



A Guide for Local Special Education Advisory Committees in Virginia

A joint project of
Virginia Department of Education and
Partnership for People with Disabilities

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This Guide was developed by a team of parents and educators committed to strengthening Virginia’s local Special Education Advisory Committees (SEACs-sometimes referred to as Local Advisory Committees or LACs). The developers intend that this Guide be used to strengthen collaboration and effective working relationships among families, school board members, division staff and administrators, and community members as a means of improving special education services and outcomes for students with disabilities. The development of the Guide was supported through a joint project of the Virginia Department of Education, the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities and the Partnership for People with Disabilities. The team of developers and reviewers includes:

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INTRODUCTION

The purposes of this Guide are to: (1) provide basic information for local Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) members and school division representatives regarding SEAC roles and functions as defined in the *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia* and (2) offer practical suggestions and sample tools for carrying out this work. The Guide is intended to assist SEAC members and school division staff in developing and maintaining effective and efficient local SEACs. (Please note local school divisions are also referred to as Local Educational Agencies, or LEAs. Both terms are used interchangeably throughout this Guide.)

With the increasing challenge of providing quality education for students with disabilities, and meeting the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA '04), SEACs fulfill a requirement for the involvement of key stakeholders and can play a critical role in assisting school divisions in shaping services for students with disabilities. IDEA '04 requires that each state establish and maintain a state advisory panel (State Special Education Advisory Committee, or SSEAC) for the purpose of advising the state special education staff regarding the education of eligible children with disabilities. State advisory committee members are appointed by

the Governor or another official authorized under state law to make such appointments. Virginia SSEAC members are appointed by the Virginia Board of Education. Some members serve as parent representatives of the Superintendents' regions in which they live.

In Virginia, in addition to the SSEAC, each school division is required by Virginia regulations to have a local advisory committee (local Special Education Advisory Committee, or SEAC). These committees advise the local school divisions of unmet needs and assist the school divisions in formulating plans for improving the performance of children with disabilities in the divisions' schools and the community. Parents of students with disabilities, persons with disabilities, and community members are appointed by their local school board and serve on SEACs in each school division, according to locally developed SEAC bylaws.

Family and community involvement in schools has long been recognized as a critical factor in improving student outcomes. School divisions require stakeholder involvement and input as a means of evaluating the services and programs they offer and staying abreast of the needs and expectations of the students, families and communities they serve. When SEACs operate

"I believe the SEAC plays a vital role in the school system and the community; however, involvement from the school, community and parents is lacking. I am not sure what it would take to get all the players involved. I welcome any training assistance, promotions and involvement possibilities. I would like to see a more collaborative approach/involvement for the SEAC." Respondent to a SEAC Needs Assessment Survey completed by the Partnership for People with Disabilities, 2005

well, they can be an important and useful tool for families and school divisions in improving student services and outcomes.

Those responsible for SEAC organization and development are faced with many challenges. There are limited resources that provide direction and information regarding how SEACs are to organize themselves and develop as effective advisory committees. SEAC and school division leaders often search for successful models and practices without the advantage of formal orientation or training.

This Guide is designed for local SEAC members as well as school board members and school division administrators and staff working with local SEACs. The Guide provides information and describes experiences that have been found to be supportive and successful.

The Guide can be supported by several helpful booklets and brochures:

- *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia* (effective March 27, 2002);
- *A Parent's Guide to Special Education*;
- *A sample Local Special Education Advisory Committee Public Information Brochure*;
- *Primer on People First Language*;
- *Primer on Special Education Acronyms, Abbreviations, and Definitions*; and
- *A Presentation about the Functions, Procedures, and Roles of Local SEACs.*

These resources can be accessed on one or more of the following websites:

www.doe.virginia.gov/
www.vcu.edu/partnership
www.usu.edu/mprrc/infoserv/pubs.cfm

SEAC REGULATIONS

FUNCTIONS

Local SEAC functions are established in Virginia regulations. These functions are cited from 8 VAC 20-80-90 of the *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia*, effective March 27, 2002:

E. 2. The functions of the local advisory committee shall be as follows:

- a. Advise the local school division of unmet needs in the education of children with disabilities;
- b. Assist the local school division in the formulation and development of plans for improving performance of children with disabilities specified in **subdivision B 1 b** of this section;
- c. Participate in the development of priorities and strategies for meeting the identified needs of children with disabilities;
- d. Submit periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities to the division superintendent for transmission to the local school board;
- e. Assist the local school division in interpreting plans to the community for meeting the special needs of children with disabilities for educational services; and
- f. Review the policies and procedures for the provision of special education and related

services prior to submission to the local school board and the Virginia Department of Education.

The SEAC functions as listed in the Virginia regulations reference Virginia Code, or Virginia Law, Subdivision B 1 b. This subdivision is cited from the Virginia Code:

subdivision B 1 b

B. Plans, applications, and reports.

1. The local educational agency shall prepare and submit to the Virginia Department of Education, policies and procedures for the provision of special education and related services that comply with all sections of this chapter and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations and any revisions to such policies and procedures. Local school divisions shall first submit the policies and procedures and revision to the policies and procedures to their local school board for approval. State-operated programs, the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind at Staunton, and the Virginia School for the Deaf, Blind and Multi-Disabled at Hampton shall first submit the policies and procedures to the state special education advisory committee for review. The policies and procedures shall include:
 - a. An application for funding under Part B; and
 - b. Progress toward meeting the goals for the performance of children with disabilities in accordance with **subdivision 2 of 8 VAC 20-80-30**.

8 VAC 20-80-30 of the *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia*

Functions of the Virginia Department of Education are cited in the regulations:

The Virginia Department of Education (state education agency) shall perform the following functions:

12. Establish goals for the performance of children with disabilities that will promote the purpose of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act as stated in 34 CFR § 300.1 and are consistent, to the maximum extent appropriate, with other goals and standards as established by the Virginia Board of Education and the code of Virginia for all children as follows:

- a. Establish performance indicators to assess progress toward achieving those goals that address, at a minimum, drop-out rates, graduation rates, and performance of children with disabilities in the state toward meeting the goals.
- b. Every two years, report to the public and the United States Secretary of Education on progress of the state and children with disabilities in the state toward meeting the goals.

13. Develop and implement a comprehensive personnel development plan which is designed to ensure an adequate supply of qualified special education, regular education, and related services personnel, including paraprofessionals, and meets the requirements for a state improvement plan relating to personnel development.

PROCEDURES

Local SEAC procedures are also outlined in the Virginia regulations. The SEAC procedures listed below are drawn from information from 8 VAC 20-80-90 E. of the *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia*, effective March 27, 2002:

- A local advisory committee for special education, appointed by each local school board, shall advise the school board through the division superintendent;
- The composition of the committee shall include parents of children with disabilities and persons with disabilities;
- Local school division personnel shall serve only as consultants to the committee;
- Public notice shall be published annually listing the names of committee members and including a description of ways in which interested parties may express their views to the committee; and
- Committee meetings shall be held at least quarterly and shall be open to the public.

MEMBERSHIP

Virginia regulations require the membership of local SEACs to be appointed by each local school board to include parents of children with disabilities and persons with disabilities. The regulations also state that local school division personnel . . . serve only as consultants to the committee.

Guided by the regulations, a majority of SEAC members should be parents of students with disabilities or persons with disabilities. However, individuals from the community, with and without direct experience with disabilities, can contribute to the SEAC's knowledge base. A successful committee may include but not be limited to the following:

- parents of children with disabilities;*
- persons with disabilities;*
- representatives from community and civic organizations;
- representatives of institutions of higher education;
- representatives from vocational, community or business organizations; and
- representatives from human service agencies providing services for persons with disabilities.

