

Starting & Running Effective Special Education Parent Advisory Groups



SPAN START Project

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*Empowered Parents:
Educated, Engaged,
Effective!*

START Project

TOGETHER! Families Can Make A Difference

**Improve Special Education
Programs & Services
Improve Student Outcomes**

Assistance is available for schools and districts and for parents and parent leaders to enhance family engagement to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.




“Each 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:14-1.2(h)

SEPAG: A LEGAL MANDATE

PURPOSE / FUNCTION

- ▶ To provide direct input on the policies, programs and practices that impact services and supports for children with disabilities and their families.
 - ▶ To provide suggestions and input to address system level needs identified by the district, students, and by families.
 - ▶ To provide input and feedback to the district on proposed plans.
 - ▶ To provide an opportunity to enhance and strengthen collaboration in the district.
 - ▶ To advise on unmet needs of children with disabilities.
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For the District

- ▶ Do I believe that parents can look beyond their own families' experiences?
- ▶ Do I value parents opinions as important?
- ▶ Do I work to create an environment where parents are supported and comfortable enough to speak freely?

For the Parent

- ▶ Can I look beyond my own child's and family experiences?
- ▶ Do I listen respectfully to the professional opinion?
- ▶ Do I bring a spirit of collaboration to the table?

HOW COMMITTED AM I TO THE IDEA OF
“PARENTS AS ADVISORS?”

POTENTIAL BARRIERS

- ▶ Administrative barriers
- ▶ Professional attitudes
- ▶ It is hard work
- ▶ Families' reluctance



AS PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS
COME TOGETHER TO ADVISE ON POLICY
AND PROGRAM ISSUES IN SPECIAL
EDUCATION,
BOTH ARE ENRICHED.



DEVELOPING & IMPLEMENTING AN EFFECTIVE SEPAG



STEP 1: HISTORY

Where are we now with our district SEPAG?

What avenues are there for parent involvement?

Are there any parent groups currently?

What has been tried in the past?

What has been successful?

What do we want to change?

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STEP 2: FUNCTION

What will be the function of the district group?

How will input be attained?

From whom will input be sought?

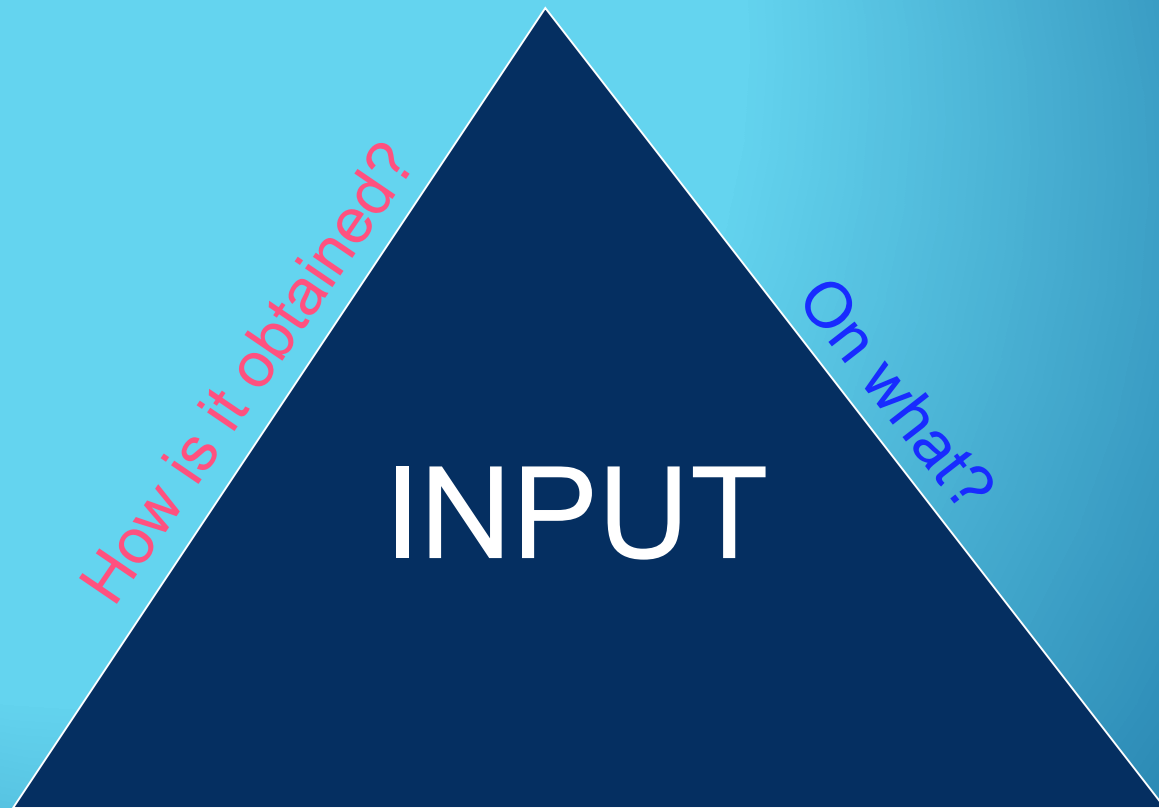
Who will input go to?

