

WARWICK SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
2007/2008 Annual Report

The Warwick Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) is required by State Regulation One, X, 2.Opp. 55-57 to present a report to the School Committee on an annual basis.

PURPOSE: This report is to show the work of the Warwick SEAC, and to advise the School Committee on special education services currently offered, unmet needs of special education students, and Warwick's compliance with State and Federal regulations.

A dedicated and talented group of individuals continues to monitor how special education services are delivered in Warwick, following a mission, toward the goal of educating all children according to their needs. The Warwick SEAC supports the District's goal to improve overall education for all students. Therefore, the Warwick SEAC supports the expansion of programs such as the full inclusion models at both the elementary and secondary levels that will positively impact upon improving methods of education in all our schools.

Our monthly meetings have been devoted to fulfilling the requirements stated in our purpose, and further to promote an increase in parent participation and support. The Warwick SEAC requests the opportunity to make a presentation to the full School Committee and respond to questions at the Committee's October meeting.

The Warwick SEAC had a very active and productive year. Parent and professional interest in, and support of our Committee continues to grow and our monthly meetings have been well attended. In January, 2008, the Warwick SEAC, in collaboration with the Rhode Island Parent Information Network (RIPIN), was able to provide an interactive workshop addressing the Basic Rights in Special Education. This was an excellent workshop and the Committee received very positive feedback from the attendees. In May, 2008 the WSEAC received great support from teachers, administrators and related service personnel at our "Everything You Need to Know for New Students" night, held at the Administration Building.

Besides attending regular monthly meetings and reviewing implementation of the aforementioned Action Plan, the Warwick SEAC monitors all activities that impact education, special services, and families. We continued our outreach focus on inclusive education, which seems to be continuing in the right direction, and high school transition issues. Though we still adamantly support inclusion for all students, transition also has many obstacles and misunderstandings for many of our children and their families, and therefore, we continue to need workshops to address these issues.

By partnering for a fourth year with the J. Arthur Trudeau Memorial Center, with the assistance of Warwick SEAC member Pam Goes, Ms. Goes oversaw the implementation of the monthly Transition Workshops for families for the 2007-2008 school year. The topics and speakers once again addressed transition issues related to adult funding and services post graduation. Many families with students at our district high schools continue to be unaware of the wealth of information that is available to them regarding the transition process. It continues to be a goal of the Warwick SEAC to ensure that the information regarding our Transition Workshops is provided to as many families and professionals at all of the secondary level schools, before a student enters their junior year. With the assistance of the Warwick Special Services Administrators, and the Administrators at each of the high schools, we are hopeful that our workshop information will be widely distributed for the 2008-2009 Transition Workshop Series.

Inclusive education continues to be a major focus of the Warwick SEAC, as it is our belief that all students are entitled to an education in the Least Restrictive Environment, with supports and services intact, and therefore, we are dedicated to the training, education, and supports necessary for the inclusion of all children. With the closing last school year of several of our elementary schools that supported inclusive programming, we are hopeful that the receiving elementary schools of those students will continue those

inclusive practices, developing "inclusive" classrooms with appropriate supports. It is the opinion of the Warwick SEAC that for their efforts to be successful, it is imperative that professional development in the areas of inclusion, peer training and positive behavioral supports be provided to the administrators and educators of these receiving schools. The Warwick SEAC is also optimistic that the new Early Childhood Learning Center preschool programs that will be opening in the fall of the 2008-2009 school year will continue to demonstrate the successfulness of inclusive programming at the elementary level. The committee would like to continue to see more opportunities for inclusion at all levels of our children's education. The overall success of these programs depends on the dedication and proper training of ALL the school personnel involved, as well as the families of the children.

As mentioned above, the closing of several of our elementary schools was a concern of the Warwick SEAC. Several parents within the district approached the WSEAC inquiring about our position on the closings. The Warwick SEAC's position on the actions that were taken by the School Committee is attached, as well as posted on our website page, located at <http://mysite.verizon.net/flamingoland/WSEAC/advise.html>.

The Warwick SEAC continues to support the implementation of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) programs that were being implemented in several of our elementary schools this past year. We are looking forward to the addition of three more of our district schools participating in this program. The emphasis of the PBIS program is on school-wide systems of support that include proactive strategies for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate student behaviors to create positive school environments. Introducing, modeling, and reinforcing positive social behavior inside and outside of the classroom for ALL students is an important part of their educational experience.

The Warwick SEAC continues to be interested in the development of the new report card. This Committee would like to see some Special Education parent representation on the committee that is working to create this new grading system for our district's Regular Education and Special Education students.

The Extended School Year (ESY) summer program has just completed. As the Warwick SEAC expresses concern on this topic each year, we would like to continue to expand this program to include more peer models for the children that spend the summer weeks in the ESY program. We still continue to see issues with finding appropriate 'peer' models for our children. We understand that funding for these programs is always a concern, and there have been cutbacks in the amount of ESY programming that has been provided to our children, but it seems absurd to continue to move towards inclusive education during the regular school year, only to discontinue it during the summer. We would once again like to thank the administration for its continued support and creative use of resources to allow the ESY children to participate with peers in alternative programs over the summer.

