhaps suggesting that understanding of issues/disorders/concerns is variable or not up to date. NOTE: This is not about all teachers. The concern is about gaps in knowledge or misunderstandings as the information about various conditions and how we can best support students related to them continues to evolve. The concern was that misinformed comments from teachers to students can negatively impact children. We do not know what we do not know without continuing education.

Eichenlaub A: Teachers are provided with continuing education opportunities, professional development days, and presentations from professionals at school.

Parent Comment: It is essential to focus on the de-stigmatization of a disability. Children are gifted differently. This is a learning process for everyone.

Parent Comment: Teacher/Provider training should be based on current and updated research.

Parent Comment: Concerns about mental health were expressed.

Eichenlaub A: Check Ins (school psychologist) are available.

Parent Comment: Understanding IEPs can be overwhelming.

Eichenlaub A: Eichenlaub explains that an IEP is a snapshot of how your child is doing at this moment. If you don't understand something please ask. The team is there to help you understand. The website will have information on how the IEP process is started for newly evaluated students. You can reach out to professionals to ask for help in comprehending your IEP.

Parent Comment: It would be helpful to focus on soft skills like being organized - executive functioning skills.

Eichenlaub A: Yes. In addition, there are certain habits and life skills that have to be developed at home. It has to be a collaborative effort to improve the success of a child. If you have specific concerns, please discuss them with your team.

Discussion of How to Improve Communication:

Parent Comment: There is an app that some teachers use called class dojo.

Parent Comment and Question: Quiet children struggle to advocate for themselves, especially in Tenakill. Parents sometimes try to bridge the gap in advocacy between teacher and students but a concern was expressed that sometimes there is a lack of response to attempts to contact some teachers. What is the next step?

Eichenlaub A: If your child does not have an IEP but a 504 the first line of defense is the guidance counselor. If your child has an IEP please contact the case manager.

Parent Comment: A parent expressed concern that there is a difference in knowledge or approach between general education and special education teachers. The concern was that children with IEP children can benefit from that difference while children with 504s may be at a disadvantage.

Parent Comment: When the kids go to HS the communication will be from teacher to student and not teacher to parent so there is a need to teach kids about advocating for themselves in elementary school.

Parent Comment: A parent noted a significant difference between Hillside and Tenakill related to teachers and communication. In Hillside students have 1 main teacher and in Tenakill there is a different teacher for every subject so you would have to communicate with several teachers. Questions about better ways to communicate were brought up and addressed. Parents are encouraged to contact teachers regarding concerns. If they do not receive a reply, they should contact their case manager or 504 coordinator to discuss concerns.

Next Meeting: April 20th at 7 PM at Tenakill Middle School