* Membership required by Virginia regulations

“SEACs have great potential when the membership has an understanding of their responsibilities as committee members and of the laws and regulations that govern special education. Often the groundwork is not laid and the members do not have this basic understanding; therefore the committee lacks effectiveness.” Respondent to a SEAC Needs Assessment Survey completed by the Partnership for People with Disabilities, 2005

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

“Role of SEAC [is] very unclear by both the members and the local school division.”
Respondent to a SEAC Needs Assessment Survey completed by the Partnership for People with Disabilities, 2005

SEAC MEMBERS

The role of the SEAC member is to work with other members of the committee to fulfill the local SEAC’s functions as assigned in Virginia regulations (see page 7 of this Guide for SEAC functions). Essentially, SEAC members identify the unmet needs of students with disabilities and develop advice and recommendations about how the school division can best meet these needs. SEAC members are appointed by their school board and work through the superintendent and his designees to report to the school board. In the role of advisors, SEAC members are called upon to consider issues and needs at a systems level. Local SEACs inform, counsel, recommend, suggest or guide rather than advocate or plead an individual case, position or point of view. SEAC members provide advice based on sound judgments developed from accurate information and facts.

The SEAC member’s responsibilities may include:

- attending regularly scheduled local SEAC meetings;
- representing the constituency or group of which they are a part;

- maintaining a good working knowledge of special education law;
- sharing one’s knowledge and skills;
- participating in the work of the SEAC, including serving on subcommittees when required;
- assisting in identifying and mentoring new members;
- focusing on systems change; and
- working collaboratively with other SEAC members and school division personnel.

A Sample SEAC Member Job Description is included in Appendix A.

SEAC CHAIRPERSON

The effectiveness of the local SEAC depends upon its leadership. The chairperson of the local SEAC is the focal point of leadership for the committee. Typically the chairperson is elected by the committee members for a term of office that is defined in the committee’s bylaws. In selecting an individual to chair the committee, SEAC members look for leadership qualities, experience with the workings of the committee, and an understanding of the organization of the school division. A job description that defines committee expectations and the responsibilities of the SEAC chairperson is a useful tool in recruiting, providing potential

candidates with a good understanding of the job. A Sample SEAC Chairperson Job Description can be found in Appendix B. The SEAC chairperson responsibilities may include:

- facilitating the planning of all meetings;
- drafting the agendas for the meetings;
- running the meetings following Parliamentary Procedures or other tools for facilitated meetings;
- facilitating meeting discussion by resolving roadblocks, summarizing points, calming emotions of the moment, and keeping the spirit positive, focused and productive;
- directing and monitoring the flow of work by delegating responsibility to individuals and subcommittees; following up between meetings;
- serving as the spokesperson for the local SEAC in public;
- promoting collaboration among all stakeholders including: SEAC members, the special education director, members of the school division administration, and school board members;
- assisting in the identification and recruitment of potential members;
- networking with other chairpersons of local SEACs and the regional representative of the State SEAC; and
- mentoring new members and subcommittee members in understanding job responsibilities and assignments.

DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

The *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia* indicates that Local Educational Agency (LEA) personnel serve only as consultants to the SEAC. They are non-voting participants. The director of special education's responsibilities regarding local SEACs may include:

- providing relevant and current information to SEAC members;
- assisting the chairperson with agenda development;
- providing administrative support to the SEAC (e.g., printing meeting materials, handling SEAC mailings and disseminating meeting notices);
- reporting on topical issues;
- making available relevant public data maintained by the LEA to SEAC members to support their work;
- facilitating SEAC communication with the LEA;
- supporting the SEAC in carrying out its functions; and
- serving as a liaison between the SEAC and the superintendent for information flow.

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

The superintendent's responsibilities regarding the local SEAC may include:

- receiving and reviewing all SEAC reports prepared for the school board;
 - staying informed of the work of the SEAC (usually through the director of special education);
 - making requests of the SEAC for advice and recommendations;
 - facilitating the presentation of reports from the local SEAC to the school board;
 - considering recommendations made by the SEAC;
 - responding to SEAC about recommendations made as appropriate;
 - receiving and reviewing recommendations from the local SEAC for prospective members to be considered for appointment by the school board;
 - meeting with SEAC representatives as appropriate; and
 - attending SEAC meetings as appropriate.
- receiving and reviewing SEAC reports and recommendations;
 - responding to SEAC about recommendations made as appropriate;
 - appointing a school board representative to act as a liaison to attend SEAC meetings and to meet with SEAC representatives as appropriate; and
 - implementing plans that incorporate SEAC recommendations as appropriate.

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

The responsibilities of the school board regarding local SEACs may include:

- appointing members to serve on the SEAC;

OTHER SCHOOL DIVISION PERSONNEL

The contributions of special and general education teachers, building administrators, related services personnel, and other members of the school division's special education staff are important in accomplishing the functions of the local SEAC. Like the director of special education, they serve as consultants to the committee, not as voting members.

Some school division employees are also parents of students with disabilities. They have a significant interest and insight into the functions of the local SEAC and the school division. In order to avoid a conflict of interest, or even the appearance of a conflict of interest, these individuals should be invited to participate in the work of the SEAC as consultants to the committee.

School division personnel do not have specific roles or responsibilities in connection with the local SEAC. Yet, the work of the SEAC is facilitated by the presence of educators in

varying roles in the school division. Assuring their participation as consultants can be achieved in a number of different ways:

- Invite school division personnel to make presentations to the local SEAC on topics about which they have particular expertise.
- Ask for a representative of different types of school division personnel (such as special education teachers, general education teachers, building administrators, related services personnel) to regularly attend SEAC meetings.
- When a specific topic is to be discussed that involves certain types of educators, publicize the meeting and the topic, sending personal invitations to those educators through the director of special education or building administrators.
- Use personal contacts to recruit educators as consultants to the committee, especially those who are parents of students with disabilities.

Sometimes parents or other community members who are educators in other school divisions are interested in contributing their talents and knowledge to the SEAC. They bring considerable expertise but because they do not work for the same school division as the local SEAC, they can be invited to join as full voting members.

SEACs ORGANIZING TO DO BUSINESS

“We have just organized and are very eager to learn... We are just learning about what to do... We need more parental involvement, community awareness and ability to be effective!” Respondent to a SEAC Needs Assessment Survey completed by the Partnership for People with Disabilities, 2005

Each SEAC develops its own way of doing business. Approaches to accomplishing the work at hand can vary from year to year with new membership, leadership and challenges. To minimize the impact that these changes can have on the ability of the SEAC to do the work for which it is responsible, certain steps and procedures that SEACs can put in place will help in organizing to do business.

RECRUITING MEMBERS

Having committed, knowledgeable and collaborative SEAC members, who have a sense of accomplishment from their work on the SEAC, is critical to success. When looking for persons to serve as SEAC members, developing and using a SEAC member job description can help potential members understand what will be expected of them. A good job description addresses responsibilities of members, time commitments (e.g., How often does the local SEAC meet? Is there work that is done through sub-committees and/or outside of the SEAC meetings?), and other expectations. A Sample SEAC Member Job Description is provided in Appendix A.

To recruit new members, an application for SEAC membership can be given to individuals who are interested in participating on the local SEAC. This form provides consistent information on all interested individuals. Using such a process, along with personal knowledge of the individuals being recruited, can help those recruiting ensure that overall committee membership is effective, representative, and diverse. A Sample Application for SEAC Membership can be found in Appendix C.

