

Warwick Special Education Advisory Committee

2010-2011 Annual Report

The Warwick Special Education Advisory Committee (WSEAC) 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 WSEAC, 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 continue 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 WSEAC supports the District's goal to improve overall education for ALL students. Therefore, the WSEAC 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 meetings have been devoted to fulfilling the requirements stated in our purpose, and further to promote an increase in parent participation and support.

The WSEAC had a very busy year. We held meetings on a monthly basis. The meetings were well attended compared to the previous school year. At the end of the 2010-2011 school year the WSEAC reports nine (9) "voting" members and one (1) student member. The WSEAC will continue our efforts to recruit both parent and professional members. According to the WSEAC by laws, the committee shall be composed of not more than twenty-one (21) individuals.

The WSEAC hosted a number of workshops and events for families this year. In November 2010, we partnered with the local Fire and Police Departments and held a Safety Day for children with special needs and their families. The event was held at the Apponaug Station and was well attended. The families received tours of both the Fire and Police Stations and participated in an interactive Martial Arts demonstration. The Fire Inspector and Police Officers also talked to the children about safety issues and provided fingerprinting kits for all children. The WSEAC thanks Officer Stephen Lombardi and Fire Inspector Michael Matteson for helping us organize this event. The WSEAC plans to host a similar event in the next school year. In December 2010, we hosted a Parents Night Out "pilot" event at Sherman School. Parents were able to enjoy a night out while the children participated in structured holiday activities led by teachers and volunteers at school. The event was a huge success and the WSEAC thanks Mrs. Paton and the teachers who volunteered their time. We plan to host this

event again in the next school year. In March 2011 we had the pleasure of meeting Eric Duquette and his mother Judy at one of our guest speaker presentations. Eric is a young man with Autism who graduated from Smithfield High School as the Salutatorian. We had many parents and professionals who came to listen to Eric's story. Also in March 2011, we held a workshop on "Executive Functioning" skills. The workshop was presented by Sue Constable from RITAP. We had a mix of about 50 parents and professionals who attended and found the information to be very useful. In May 2011, we hosted our final event for the 2010-2011 school year. We held a workshop on the topic of "Successful Inclusion". Dr. Barry Prizant was our guest speaker for the evening and we had a fair turnout with a mix of both parents and professionals. We received great feedback from attendees. Lastly, the WSEAC is currently working on plans to host a family bowling event in the fall of 2011.

In addition to the workshops and family events that we hosted this year, the WSEAC was very proud to participate in the *1st Annual Walk to Stop Bullying* on May 21, 2011. Team WSEAC walked with other teams together as a community to put an end to bullying in Rhode Island. The event was well attended the WSEAC members raised over \$100 for a very worthy cause. We plan to participate again next year.

We continue to have WSEAC members actively representing our organization at the Statewide Special Education Advisory Network (SEAN) meetings. The group, which is led by Rhode Island Parent Information Network (RIPIN) meets semiannually, in the Fall and the Spring and provides a forum to network with parent leaders from other districts within the State. The group also discusses important educational issues surrounding individuals with special needs. A representative from RIDE usually attends the meetings as well and provides the group with statewide updates.

Besides attending scheduled meetings and reviewing implementation of the aforementioned Action Plan, the WSEAC monitors all activities that impact education, special services and families. We continue our outreach focus on inclusive education and high school transition issues. We adamantly support inclusion for all students, when appropriate. The topic of transition has many obstacles and misunderstandings for many of our children and their families, and therefore, we continue to need workshops to address both of these issues. Since we presented a workshop on "Successful Inclusion" this year, the WSEAC plans to hold a workshop on Transition issues during the next school year.

Inclusive education continues to be a major focus of the WSEAC, as it is our belief that all students are entitled to an education in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), 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 thrilled that Warwick continues to support inclusive practices by developing "inclusive" classrooms with appropriate supports. It is the opinion of the WSEAC that for these efforts to continue to be successful, it is imperative that ongoing professional development in the areas of inclusion, peer training, positive behavioral supports (PBIS) and Response to Intervention (RTI) be provided to the Administrators,

Educators and Related Service Providers in our schools, not just the Special Educators. Also, the committee would like to continue to see more opportunities for inclusion at ALL schools within our district and at ALL levels of our children's education, not just at the elementary level. In addition, please note that the overall success of all programs depends on the dedication and proper training of ALL school personnel involved, as well as the families of the children. There must be a partnership between ALL parties involved with everyone working as a team and remembering that the child's parents are important members of that IEP team.

