

WARWICK SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

2006/2007 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 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.

The Committee is pleased that a resolution was finally reached this past year with the teachers' union. The committee received feedback from parents and professionals that open houses at each of the schools were very well attended, field trips have resumed and in March, 2007, the WSEAC received great support from teachers, administrators and related service personnel at our "Everything You Wanted To Know About Kindergarten" night, held at Sherman Elementary School.

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 Committee was pleased to have several WSEAC members involved with the Superintendent Search Committee as well as the Strategic Planning Committee. This year, we continued our outreach focus from inclusive education, which seems to be continuing 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, we continue to need workshops to address these issues.

By partnering for a third 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 2006-2007 school year. The topics & speakers addressed transition issues related to adult funding and services post graduation. As it has been clear by the growing attendance numbers at these workshops, and the many families with high school juniors and seniors who have not been exposed to any information regarding the transition process, it is a goal of the Warwick SEAC to ensure that the information regarding our transition workshops be provided to as many families and professionals at all of the secondary level schools, before a student enters their junior year.

In May, 2007, the Warwick SEAC, in collaboration with the Rhode Island Parent Information Network (RIPIN), was able to provide an interactive workshop addressing how to develop

positive working relationships between parents and professionals. This was an excellent workshop and the Committee received very positive feedback from the attendees.

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 Warwick SEAC is hopeful that the several new inclusive preschool classrooms that will be opening at several schools in the fall of the 2007 - 2008 school year will continue to demonstrate the successfulness of inclusive programming at the elementary level. As many of the committee member's children are getting older and entering the secondary level of their education, families are reporting that there are not as many opportunities at the secondary level for inclusion as they had available to them in their elementary years. The committee would like 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.

The WSEAC was very interested in the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) programs that were being implemented in several of our elementary schools this past year. 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 Committee would like to see this program implemented at all of our district schools.

The Extended School Year (ESY) summer program has just completed. As it is a challenge each 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 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 – Mr. Paul Cannistra, Ms. Lucille Mota-Costa, Mr. Christopher Friel, and Ms. Bethany Furtado – for attending several of our meetings this past year. Their attendance rotation schedule continues to be 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 due to Superintendent Search Committee Meeting scheduling conflicts. We are hopeful that the rotation schedule will continue to result in attendance and participation by the School Committee at all of the scheduled Warwick SEAC meetings. 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 that had to be made. Of ongoing interest to the Warwick SEAC is the discussion of privatizing the special education busing, as this directly affects our children.

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 continue to 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 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 commend Mr. Robert Shapiro for his excellent leadership and support over the years with the Warwick Public School District. He demonstrated a great commitment to quality education and families appreciated his accessibility to them. We wish him well as he retires from the position of Superintendent of Warwick Public Schools. The Committee looks forward to welcoming the newly hired Superintendent, Dr. Peter Horoschack. We'd also like to extend our welcome to Dr. Richard D'Agostino, who accepted the position of Director of Special Education this year. Thanks to both Dr. D'Agostino and Ms. Susan Rooney, Assistant Special Education Director, for their support at several Warwick SEAC meetings.

Sincerely,

Eve Bisard, Co-Chair

Jessica Schad, Co-Chair

cc: Warwick School Committee

Rhode Island Department of Education