Developing a SEAC brochure that provides the community and potential new members with general information about the responsibilities and functioning of the local SEAC can also support recruitment. A Sample SEAC Brochure can be found in Appendix D.

Having copies of the job description, the application form and the SEAC brochure at school division functions (such as SEAC meetings, school registration days or back to school nights, and special education training events) provides opportunities to recruit potential members. In addition, it may be helpful to advertise actively for SEAC members through county or city websites, school newsletters or flyers. Disseminating information through Parent Resource Centers (PRCs) or the Parent Teacher Association or Organization (PTA/PTO) can be useful. Presenting at teacher inservices, school board meetings or to other groups may also be successful strategies for recruiting members. Posting meeting agendas and minutes for the public and providing good awareness information informs families and the community about the local SEAC's need for members. This also informs the public about the

committee's existence and the advisory role it plays with the school division.

Reaching the community may require a more creative effort, but the value of community involvement in the local SEAC should not be underestimated. Developing a letter of introduction that includes the goals for the committee, past successes and future vision may prove to be a successful strategy. A Sample SEAC Letter of Introduction can be found in Appendix E. With a brochure, job description and application, this letter can be sent to community agencies, parent support groups, advocacy organizations and other possible interest groups. Follow-up phone calls may help to identify potential SEAC members who are able to make significant contributions to the work of the committee.

A diverse group of members participating on a local SEAC can be a key factor in how effective the committee will be. In order to ensure diverse SEAC membership, there should be a consideration of including different stakeholder groups (e.g., families, direct service providers, community agencies, and the general public), different geographic areas of the school division, different ethnic and racial backgrounds and different school levels (elementary, middle and high school). This same effort for diversity is important when seeking educators and administrators to participate as consultants.

Diversity on local SEACs is not always easy to accomplish. It must be identified as a priority of the committee and an intentional effort must be made for real diversity to be achieved. A Sample SEAC Membership Grid, found in Appendix F, can be used by local SEACs to evaluate areas where greater diversity would improve the quality and depth of experience, knowledge and representation.

“Overall our SEAC does well as an internal organization however community contact and assessment fall short. There is relatively no ethnic diversity on the committee... There is wide representation from many stakeholders but I fear the word does not get back to their constituents.” Respondent to a SEAC Needs Assessment Survey completed by the Partnership for People with Disabilities, 2005

Once potential committee members have been identified, their names can be sent to the superintendent of schools who will review names and forward them to the school board. The school board is ultimately responsible for making official appointments. After the appointments are made, steps need to be taken to support members in becoming active, effective and dedicated contributors to the work of the local SEAC. The following have proven helpful for accomplishing this:

- Provide a new member orientation program.
- Provide a SEAC notebook with pertinent information and documents to each member. Appendix G includes a Sample SEAC Member Notebook Index.
- Provide a copy of *A Guide for Local Special Education Advisory Committees in Virginia* to each member.
- Direct members to the Virginia Department of Education's website (<http://www.doe.virginia.gov/>) and the LEA's website.
- Match experienced members with new members in a mentor relationship.

- Develop knowledge and expertise through ongoing training on topics such as:
 - special education processes;
 - administrative structure;
 - understanding and interpreting plans and budgets;
 - federal and State regulations and mandates; and
 - best practices and issues in special education.
- Conduct a SEAC self-assessment annually to allow each member to reflect on his or her personal involvement as a committee member and to consider how well the local SEAC is meeting its responsibilities. A Sample SEAC Self-Assessment is provided in Appendix H. Typically, a self-assessment is done through a survey that is completed anonymously by each member, tabulated by the SEAC chairperson, designee or subcommittee and shared with the full SEAC committee. This information is then used by the SEAC to improve its performance and to begin to identify priorities for the committee.

ESTABLISHING BYLAWS

One of the key documents that guide the work of local SEACs is a set of by-laws or operating procedures drawn up by each SEAC. Simply stated, bylaws are rules and regulations, adopted by an association, group or organization, which govern its activities. Sample SEAC Bylaws are included in Appendix I-1. The bylaws should reflect the existing state regulations regarding the establishment and responsibilities of local SEACs. In addition, bylaws ensure that all members understand the roles and responsibilities of the local SEAC and the operating proce-

dures that have been established by the committee. This document can also serve as a resource for information to the public about the roles and functions of the local SEAC.

Good bylaws alone do not make an effective group or organization; they are an outline of its structure. Bylaws enable members to determine what rules they can all agree with and abide by, and yet allow the members to make changes when the group or organization grows and changes. These rules ensure stability, continuity and structure, especially during times of rapid growth or when there are not many “old” members to tell the new members what to do. [Information has been adapted from an article retrieved May, 26, 2005 at <http://www.alaska.net/~akpta/bylaws.html>]

Every member who joins the local SEAC should be given a copy of the bylaws, and it should be impressed upon them to read and understand them. All members should obey the bylaws. This prevents many problems. If there are bylaws the members are opposed to, it is better to change them than to not obey them.

Although bylaws should be “custom made” to your local SEAC, several essential items should be included in the bylaws. These Bylaw Essentials are included in Appendix I-2.

Bylaws can also go beyond the essentials to outline routine procedures. In other words, bylaws describe the skeleton structure of the SEAC and can also provide SEAC members, particularly the chairperson, with the information to perform their jobs properly. The use of bylaws ensures an orderly and consistent approach to doing business and improves a SEAC’s credibility.

PLANNING THE CALENDAR YEAR

It is important to establish an annual calendar at the beginning of each operating year. Some local SEACs use a survey, similar to the Sample SEAC Self-Assessment in Appendix H, to determine those issues that are top priorities for SEAC members and to decide on agenda topics for discussion and presentation during the upcoming year. This process might begin in the spring, with the chairperson distributing a survey to the SEAC members, who in turn complete the survey and return it to the chairperson by the next meeting. The chairperson might enlist a subcommittee to assist him or her in reviewing the results of the survey. The chairperson should work with the director of special education to determine issues that should have time set aside for presentations or discussion during the upcoming year. The chairperson, the director of special education and any other interested committee members can then meet at the end of the school year or during the summer to set the meeting dates, times and places and the major topics to be considered at each meeting for the upcoming school year. A Sample Annual Calendar is provided in Appendix J.

A published annual calendar allows family members, educators, division administrative personnel and members of the community at large to know in advance when topics of interest to them will be covered and to schedule their time so that they are able to attend or send in public comment. Posting the planning calendar on the school division's Web site and in the local newspaper, helps to achieve broad distribution of the committee's plans and activities for the year.

"...My concern is for our new members. In order for them to fully understand the responsibilities of local SEACs, there needs to be an orientation and training period provided to these individuals before they can effectively participate in the workings of the committee. Periodic training sessions would benefit all members." Respondent to a SEAC Needs Assessment Survey completed by the Partnership for People with Disabilities, 2005

ORIENTING NEW MEMBERS

An orientation meeting for new members should be included on the annual calendar. Ideally this meeting is held during the summer to introduce new and returning committee members to each other and provide an overview of the workings of the local SEAC. Some local SEACs hold this orientation meeting on the same night as their first SEAC meeting for the school year, inviting members to come a couple of hours earlier than the usual meeting time and serving a light meal. This provides time to welcome and get to know one another and to orient new members.