The Extended School Year (ESY) was completed in August 2011. As the WSEAC 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 summer weeks in the ESY program. We still continue to see issues with developing programs with appropriate "peer" models for our children. We understand that funding for these programs is always a concern, and there have been cutbacks over the years in the amount of ESY programming that has been provided to our children, but it still seems absurd to continue to move towards inclusive education during the regular school year, only to discontinue it during the summer months. Our children's disabilities do not go away in the summer, therefore it is extremely important to provide them with consistent programming. We would, however, like to thank the administration for its continued support and creative use of resources to allow ESY children to participate with peers in alternate summer programs to best meet their needs.

At least one member of the WSEAC tries to attend all School Committee meetings. By regularly attending the meetings and informing the other WSEAC members of issues that impact education in our schools, we are able to keep up to date on issues within our district. We are able to support the administration, when appropriate, or voice our concerns in a timely manner. As a reminder, the School Committee is mandated to appoint a member to attend the WSEAC's scheduled meetings. The School Committee's attendance during the 2010-2011 school year was much better than last year. We would like thank School Committee member, Patrick Maloney for attempting to attend most of our meetings this year. It is always beneficial to us as well as the School Committee when information can be shared. The WSEAC needs the ongoing support of the School Committee to assist us in our goals for Special Services.

It is our goal that the WSEAC, and Special Services in general, inform families of the issues and challenges that our children face. To accomplish this, we distribute flyers for WSEAC sponsored events and workshops to all schools and we advertise the events in the local newspaper. We also display our brochure and flyers at various locations throughout the community, in an effort to reach as many families as possible. In addition, a web site is maintained for the WSEAC at www.wseac.org where information such as meeting dates and upcoming events can be found as well as meeting minutes, annual reports and general information about our committee. Our web site also provides links to other web sites related to special education.

Recruitment of new parent members to assure a full quorum and a 51% roster representation of parents of children receiving special education services is the function of this subcommittee, as mandated, for our business to proceed. As indicated on the revised IEP forms, the school district MUST provide information for parents on the Local or Regional Advisory Committee on Special Education ie. the Warwick Special Education Advisory Committee (WSEAC). We will continue our recruiting efforts during the next school year focusing mostly on families that have young children, since many of our members have children in high school and will soon be moving on. In addition to parents and guardians, we are looking for more educators and related service providers to become part of our group and share their ideas, knowledge and experiences with us. We will try our best during the next school year to recruit them as well, since partnership, as previously mentioned, is so very important in order for our children to be successful.

The WSEAC is very pleased to announce the implementation of the *Best Buddies* program at Tollgate High School. We would like to thank Mr. Ken Roberts, husband of WSEAC member Cindy Roberts, for working so hard to organize the startup of the Tollgate Best Buddies chapter. The program has provided an amazing experience for the students with special needs AND the peer buddies who volunteer. The WSEAC has since then had many discussions with Best Buddies RI about implementing the program at the other Warwick High Schools. A representative from Best Buddies RI attended one of our WSEAC meetings and presented us with information about how the program works and how to get started. The staff at Veterans High School immediately expressed an interest and will start the Veterans Best Buddies chapter in the fall. This program will fill a much needed gap for our children with special needs. For some, they will finally experience what it is like to have a friend to hang out with and go places with, just like other teenagers. The Best Buddies program is currently offered only at the High School level but they are working on being able to offer it at the Middle Schools in the near future.

In closing, we, the WSEAC would like to thank Dr. Richard D'Agostino and the three Assistant Special Education Directors for their ongoing support of the Warwick Public School District's Special Services Department. They all continue to demonstrate a great commitment to quality education for all children and also extend their support at our monthly meetings. We appreciate all your hard work.

Respectfully,

Jessica Schad, Chair WSEAC

cc. Warwick School Committee

Rhode Island Department of Education

