

WARWICK SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

2002/2003 Annual Report

The Warwick SEAC is required by State Regulation One, X, 2.0pp. 55-57 to present a report to the School Committee on an annual basis.

PURPOSE: This report is to show the work of the 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.

The Warwick SEAC members have reviewed the implementation of the Special Services "Action Plan" which was derived from the recommendations of the Task Force to review the Special Services Division Management Study. This plan has been implemented under the direction of Stephen Lowery, Director of Special Services. A talented and enthusiastic group of people 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 fully inclusive models that will positively impact upon improving methods of education in all our elementary schools. We were heartened to see two additional elementary schools join this effort in 2002 - 2003 school year.

We would also like to commend the schools that have had their SALT visits and have had their School Improvement Teams write plans based on these visits that include strategies to close the gaps that exist between regular and special education students.

Our monthly meetings have been devoted to fulfill 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.

Besides attending regular monthly meetings and reviewing implementation of the aforementioned Action Plan, the Warwick SEAC monitors all activities that impact on education, special services, and families. The Warwick SEAC conducts its business by way of subcommittees. The following have been active for the past school year:

Inclusion Subcommittee

This is 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. We are hopeful that the number of elementary schools that have developed "inclusive" classrooms with appropriate supports will continue to grow beyond the present eleven schools participating. We were heartened to see two additional elementary schools begin planning for this effort in 2002-2003 school year, bringing the total to 13 of our elementary schools participating. Dr. Anthony Antosh of the Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities continues to make himself available as a valuable outside resource for inclusion practices in the schools. He has visited and spoken at many over the years. The overall success of this program depends on the dedication and proper training of ALL the school personnel involved, as well as the families of the children.

We are very pleased with the success of the new Middle School model now in its second year at Gorton Jr. High and how it continues to be refined and modified. We recommend sustained efforts to move the education of all our 12 - 14 year old students towards Middle School Structure in the near future. Special Needs students will benefit from the increased communication among/between teachers and the consolidation of the instructional program, which occurs in a middle school. We are encouraged by and support the efforts of the School Committee working with the Warwick Teacher's Union to establish additional reading programs at Gorton Jr. High. We also wish to see continued growth and support of the ALP program at Winman Jr. High and the therapeutic program at Park Elementary.

The new inclusive summer program at Drum Rock has just completed its third year. We would like to continue to expand this program to include more peer models for the children that spend the summer weeks there and wish to explore options such as having more parent involvement and off site field trips. We also had a meeting in the spring to brainstorm with all parties associated with the summer program. Over the past few years, we've seen issues with finding appropriate 'peer' models for our children as well as funding for these non-disabled children to attend the program. There is also seems to be a lack of parent interest within this population. This year, we had a questionnaire sent out to students and teachers that participated in the ESY program and got a great response. We also had many suggestions as to how to improve the program and continue towards more inclusive practices. It would be wonderful to see this issue explored and funded in years to come as it seems absurd to continue to move towards inclusive education during the regular school year then discontinue it during the summer.

Liaison Subcommittee to the School Committee

By attending School Committee meetings and informing the SEAC members of issues that impact on 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. During the 2002/2003 school year, a member of the School Committee attended just one of our meetings. This continues to be ongoing issue as over the past 5 years, a representative of the School Committee has attended only a couple of meetings. We have tried everything to encourage attendance and to remind the School Committee of this responsibility, all to no avail. Once again, we would like to see the School Committee assign someone on a monthly, rotating basis to alleviate this in future years, and enforce this participation. SEAC needs the support of the School Committee to assist us in our goals for Special Services. Hopefully, the upcoming elections and the results will infuse new energy and enthusiasm in the School Committee and its ultimate involvement with our committee.

We also attended the Rhode Island School Improvement visit this year and were interviewed by a member of the Rhode Island Department of Education team about the special education programs in Warwick, as well as inclusive education practices. A member also represented WSEAC at the new RI State Improvement Grant initiative that involves more communication and among the state's LACs.

We also supported and spoke at the Warwick City Council budget hearings for the School Department.

Speakers and Trainers

Qualified experts are on this subcommittee to bring their expertise into our schools for training and support of our families and faculty. This year several workshops were conducted with the support of the SEAC. Topics included our 2nd annual information night on what happens when your child with special needs <or any child for that matter> enters kindergarten. It was presented at John Wickes School and included representatives from this committee, a principal, regular and special education teachers and classroom aides, transportation, Child Outreach, Title 9, administrators, and specialists such as therapists and guidance people. A brochure was developed that can be used from year to year as we hope to continue this as yearly event as well as expand it to the families with children entering the pre-school system.

We also had a workshop that provided information on how parents/caregivers of children with special healthcare needs can plan for a future for their children when they are no longer around, that is, to set up a special needs trust. MetLife representatives spoke to many parents on this subject and provided a great resource for this sometimes difficult topic.

Public Relations Subcommittee

Working with all the other subcommittees, it is our goal that the Warwick SEAC, and Special Services in general, are highlighted, recognized, and thought of with respect. To accomplish this, press releases, advertisements to showcase training and special events, and visibility at events in all elementary schools for questions and distribution of brochures take place. Our Home Page on the web, <http://www.warwickschools.org/SPED/SPED.htm>, notes meeting agendas, upcoming training workshops, and events.

Membership Subcommittee

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 go on. The SEAC brochure includes a membership application the school personnel guarantees distribution to parents as part of our outreach efforts. We've had several new parent members join us this year, as well as a teacher. We hope to expand this and are actively recruiting for parents, as well as a principal or two, to join our committee.

In closing, we commend Stephen Lowery for his excellent leadership and goals he has supported on the Task Force. He is committed to quality education and families appreciate his accessibility to them. Special thanks also go to Paul Vigeant, Assistant Special Education Director for attending almost all of our meetings. We'd also like to thank Mr. Richard Maresca, principal at Holliman, for his ongoing support of Special Olympics and good luck on his retirement. We'd also like to wish Kathryn Keenan well as she leaves her position as Assistant Special Education Director and moves on to principal and Mary Leone's continued support of the ESY program.

Sincerely,

Sharon Terzian, Co-Chair

Annie Johnson, Co-Chair

cc: Warwick School Committee

Rhode Island Department of Education