A sample agenda for an orientation meeting might include:

- welcome and introductions of members (including an explanation of who members represent);
- review of the annual calendar;
- explanation of the local SEAC's regulatory responsibilities;

- explanation of the difference between “Advisory” and “Advocacy”;
- review of roles and responsibilities of SEAC members (including a discussion of the difference between personal and systemic issues);
- overview of local SEAC bylaws;
- explanation of the public comment process;
- overview of latest annual report prepared by the SEAC (including a review of SEAC annual priorities); and
- new member discussion of interests and concerns.

Providing members with a binder of orientation materials that is organized to hold information, agendas and minutes can help SEACs to start the year better organized and ready to work. Appendix G includes a list of items that might be included in a SEAC member notebook.

SEACs DOING BUSINESS

Local SEACs share a basic desire to improve educational services and outcomes for students with disabilities. To do this, SEACs must be successful in working collaboratively as a committee and with moving issues forward in their school divisions.

The following are some basic approaches to doing business that assist SEACs in accomplishing their goals and objectives.

“Two areas of concern: helping to keep parent/community informed of the needs and assuring that the committee works with the special education staff to identify unmet needs.” Respondent to a SEAC Needs Assessment Survey completed by the Partnership for People with Disabilities, 2005

IDENTIFYING UNMET NEEDS AND SETTING PRIORITIES

Identifying unmet needs and setting priorities are two of the most important functions of the local SEAC. They guide both the agenda and the scope of the SEAC’s work for the year.

In order to advise the LEA of unmet needs, the local SEAC must first choose the ways that work best for identifying unmet needs. These ways may include:

- holding a planning session in which local SEAC members can brainstorm about unmet needs of which they are aware;

- developing a survey about services and needs that can be sent to students, teachers, administrators or families of students receiving special education services;
- holding informal focus groups that provide opportunities for families, teachers, administrators, and students to answer and discuss questions about special education services;
- asking PRCs (in school divisions where they exist) to share, on a routine and anonymous basis, concerns most often raised with them by families and teachers;
- working with the LEA during state and federal monitoring opportunities to identify areas of unmet needs;
- soliciting public comment during local SEAC meetings or holding public hearings for this purpose; and
- organizing a local SEAC hotline, soliciting volunteers from among members to take responsibility for a specified period of time and advertising names and numbers of the hotline volunteers.

Periodic use of the more extensive methods of outreach to the school community (e.g., surveys or focus groups) can provide a broader view of unmet needs but the value of these methods should be weighed against their cost. A collaborative effort between SEAC members and LEA staff from the initial phases of needs identification is critical. Staff can provide valuable information about what the LEA is presently

doing and ideas for changing or improving the current effort. Honest, polite and continuous communications are essential elements to any joint effort to improve educational experiences and outcomes for students receiving special education services.

Unmet needs identified by the local SEAC should be systemic and not individual. Public information maintained by the school division that is required by the SEAC to perform its functions should be requested by the SEAC and provided by the school division. As information about unmet needs is gathered, it should be recorded in a systematic fashion, evaluated, prioritized and reported to the school board along with the SEAC's recommendations about how the school division can address the identified needs.

Establishing annual priorities is important for any group or organization. Doing so helps a SEAC to direct its efforts and not take on too many projects that overwhelm its membership, the LEA or the school board. Identifying one to three critical issues on which to focus during the year provides the opportunity to consider and make informed recommendations. It also leaves time to address other issues that arise during the ordinary course of doing business, such as requests for information and recommendations from the school board, review and approval of the Annual Plan, and review of the school division budget.

Setting priorities can be done as a facilitated activity with a discussion leader and a recorder who lists participants' responses on newsprint that is hung on the wall. SEAC members are asked to:

- identify all unmet needs;
- group needs by major categories, discussing whether any of the needs are the same or similar enough to be collapsed into one statement;
- use markers to place checks next to their top five needs on the newsprint; and
- discuss the five needs receiving the most checks to reach consensus on the top two to three needs on which the SEAC will focus during the operating year.

The process of reaching consensus is not simple majority rule. It requires the facilitator to continually check for agreement and, when a stalemate is reached on an issue, to move the group to the next issue or need which all members can support.

The time frame for identifying unmet needs and setting priorities should be established when the calendar and scope of work for the year is determined. Prioritized unmet needs and recommendations should be the focus of the Annual Report to the school board. Many identified unmet needs will not be met immediately by the school division and recommendations will not be fully implemented in a one year time frame. In some cases, additional study may be required in order to determine the best recommendations for meeting unmet needs. Subcommittees are often a good way to do this. Time for groups to meet to study an issue more closely should be built into the calendar.

It is important to work with school division personnel to develop recommendations that include specific strategies and steps with reasonable timelines for completion. An outline of

dates on which progress will be reviewed and procedures for making needed changes to the plan should be included. This will provide a more valuable product to the school board than a long list of unmet needs that have not been prioritized.

CONDUCTING REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETINGS

“We need training for chairs on how to run meetings... , and how to respond to public comment.” Respondent to a SEAC Needs Assessment Survey completed by the Partnership for People with Disabilities, 2005

According to Virginia regulations, committee meetings shall be held at least quarterly and shall be open to the public. Many SEACs meet more often, even monthly, to carry out the work of the committee. Frequency of meetings is the choice of the local SEAC as long as it meets at least once a quarter.

In regular meetings, the chairperson facilitates members in following the committee’s bylaws and operating procedures. Meetings should be set at a consistent time and place convenient for members and the public. There should be ample space and chairs and the environment should be conducive to the work of the group. Having a brief break during the meeting and/or serving refreshments can help in creating an environment where people are comfortable working together.

In order to assure that SEAC meetings are productive and members stay engaged and have

a sense of accomplishment at the completion of meetings, it is important to develop an agenda before each meeting. The agenda should be provided to SEAC members in advance with any other written materials the group will need to review in order to participate in discussion.

Typically it is the responsibility of the chairperson to draft the agenda and develop the committee meeting package with the director of special education, sending it to members far enough in advance for them to have time to prepare for the meeting. Usually, the director of special education or a staff member takes care of sending the materials to the SEAC members. A Sample List of Items in a Committee Meeting Package is included in Appendix K.

Local SEACs will want to establish their own meeting ground rules. Ground rules can assist a group in identifying the actions that help them commit to working together as effectively as possible. Ground rules can be generated by all SEAC members brainstorming a list of behaviors and attitudes which will enhance the effectiveness of meetings. Appendix L contains Sample Meeting Ground Rules. These ground rules should be reviewed, posted at each meeting and added to as necessary.

There are other meeting procedures committees can include as part of the way they operate to facilitate good working relationships, effective operating practices and successful collaboration. Effective committees use teaming skills such as sharing leadership, practicing good communication and listening techniques, fostering everyone’s participation, valuing each member’s contributions and practicing brainstorming and consensus problem solving.

A structured team meeting process can be a

useful tool in facilitating these effective practices. A structured team meeting process provides a format to keep meetings efficient and help members stay on task so work can be accomplished. This process leads members to identify a facilitator, a note taker or recorder, and a timekeeper and then to jointly confirm the agenda and the times the committee will designate to each agenda item. Since the beginning of meetings sets the tone, starting with celebrations may help create a positive work environment. Time spent in relationship building can be important to later commitments to work together and to handle difficult agenda items with a collaborative attitude. As agenda items are tackled, points of discussion are noted, and actions needed and persons responsible are recorded. After the meeting, each member gets a copy of the meeting notes. These notes serve as a record of the meeting discussion and actions that will be taken, and by whom. This helps members remember and hold each other responsible for jobs they have agreed to perform. A Sample Collaborative Structured Team Meeting Record form is provided in Appendix M.

