

WARWICK SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

2005/2006 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 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 continue to be frustrated with the ongoing 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. 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. There are also some teachers that are indeed 'working to rule' and therefore are 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. We are hopeful that with the newly elected leadership within the Warwick Teachers Union, we will begin to see progress towards a resolution of the teachers' 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 continued 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 for a second year with the J. Arthur Trudeau Memorial Center, with the assistance of Warwick SEAC member Pam Goes, the Warwick SEAC implemented monthly workshops for families for the 2005-2006 school year. The topics & speakers not only addressed transition issues related to adult funding and services post graduation, but also addressed transition issues at the preschool level related to accessing the Katie Beckett Medicaid Program and Advocacy 101, providing information to families new to the special education system.

In October, 2005, the Warwick SEAC was able to provide a detailed workshop presented by David Kane, Esq., Office of Special Needs, Rhode Island Department of Education, reviewing the new 2004 IDEA Federal Regulations.

Victor Mecurio, Director of Secondary Education, attended the February, 2006 Warwick SEAC meeting to discuss the new Graduation by Proficiency requirements that will be in effect for the graduating class of 2008.

At the March, 2006 Warwick SEAC meeting, Mr. Dave Groshia, educator at North Providence High School and Mr. Mike Healy, Special Education Chair of North Providence High School, presented Graduation by Proficiency information based on their 6 years of experience with the Senior Projects and Graduation by Proficiency requirements.

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. 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 Warwick SEAC is concerned with the recent involuntary transfers that occurred at the end of the year of some of our elementary special education teachers because of budgetary issues. These transfers will undoubtedly leave some schools with higher special education teacher/student ratios. We realize it is a luxury to have lower ratios, but with special education teachers doing more than just supporting children with IEP's in the inclusion settings, these teachers are responsible for other duties such as testing, addressing teaching and reading strategies for children without IEP's that are not counted in their lower classroom caseloads. Higher caseloads make inclusive services more difficult to deliver properly, which in turn makes it more difficult for our children to succeed. It is our hope that we will not see an increase in more self-contained classroom

placements of children who would otherwise have been successful with the previous staffing arrangements in the various elementary schools affected by this budget issue.

The Extended School Year (ESY) 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 more 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. 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, 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 attending School Committee meetings and informing the Warwick 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 several members of the School Committee – Robert Cushman, Dr. John Thompson, Lucille Mota-Costa – for attending several of our meetings this past year. Their attendance rotation schedule seemed to be somewhat effective in ensuring a committee member was in attendance at Warwick SEAC's monthly meetings, supporting the mandate, but attendance at all of the meetings did not occur. We are hopeful that the rotation schedule this year will result in attendance and participation by the School Committee at all of the scheduled Warwick SEAC meetings. We also thank School Committee members for holding several meetings with concerned parents and PTA groups to keep families informed of the ongoing budget issues. 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.

Several of us attend the School Committee meetings on a regular basis. The biggest issue this past year was the budget and the cuts made by the Mayor. There is not enough 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. Hopefully, the results of the Warwick Teachers' Union election this past June will infuse new energy and enthusiasm within the Union and the School Committee and its ultimate settlement with a teacher's contract will be reached.

Several of the Warwick SEAC members demonstrated our support through our attendance at the Warwick City Council budget hearings for the School Department.

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://www.warwickschools.org/SPED/SPED.htm>. We also distribute our brochure, that was developed last year, based on the RITAP (RI Technical Assistance Project) Resources and Options for families and 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 proceed. The Warwick 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. We still are in need of more parents, teacher(s), and related services personnel representatives.

In closing, we commend Mr. William McDevitt for his excellent leadership and support this past year. He demonstrated a great commitment to quality education and families appreciated his accessibility to them. We wish him well as he leaves the position of Warwick Special Education Director and returns back to the classroom. Special thanks to Mr. Robert Mattis, Assistant Special Education Director, for his support at several Warwick SEAC meetings. We wish Mr. Paul Vigeant well in his new position with West Warwick Public Schools.

Sincerely,

Eve Bisard, Co-Chair
Sharon Terzian, Co-Chair
cc: Warwick School Committee
Rhode Island Department of Education