

WARWICK SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

2004/2005 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.

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 full inclusion models that will positively impact upon improving methods of education in all our schools.

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.

We are frustrated with the continuing teacher contract issue and the union's position on trainings, working to rule, adversarial attitude, and other matters. While some teachers are doing what they normally do, the atmosphere at some of the schools continues to deteriorate as this drags on and there appears to be no solution on the horizon. The refusal of teachers to attend trainings over the summer, go out on field trips, be a part of PTO/PTAs, attend our meetings, write comments on report cards, write college recommendations, and to staff the usual fall open houses that a lot of parents depend on for information and introductions is also very distressing. The trainings are necessary for teachers to learn the new paperwork and protocols required by the No Child Left Behind initiative and the new IDEA regulations. These trainings benefit them, as well as our children. There are also some teachers that are indeed 'working to rule' and therefore not available to parents either before or after school should the need arise. Parents of children with special needs tend to need more access to teachers than other parents and though this is not all teachers, there are enough to warrant us mentioning this.

This year was also a very difficult year regarding the budget for the City, especially the School Department. Several members attended many School Committee and City Council meetings involving budget issues. Originally, it was proposed that ALAP, athletics, and

other programs would be gone or severely cut, and at one point, Pottowomut School was on the list for closing. The Mayor drastically cut the overall budget, and although Special Services managed to remain mostly intact, the Mayor's was insistent on creating a program to allow more of the children placed outside of the school system to return to the district. Warwick has one of the lowest out of district placements of any school system in Rhode Island. A task force was created by the Mayor, and although there were no parents initially on it, several members went to a meeting and were well received and allowed to speak on behalf of this population. As of now, this new program is still being looked at. Overall, the budget will continue to have major money issues regarding the teachers' contract. Currently, there are no funds in the budget to allow for any settlement; the administration saying it was premature to include these, but given the many budget cutbacks and shortages, it seems it will be difficult to later come up with funds to supply any monies needed to settle the contract.

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. This year we shifted our outreach focus from inclusive education, which seems to be going in the right direction, to 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 needed some workshops to address these issues.

By partnering with the J. Arthur Trudeau Memorial Center, the Warwick SEAC implemented monthly workshops for families for the school year 2004/2005. All 6 secondary schools were asked to send the provided flyers home with all students with an IEP. Workshops were held at Pilgrim, Toll Gate & Warwick Vets. The topics & speakers were:

- Transition introduction & overview
Rosemary Lavigne Westbay Collaborative
- ORS services & benefits management
Pat Vealy & Ginny Perelson Office of Rehabilitative Services
- Funding/adult services
Sue Lundin/Joann Malise Division of Developmental Disabilities
- Advocacy & planning
Doreen McConaghy PAL
- IEP transition goals
Paul Yigeant Warwick School Department

Participating families were given Transition Planning folders provided by the Sherlock Center on Disabilities for their personal use. Attendance averaged 15 people per

workshop. Workshop evaluations were generally very good, with families requesting that we continue to hold them each year.

Inclusive education 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 number of schools participating. 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.

The summer program at Drum Rock has just completed. 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 still continue to see issues with finding appropriate 'peer' models for our children as well as funding for these non-disabled children to attend the program. Our now annual questionnaire was sent out to students and teachers that participated in the ESY program and it got a great response. We also had 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. 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 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. We would like to commend Mr. Robert Cushman, for attending several of our meetings this year and for holding many meetings on his own to keep families informed of the ongoing budget issue. Dr. Thompson also attended a meeting this year. It's always beneficial to us as well as the School Committee when information can be shared.

Several of us attend the School Committee meetings on a regular basis. This biggest issue this year is the budget and the cuts made by the Mayor. There is no money in the budget for the teachers, should they settle the contract and taxes are ever increasing in the City even without the budgeting of this money. There is still no end in sight to the teacher contract issues and currently no further negotiations planned.

Qualified experts on this committee bring their expertise into our schools for training and support of our families and faculty. Our annual information night on what happens when your child with special needs <or any child for that matter> enters kindergarten had to be cancelled again, due to the teachers' union position on after school participation. We had hoped to continue this as yearly event as well as expand it to the families with children entering the pre-school system, but until the contract is settled, this event is still on hold.

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 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. We also developed a new brochure based on the RITAP (RI Technical Assistance Project) Resources and Options for families that is available online as well.

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, Mr. Gerry Habershaw, former Assistant Principal at Aldrich Jr. High and now Principal at Vets, and Ms. Rosemary Hunter, principal at Greenwood Elementary join us this year. We still are in need of more parents, teacher(s), and related services personnel representatives.

In closing, we commend Stephen Lowery for his excellent leadership and support over the years. He is committed to quality education and families appreciate his accessibility to them. We wish him well in his new position in the Warwick School Department. We also would like to welcome Mr. Bill McDevitt as the new Director of Special Services. Bill has also already made himself readily available to families.

Sincerely,

Annie Johnson, Chair

Sharon Terzian

cc: Warwick School Committee

Rhode Island Department of Education