Virginia regulations also state “public notice shall be published annually . . . including a description of ways in which interested parties may express their views to the committee”. Public comment is a tool to allow members of the community the opportunity to voice concerns and matters of interest before the SEAC. Time is set aside at each local SEAC meeting to accept public comment. Public comment is a way for SEACs to gather data on unmet needs. The regulations also provide for making SEAC members’ names public. If parents or community members are uncomfortable or unable to make public comment, they can contact a SEAC member to bring their written comments

to the committee. A Sample Public Comment Form and Guidelines is provided in Appendix N.

PARTICIPATING IN THE BUDGET PROCESS

“Our SEAC needs more strategies for implementing action, instead of just discussing issues as much as we do.” Respondent to a SEAC Needs Assessment Survey completed by the Partnership for People with Disabilities, 2005

Each school division operates under its own timeline to develop a school budget to be approved by the school board and submitted to the local government. There are steps that a local SEAC can take to become more of a participant in this process.

1. It is important that each local SEAC work with its director of special education in understanding the timeline for development of the local school budget and the critical points of SEAC involvement required to fulfill SEAC functions (i.e., advising the school board about unmet needs, participating in the development of priorities and strategies, making recommendations that often have budget implications, assisting in the formulation of plans, and interpreting plans to the public).
2. Along with the timeline, understanding how the local budget process works is critical for SEAC members. Does the superintendent require all budget requests from the director of special education by a par-

ticular date? If so, has the committee advised the director of special education of specific needs it would like to see addressed in this year's budget requests in a timely manner? Is the committee aware of the major budget requests to be made by the director of special education?

3. School boards often provide opportunities for citizens and citizens groups to speak before them to identify needs during the time when the budget is being developed. This provides an opportunity for SEAC members to voice needs.

It is important for the local SEAC to establish its annual calendar in sync with that of the school division and the county or city budget process so that it can clearly identify unmet needs of students with disabilities, make recommendations and provide supporting information that helps school boards make informed decisions in a timely manner.

REVIEWING THE ANNUAL PLAN

Under the provisions of IDEA '04 and the *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia* (effective March 27, 2002), in order to establish its eligibility for Federal funding, an LEA is required to submit an Annual Plan and application for federal funds for providing special education and related services to children with disabilities. The payment of state and federal funds available for the education of children with disabilities is based on the approval of the Annual Plan and application.

Federal regulations require that the LEA, in providing for the education of children with

disabilities within its jurisdiction, must have in effect policies and procedures that are consistent with state policies and procedures established under Federal regulation. The Annual Plan required in Virginia serves as the formal agreement between a local school board and the Virginia Department of Education for implementing federal and state laws and regulations governing this program.

The applications for use of the federal funds and the Annual Plan components to be submitted are:

- comprehensive System of Personnel Development and Report on Implementation;
- the Local Improvement Plan;
- a listing of the members of the local Special Education Advisory Committee;
- the Regional or Local Jails Interagency Agreement, if applicable; and
- the Report on the Implementation of the Plan for the prior school year.

Only the revisions to the LEA's policies, procedures, and supporting documentation need to be submitted with the Annual Plan. As stated in Virginia regulations, changes to policies and procedures should be reviewed by the local SEAC before being included in the Annual Plan that is submitted to the school board.

Before submitting the Annual Plan and application for funds to the Virginia Department of Education in late May each year, an LEA must first submit the plan to the local school board for approval.

REVIEWING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Virginia regulations require that the local SEAC review the policies and procedures for the provision of special education and related services prior to submission to the local school board and the Virginia Department of Education. This is one of the six required functions of local SEACs. Policies refer to the basic governing principles that create rights and responsibilities for the conduct of the LEA business. Procedures tell how the LEA plans to implement the policies.

LEA policies and procedures must be in compliance with state and federal regulations governing special education in order for LEAs to be eligible for state and federal funding. The state requires that policies and procedures be kept current at all times. Amendments to policies and procedures are submitted to the Virginia Department of Education as they are adopted by the local school board. Any changes made to the policies or procedures should be submitted as amendments to the Annual Plan.

A local SEAC may want to have a subcommittee review new and revised policies and procedures and summarize them for the full committee or it may choose to have the director of special education, or his or her designee, present and explain any new or revised policies and procedures to the full SEAC. Providing SEAC members with copies of the policies and procedures to be reviewed in advance of the meeting at which they are to be discussed will make this activity more efficient and productive.

PREPARING THE ANNUAL REPORT TO THE SCHOOL BOARD

“Our SEAC is trying but often flounders on how to move forward to make a clear difference.” Respondent to a SEAC Needs Assessment Survey completed by the Partnership for People with Disabilities, 2005

As previously stated, it is required by regulation that the SEAC advise the local school division of unmet needs in the education of children with disabilities and make recommendations about ways to meet those needs. This is typically done through periodic reports, including a SEAC Annual Report to the school board that is transmitted through the superintendent. The Annual Report should be a balance of strengths and needs the SEAC has collected information about through surveys, data collection, public comment, presentations at meetings and subcommittee work. Some things to incorporate in the report include:

- a statement of the purpose of the SEAC (from Virginia regulations);
- identification of unmet needs (through data collection, public comment and so forth);
- recommendations on ways to improve the education of students with disabilities (based on data collection, subcommittee work, and so forth);
- annual priorities and goals (from SEAC strategic planning);

- list of commendations recognizing the LEA for new programs, budget commitments, and so forth;
- key activities and accomplishments of the SEAC; and
- future issues on which the SEAC plans to focus.

A Sample Format for an Annual Report to the School Board can be found in Appendix O.

The usefulness of the SEAC Annual Report is often underestimated. Some SEACs use the Annual Report as the basis of an annual presentation to the school board. While PowerPoint presentations are not necessary, some sort of visual presentation can assist the school board members in focusing on important issues. It also provides them with the opportunity to ask questions about issues and to discuss both the unmet needs identified and the recommendations made. A SEAC can develop a collaborative relationship with school board members by keeping comments short and to the point, backing up findings and recommendations with facts and data, expressing appreciation for past school board support and inquiring as to how the SEAC can help the school board.

Sharing the Annual Report with other community groups who have an interest in special education can also help SEACs identify partners and recruit new members.

PARTICIPATING IN THE FEDERAL MONITORING PROCESS

Federal education legislation and regulations provide for parent involvement in the monitoring of compliance with federal special education law. School divisions enter the monitoring process every six years and are notified in advance of the monitoring schedule. LEAs are required to involve parents. Local SEACs can play an important role in LEAs in helping to get family input and participation. The Virginia Department of Education encourages LEAs to engage in a monitoring process that uses data collection and self-evaluation to identify problems and develop and initiate improvement strategies that focus on program effectiveness and student results. This process aligns with the work of the local SEAC in identifying needs and working with the division to implement improvement strategies.

The federal program monitoring in Virginia encompasses three phases:

- Phase I requires school divisions to conduct a self-assessment and take the necessary steps to plan for program improvement.
- Phase II requires the Department of Education to review and analyze the self-assessment document as well as other data regarding the school division and determine whether or not there is a need for an on-site review.
- Phase III requires the Department of Education to conduct timely follow-up with school divisions on the implementation of corrective actions based on agreed timelines.