By regularly attending School Committee meetings and informing the Warwick SEAC members of issues that impact education in our schools, we are able to keep up to date on issues and activities in a timely manner. In this way, we can support the administration, when appropriate, or voice our concerns. In addition, the School Committee is mandated to appoint a member to attend the SEAC's regular monthly meetings. We are pleased to have had representatives from the School Committee in attendance at many of our 2007-2008 monthly meetings. We would like to commend Ms. Lucille Mota-Costa, Mr. Paul Cannistra and Ms. Bethany Furtado for the meetings that they supported. We are optimistic that School Committee members will continue to make an effort to attend the 2008-2009 WSEAC monthly meetings, supporting the mandate. It's always beneficial to us as well as the School Committee when information can be shared. The Warwick SEAC needs the ongoing support of the School Committee to assist us in our goals for Special Services.

It is our goal that the Warwick SEAC, and Special Services in general, inform families of the issues and challenges that our children face. To accomplish this, press releases, advertisements to showcase training and special events and distribution of brochures take place. A website is maintained for the Warwick SEAC, with our Home Page located at <http://mysite.verizon.net/flamingoland/WSEAC/advise.html>.

Recruitment of new parent and consumer members to assure a full quorum and a 51% roster representation of parents of children receiving special education is the function of this subcommittee, as mandated, for our business to proceed. The Warwick SEAC brochure includes a membership application. As indicated on the new IEP forms that became effective July 2008, the school personnel will be required to inform parents/distribute our brochure to parents as part of our outreach efforts. We continue to have new parent members joining our Committee and are pleased with our continued growth. We are always looking for more parents, teacher(s), and related services personnel representatives.

In closing, we thank Dr. Richard D'Agostino and the Assistant Special Education Directors, for their support of the Warwick Public School District's Special Services Department. They all continue to demonstrate a great commitment to quality education and families appreciate their accessibility to them.

Respectfully,

Eve Bisard, Co-Chair

Jessica Schad, Co-Chair

cc: Warwick School Committee

Rhode Island Department of Education

Encl: WSEAC Position on School Closings

April 1, 2008

Dear Parents,

As Co Chairs of the WSEAC we feel it is important to address some parents' concerns regarding the WSEAC's position (or lack thereof) on the issue surrounding the recent school closures. The closures of the 3 schools were announced March 25, and the WSEAC, as a whole, has not met since that decision by the school committee was made.

The WSEAC has been kept up to date through updates on the redistricting process, provided by Dr. D'Agostino, Director of Special Education and a member of the redistricting committee, and WSEAC members who attended the redistricting committee meetings. These updates were given during our WSEAC monthly meetings. Dr. D'Agostino answered questions the WSEAC members asked and he encouraged all members to attend the public hearings on this matter to voice their concerns to the school committee on the proposed plan(s).

Prior to the March 25th School Committee decision, the WSEAC did not take a position on one side of the issue or the other. Part of our mission is to disseminate information on district, state and federal special education issues, provide a forum for parent information and support, and act as a local resource for families with concerns about their child's educational needs. Our committee is comprised of a diverse group of individuals, representing many of the schools throughout the district, including parents, students, teachers, administrators, school committee members, therapists, and anyone else with a concern for our children who receive special education services. The WSEAC is interested in what is happening with all of our children, in all of our schools, in the area of special education. As our meeting attendance numbers continue to grow, we do our best to assist each and every parent that comes to us with a concern with locating the resources they need, or direct them to the appropriate professionals, that can address their individual concerns. We feel the WSEAC has done just that with the issue of redistricting.

We, with the help of a redistricting committee member, Dr. D'Agostino, through our WSEAC meetings, disseminated information to our WSEAC members on the redistricting process and provided a forum for parent information, giving parents information on where they could go to get further information or to voice their concerns – (ie. contacting school committee members, attending the public hearings, identifying website locations where parents could locate proposals and minutes from redistricting meetings, etc.).

With that said, it is our opinion that it is not the WSEAC's position to take a position on the issue of school closings. It is our role to assist families by providing support and information they seek during this process. It is not the role of the WSEAC, as a whole, to determine what is/was/will be considered an appropriate placement, program, or school, for any particular, individual child, whether it be their home school, a school across town, a self-contained placement or an inclusion placement. That is what the IEP

team is for. We, the WSEAC Co-Chairs, personally, are disappointed that any school had to close. We admire all of the professionals and parents that are advocating to reverse the decision that was made. But the WSEAC will respond to the school committee decision that has been made, and any future decisions that may be made, by continuing to support our mission of providing support and assistance to any parent who has a concern regarding their child and the special education services that they receive. It is up to each parent and the rest of their child's IEP team, for each individual child affected by the school closures, to determine what is an appropriate transition plan to the next placement, where that placement may be, etc. As many on our committee can confirm, we have many parent members whose children with special needs have attended several different schools before the time they had even reached 6th grade. Many have never been in their home schools. I believe our committee members are a valuable resource and can share their experiences, how their IEP teams assisted with successful transitions to new classrooms, new buildings, new peers, new educators, related service providers, and share their knowledge with, and offer support to, parents who will be experiencing transition due to the school closings.

As we continue to receive information from parents and professionals in regards to the students with special needs affected by this ongoing process, the WSEAC will continue to keep our membership informed.

Respectfully,

Eve Bisard, WSEAC Co-Chair
Jessica Schad, WSEAC Co-Chair