What will be done with the input?

How will it be documented?

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KEY ROLE: INPUT



How is it obtained?

On what?

INPUT

What do you do with it?

TOPICS TO PROVIDE INPUT ON:

- ▶ Use the tool provided to think of some topics and issues that you would like to see your district SEPAG address.



STEP 3: OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE

What will be the structure of the group?

Are by-laws needed?

Will there be leadership roles?

How will this group link with other groups. Committees and boards?

How often will the group meet?

Will meetings be open to the public?

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HOLDING PRODUCTIVE MEETINGS

- ▶ It is important that all members be well informed in order to represent their constituency and ensure that group actions are appropriate.
- ▶ Members should feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas.
- ▶ Use majority vote and/or parliamentary procedures or by consensus.
- ▶ The determination for which decision making process will be used should be clear to all parties and consistently utilized.



STEP 4: MEMBERSHIP

What will be the makeup of the group?

How will members be recruited?

How will outreach be conducted to ensure that the parent group is representative of the community?

Will there be terms of office?

What supports will be provided to members?

What roles and responsibilities will members have?

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STEP 5: GOALS & PRIORITIES

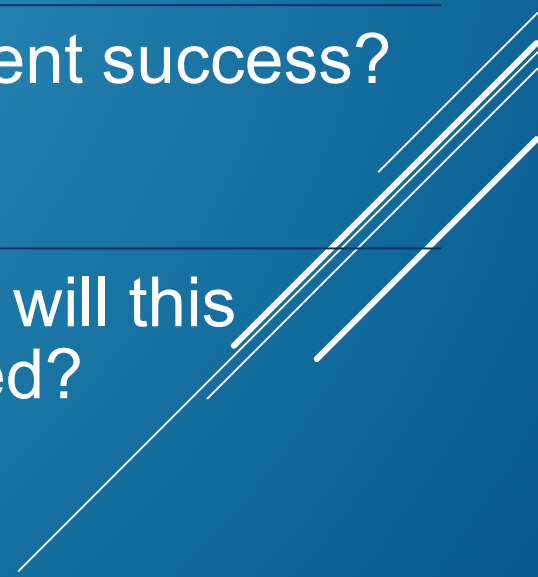
How will goals and priorities be set?

How will you determine the needs and issues to be addressed?

Will goals be set annually?

How will you document success?

How and with whom will this information be shared?

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STEP 6: RESOURCES & SUPPORTS

What supports must be in place to make the SEPAG run effectively?

What administrative supports will Special Services provide to the group?

Who will take minutes of the meetings, prepare agendas and secure meeting space?

What supports will the district provide to the group?

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SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENT ADVISORY GROUPS IN NEW JERSEY

A GUIDE TO DEVELOPING AND CONDUCTING AN EFFECTIVE GROUP

- ▶ Launched Summer 2017 by SPAN and NJ Department of Education
- ▶ The key to a successful partnership is meaningful collaboration and exchange of ideas. This guide was developed with that in mind and is intended to offer a road map to help bring stakeholders together, suggest strategies to help stakeholders engage in dialogue, and offer best practices to help them work together to benefit the local community.
- ▶ To access the guide and a video to accompany the guide, please visit www.spanadvocacy.org

REFLECTION



- ▶ Where are you now?
- ▶ What do you still need to know?
- ▶ What is your next step?

Thank You

Please complete the evaluation

For more information contact us at:

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