School divisions are encouraged to establish a diverse committee to conduct the self-assessment review. Virginia's *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities* (8 VAC 20-80-10) states, "Committee composition may include representatives of the following: school administrators (including building principals), teachers, parents, local advisory committee, support personnel, and other individuals as appropriate." Federal monitoring indicates that when on-site review is conducted, "Activities may include... interviewing staff, parents, and students, and attending a public meeting with the local advisory committee members and parents."

SEAC COLLABORATION AND SEACS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

“SEAC, school administration, teachers and parents should work as a team in meeting individual and broad scale needs of children with disabilities. Additional training is needed by all groups to make this relationship work.”

Respondent to a SEAC Needs Assessment Survey completed by the Partnership for People with Disabilities, 2005

Collaboration is working together to achieve a common goal and believing that other participants in the process have unique and needed experience to contribute towards that end. Collaboration is based on mutual respect, trust, hearing and valuing each others contributions, accountability and shared knowledge. Relationships are at the heart of all good collaboration.

Some strategies for SEACs to use to be successful in building collaboration among stakeholders and decision makers in school divisions include:

- using a collaborative structured team meeting process to help SEAC members learn how to make plans, take action as a group, and distribute leadership and responsibility throughout the committee membership. A Sample Collaborative Structured Team Meeting Record form can be found in Appendix M;
- developing a working relationship with the director of special education and his or her

staff (designate SEAC members, usually the chairperson, to meet with him or her frequently during the year);

- developing a relationship with the superintendent and the members of the local school board; meet with them during the course of the year (the chairperson may seek regularly scheduled meetings with the division superintendent and time on the agenda at school board meetings); use meeting time well; have an agenda; be specific in requests; ask how the SEAC can help;
- keeping open communications with members of local government who control funding decisions, advocacy groups, and local disability groups; and
- using the State SEAC regional representative to develop and coordinate division linkages among local SEACs in a region and to provide information on training and technical assistance activities.

Too often advisory committees are underutilized. They play a passive role, reviewing and rubber stamping what is already being done rather than working on constructive ideas and recommendations for improving or developing services. An effective, well-designed and structured advisory committee, with the right mix of people, can be a great “think tank” to address issues and problems, gather community input and recommend well founded plans and strategies.

A collaborative structured team process can be used to bring SEAC members together and help them learn how to make plans and take action as a group in order to address pressing issues their school community faces. The benefits of the collaborative structured team process include: each member has ownership and commitment to goals, there is shared knowledge and expertise, leadership and responsibility is distributed throughout the committee membership and new ideas are generated through group interaction.

The challenge to SEAC and school division leadership who are looking for ways to work collaboratively is to begin by identifying one issue or need. Next they determine the steps to be taken in order to develop recommendations, assign responsibilities and timelines. Then they follow the steps to completion. Achieving a successful outcome around one issue can create a template for SEAC and school personnel to use going forward.

Both within and beyond the school division, it can be beneficial for a local SEAC to identify partners. In general, partners are people or groups who share the same interests, or have the capacity or resources to help each other. For SEAC purposes, it is important to identify those people who are key decision makers in the special education process. SEAC members will want to identify those who may be interested in working together to address commonly identified needs. It is also important to recognize those partners or groups in the community that are working on the same issue. These partners may be willing to share their resources and information in order to partner with the school division to achieve some common goal.

Cooperation with partners presents a unified, powerful image for the school division and the community. The administration and the community see that the issue is important enough for people to compromise and put aside small differences in order to fix a problem. This shows that the SEAC is committed to the issue itself, not a personal agenda. The more partners voicing the same concerns or recommendations about the issue, the more likely it is for the issue to be addressed, and advisory efforts to be successful.

Local SEACs play an important role in advising school divisions about the needs of students with disabilities and making recommendations about how to meet these needs. Well formed SEACs have members who represent a broad array of community stakeholder groups and can provide school division staff and school board members with valuable input from these diverse constituencies.

Through careful study and clear, consistent communication, local SEACs have the ability to bring about positive change in services and outcomes for students with disabilities. Effecting systems change requires that SEACs lay the groundwork for success by:

- understanding the roles, responsibilities, and functions of local SEACs;
- developing a rapport and relationship with the groups they represent;
- allowing times at meeting for members to share relevant information from the groups they represent and for the public to provide comment;

- developing a positive working relationship with the director of special education, the school division administration and school board members;
- approaching their work as advisory, not advocacy;
- keeping informed about state and national education issues;
- setting goals and exploring alternatives that allow those goals to be accomplished;
- identifying unmet needs and making recommendations based on careful study of factual information;
- understanding the school division's organizational structure and the appropriate process to promote SEAC recommendations within that structure; and
- encouraging open communication among all stakeholders in the special education process.

Adapted from *State Special Education Advisory Panel, An Overview, 2004*, developed by John Copenhaver, Director, Mountain Plain Regional Resource Center

A Guide for Local Special Education Advisory Committees in Virginia

LIST OF APPENDICES

- A) Sample SEAC Member Job Description**
- B) Sample SEAC Chairperson Job Description**
- C) Sample Application for SEAC Membership**
- D) Sample SEAC Advisory Committee Brochure**
- E) Sample SEAC Letter of Introduction**
- F) Sample SEAC Membership Grid**
- G) Sample SEAC Member Notebook Index**
- H) Sample SEAC Self-Assessment Tool**
- I-1) Sample ByLaws**
- I-2) Essential Items to Include in SEAC ByLaws**
- J) Sample Annual SEAC Calendar**
- K) Sample Listing of Committee Meeting Package**
- L) Sample SEAC Ground Rules**
- M) Sample Collaborative Structured Team Meeting Record Form**
- N) Sample Public Comment Form and Guidelines**
- O) Sample Format for Annual Report to the School Board**

SAMPLE SEAC MEMBER JOB DESCRIPTION

This is a volunteer position to serve as a member of the Special Education Advisory Committee of _____ County/City Public Schools for a __ year term (as stated in the local SEAC bylaws).

Description of Major Responsibilities

This position has primary responsibility for working with other SEAC members to fulfill the following functions outlined in *the Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia*, effective March 27, 2002:

- a. Advise the local school division of unmet needs in the education of children with disabilities;
- b. Assist the local school division in the formulation and development of plans for improving performance of children with disabilities specified in subdivision B 1 b of this section;
- c. Participate in the development of priorities and strategies for meeting the identified needs of children with disabilities;
- d. Submit periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities to the division superintendent for transmission to the local school board;
- e. Assist the local school division in interpreting plans to the community for meeting the special needs of children with disabilities for educational services; and
- f. Review the policies and procedures for the provision of special education and related services prior to submission to the local school board and the Virginia Department of Education.

Individuals in this position work closely with the local school division's director of special education.

Other Responsibilities Include:

- Review and abide by SEAC bylaws.
- Attend regularly scheduled local SEAC meetings.
- Maintain an ongoing knowledge of special education law.
- Be informed of activities of the committee and familiar with current school division special education plans.
- Read the minutes of each meeting; advise the chair of any corrections or additions.
- Participate in the work of the SEAC, including serving on subcommittees when required.
- Encourage parents and other community members to join/attend the SEAC.
- Participate in community awareness activities to increase visibility of the local SEAC.
- Focus on systems change not personal grievances or individual advocacy.
- Work collaboratively with other SEAC members and school division leadership and personnel.

SAMPLE SEAC CHAIRPERSON JOB DESCRIPTION

This is a volunteer position to serve in the primary leadership role of the local Special Education Advisory Committee of _____ County/City Public Schools for a __ year term (as stated in the local SEAC bylaws).

Description of Major Responsibilities

This position has primary responsibility for providing leadership to other SEAC members to fulfill the following functions outlined in the *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia*, effective March 27, 2002:

- a. Advise the local school division of unmet needs in the education of children with disabilities;
- b. Assist the local school division in the formulation and development of plans for improving performance of children with disabilities specified in subdivision B 1 b of this section;
- c. Participate in the development of priorities and strategies for meeting the identified needs of children with disabilities;
- d. Submit periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities to the division superintendent for transmission to the local school board;
- e. Assist the local school division in interpreting plans to the community for meeting the special needs of children with disabilities for educational services; and
- f. Review the policies and procedures for the provision of special education and related services prior to submission to the local school board and the Virginia Department of Education.

An individual in this position works closely with the school division's director of special education and represents the local SEAC to the superintendent of schools and the local school board.

Other Responsibilities Include:

- Facilitates meetings, including developing the agenda and guiding discussion.
- Directs and monitors the flow of work by delegating responsibility to individuals and subcommittees; follows up between meetings.
- Serves as the spokesperson for the local SEAC in public.
- Promotes collaboration among all stakeholders including: SEAC members, the special education director, school division staff, and school board members.
- Assists in the identification and recruitment of new members.
- Networks with other chairpersons of local SEACs and the regional representative of the State SEAC.
- Mentors new members and subcommittees members in understanding their job responsibilities and assignments.

SAMPLE APPLICATION FOR SEAC MEMBERSHIP School Division

Name: _____ Date of Application: _____

Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Work Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Are you a (check all that apply)

- parent? person with a disability? grandparent?
- guardian? foster parent of a child/youth with a disability?
- representative of a community agency? (please specify) _____
- representative of a business or association in the community? (please specify) _____

other? (please specify) _____

If you are a parent or family member, what is your child's

Age? _____ School? _____

Disability? _____

What do you hope to accomplish from your participation on the SEAC?

What unique experiences, perspectives, talents or skills could you bring to the SEAC?

If invited to serve on the SEAC, what do you see as needs in special education?
(List system-wide issues rather than personal issues)

How did you hear about the ____ SEAC? (please check one)

- SEAC Member Brochure Teacher
- Parent Resource Center Other:

Send completed application to:

Name
Director of Special Education
Address

**Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)
Membership 2004 – 2005**

Brookville District

Joan Lind (phone #)
Betty Bird (phone #)

Fairlawn District

Carol Cohen (phone #)
Joe Smith (phone #)

Three Horse District

Clark Jones (phone #)
Katherine Hill (phone #)

Scotville District

Mickey Wilson (phone #)
Terry Jones (phone #)

Marina District

Tom Nichols (phone #)
Brenda Murphy (phone #)
Bud Hollis (phone #)

Agency Representatives

Gene Aster (phone #)
(Recreation & Parks)
Gail Stone (phone #)
(Community Services Board)

Business Representative

Mary Jane Mitchell (phone #)
(Computer Support Systems)

_____ Public Schools

**Special Education
Advisory Committee
2004-2005**

_____ Public Schools

William Williams, Superintendent of Schools
(phone #)

Lilly White, Director of Special Education
(phone #)

Parent Resource Center
(phone #)



What is the Special Education Advisory Committee?

_____ Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) works with the school board, administrators, parents, and teachers who are responsible for students receiving special education services.

Who are the students receiving special education services?

They are students who have been diagnosed with one or more of the following conditions:

- autism
- deaf-blindness
- developmental delay
- emotional disability
- hearing impairment
- mental disability
- multiple disabilities
- orthopedic impairment
- other health impairment
- severe/profound disability
- specific learning disability
- speech/language impairment
- traumatic brain injury
- visual impairment

Who serves on the committee?

The SEAC, whose members are appointed by the school board, is comprised of:

- persons with disabilities
- parents/guardians of students with disabilities
- public/county human service agency representatives
- community/civic organization representatives
- business/industry representatives

The Director of Special Education, the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, and a representative from the school board serve as consultants to the committee.

When does the SEAC meet?

The SEAC meets the **4th Tuesday of each month** during the school year (with the exception of November) from **6:30 - 8:30 p.m.** There is no meeting in December. Unless otherwise noted, meetings are held at Brookville High School. This year's schedule is as follows:

September – Orientation/Transition Practices (**6:00 p.m. Mtg.**)

October – Transition goals and objectives

November 18 – Transition: Recommendations of SEAC

January – Teacher survey results/LRE

February – Federal monitoring update results/LRE

March - Collaboration

April – Annual Plan

May - Recognitions / Annual Report to School Board

Who may attend Special Education Advisory Committee Meetings?

All meetings are open to the public. The SEAC welcomes anyone interested in special education. There is designated time for public comment during the meeting. This is an opportunity to share successful educational experiences and express general concerns regarding educational issues for students with disabilities.

What is the function of the Special Education Advisory Committee?

- to advise the local school division of unmet needs in the education of children with disabilities;
- to assist the local school division in developing plans for improving performance of children with disabilities;
- to participate in the development of priorities for meeting the identified needs of children with disabilities;
- to submit periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities to the division superintendent for transmission to the local school board;
- to assist the local school division in interpreting plans to the community for meeting the special needs of children with disabilities; and
- to review the policies and procedures for the provision of special education and related services prior to submission to the local school board and the Virginia Department of Education.

For complete Federal regulations, refer to 8 VAC 20-80-90E

How can the Special Education Advisory Committee help you?

It can help you better understand how to work with the school division and how special education can meet the needs of children and youth with disabilities.

How can I get more information about attending meetings and/or joining the committee?

If you would like to talk to someone about the SEAC, or get an application for membership, call _____, Chairperson, at phone # _____, or Director of Special Education, at phone # _____.

(adapted from a brochure produced by Henrico County Public Schools)

SAMPLE SEAC LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Date

Dear Community Representative,

The _____ Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) is currently seeking new members for the upcoming school year. I have learned over the past year as the Chairperson of the SEAC that membership comprised of both parents who have children with disabilities and community representatives, makes for an effective committee mix. I am asking for your help in identifying individuals through your organization who might be interested in being considered for membership on the _____ SEAC.

The _____ SEAC has had a very successful year. We reported to the school board on two areas of unmet needs affecting students receiving special education services: improvement of our school division's transition services and services to students with autism. We look forward in the upcoming school year to continuing to work with _____ Public Schools in addressing issues that impact students with disabilities.

I've enclosed the following:

- A job description
- A brochure on the SEAC
- An application for membership

These should assist you and any prospective SEAC members in learning more about the _____ SEAC and the responsibilities of individuals appointed by the _____ School Board to membership on the SEAC.

If you or any prospective members have any questions you can call me at _____.

Thank you for your assistance in this important activity.

Sign name
Chairperson
_____ SEAC

SAMPLE SEAC MEMBER NOTEBOOK INDEX

Goals and Objectives

Committee Membership and Contact Information

Minutes/Agendas

Projects

Most Recent Annual Report

Policies and Procedures Reviewed by the Committee

Most recent compliance review report by Virginia DOE and corrective action plan from the LEA

Bylaws

Special Education and School Contacts

Regulations

- IDEA '04
- *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia*
- Copy of the Rehabilitation Act, Section 504, with overview of that regulation

Miscellaneous

A Parents Guide to Special Education

A Guide for Local Special Education Advisory Committees in Virginia

SAMPLE SEAC SELF-ASSESSMENT

The following form can be used by SEAC members and the director of special education to get an impression of how well the SEAC is doing. Each member and the director of special education should complete the form about four weeks before the meeting at which it is to be reviewed. Ideally, a subcommittee of the SEAC receives the completed forms, collates the results and writes a report indicating the number of respondents who rated the SEAC for each of the 12 considerations.

	Considerations	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neutral	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
1	SEAC members have full and common understanding of the functions, roles and responsibilities of the SEAC.					
2	The SEAC has clear and easy to understand bylaws.					
3	The SEAC has clear priorities based on objective assessment of needs.					
4	The SEAC has established procedures for reporting unmet needs and making recommendations to the school board.					
5	The SEAC seeks diverse input in developing recommendations to the School Board.					
6	The SEAC effectively outreaches to special education constituencies.					
7	SEAC meetings facilitate focus and progress on important issues and matters.					
8	The SEAC receives regular reports on budgets, program performance and other important matters.					
9	The SEAC regularly monitors and evaluates progress on priority issues.					
10	All necessary skills and stakeholders are represented on the SEAC.					
11	The SEAC conducts ongoing training for its members.					
12	School board and division personnel are responsive to the work of the SEAC.					

Appendix H

Please list the three to five issues or needs on which you believe the SEAC should focus its attention in the next year. Be as specific as possible in identifying these points.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

**_____ Public Schools
Special Education Advisory Committee**

Sample Bylaws

Article I – Name

The name of this body shall be the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) for _____ County/City Public Schools (herein referred to as “the Committee”).

Article II – Purpose

Major responsibilities of the Committee which are addressed in the Regulations and Administrative Requirements of the Operation of Special Education Programs in Virginia (1978 and as amended) are as follows:

1. Provide advice concerning unmet needs in the education of students with disabilities in _____ County/City.
2. Assist in the formulation and development of long-range plans which will provide services needed for students with disabilities in _____ County/City Public Schools and community.
3. Participate in the development of priorities and strategies for meeting the identified needs of students with disabilities.
4. Submit periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of students with disabilities to the School Board through the Superintendent.
5. Assist in interpreting to the community, plans for meeting the needs of students with disabilities for educational services, and
6. Review annually the updated Annual Special Education Plan and Application for Federal Flow-Through Funds thirty (30) calendar days prior to submission by the Superintendent to the School Board.

Article III – Membership

1. Number

Membership of the Committee shall be limited to twenty-four (24) members recommended by the Committee to the Superintendent for appointment by the School Board. The preferred composition of the Committee is four (4) parent representatives from each of the five districts, and four (4) public private agency representatives

2. Appointment of Members

There shall be a standing Membership Subcommittee consisting of elected active members of the Committee. The Vice Chair for Membership shall serve as chair of the Membership Subcommittee. Prospective parent members must submit to the Chair of the Committee, through the Director of Exceptional Education, an application outlining their desire and qualifications to serve on the Committee. In making its recommendations, the Membership Subcommittee shall strive to maintain diversity by considering the geographical location of the prospective parent member's residence, the disabling condition he/she represents, their child's age, and the prospective parent member's gender and ethnicity. Prior to nomination, persons will be advised by the Vice Chair of Membership of membership responsibilities. The Membership Subcommittee shall forward on July 1 a slate to the Superintendent for

consideration of appointment by the School Board. The Superintendent and the School Board reserve the right to nominate any candidate they believe to be qualified. The School Board shall appoint new members to the Committee at a summer meeting. Letters shall be sent by the Chair of the Committee in August to all new appointees and those nominated, but not appointed. Applications from nominees not appointed shall remain on file for a period of two years.

3. Active Members

Members of the Committee shall include, but not be limited to, the following persons or representatives of groups, with the possibility that a member may be representative of more than one type of person or group:

- a. Persons with disabilities;
- b. Parents/guardians of persons with disabilities;
- c. Community civic organizations;
- d. Business or industry;
- e. Public agencies concerned with the care of persons with disabilities; and
- f. Other local advisory committees concerned with the education and training of students with disabilities.

4. Consultants

The Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and the Director of Exceptional Education, or their designees, shall serve as consultants to the Committee. Note: State regulations stipulate that local school division personnel shall only serve as consultants to the Committee.

5. Term of Active Members

Active members shall be appointed by the School Board in the summer for three-year terms. To assure the continuity of the Committee, a maximum of eight (8) members shall rotate off the Committee each year. A member may thereafter be reappointed for one successive three-year full term before rotating off the Committee if he/she submits a letter of intent to the Chair of the Membership Subcommittee by March of the third year of their term. After serving two successive full terms, a member may not be reappointed until one year has elapsed. The term of members shall end on August 1.

6. Vacancies

Should vacancies occur because of low application numbers or the withdrawing of an active Committee member, the Membership Subcommittee shall present a slate of names to the Committee for approval. Nominees shall be recommended to the Superintendent for appointment by the School Board no later than October 30.

7. Absences

Members are required to attend all meetings in a school year with no more than three (3) unexcused absences. With the fourth unexcused absence, the person will no longer be a member of the Committee. A record of attendance shall be kept by the Vice Chair of Membership who shall report periodically to the Chair of the Committee.

Article IV – Officers

1. The officers of the Committee shall consist of a Chair, a Vice-Chair of Membership, a Vice-Chair of Planning, and a Secretary;
2. A nominating subcommittee, consisting of three (3) active members appointed by the Chair, will present a slate of proposed officers at the April meeting. Additional nominations may be made by the membership during the April meeting with the consent of the nominees;

Appendix I-1

3. Officers shall be elected by a majority vote of the Committee at the last meeting of the school year (May) provided a quorum is present. Officers shall serve a one (1) year term. No member shall serve in the same office for more than two (2) consecutive one-year terms;
4. In the event an office becomes vacant, the chair shall appoint a replacement for the unexpired term. Vacancy in the office of Chair shall be filled by one of the Vice Chairs for the unexpired term;
5. The term of officers begins in July of the year they are elected and ends at the end of June of the following year; and
6. The duties of the officers shall be as follows:

Chair

- a. Serve as chief executive of the Committee with the powers and duties usually belonging to such a position;
- b. Call and preside at meetings of the Committee;
- c. Serve as ex-officio member of all subcommittees;
- d. Ensure that the annual report is submitted to the School Board;
- e. Assure representation of the Committee at functions as requested by the Committee or others;
- f. Participate in orientation activities for new members;
- g. Appoint committee chairs; and
- h. Serve on other school advisory committees in order to facilitate collaboration regarding global issues.

Vice Chairs

Vice Chair of Planning

- a. Shall chair the Planning Subcommittee (goal setting and programs)
- b. Serve in the place of, and with the authority of, the Chair in case of the Chair's absence; and
- c. Discharge any duties delegated to him/her by the Chair.

Vice Chair of Membership

- a. Shall chair the Membership Subcommittee;
- b. Discharge any duties delegated to him/her by the Chair; and
- c. Keep a record of member attendance.

Secretary

- a. Keep minutes of the Committee meetings; and
- b. See that the minutes are made available to Committee members in a timely fashion.

Article V – Subcommittees

Subcommittees, standing or special, shall be appointed by the Chair as deemed necessary to carry out the work of the Committee. Each active member is required to serve on at least one (1) subcommittee. Standing subcommittees shall consist of three (3) or more members, one of whom may be an ex-officio staff person.

Article VI – Meetings

Frequency of regular meetings

Unless otherwise ordered by the Chair, the Committee shall meet no less than four (4) times, generally the fourth Tuesday evening of each month, between September and June. A calendar of meeting topics and places for the year shall be drawn up by the Vice Chair of Planning and submitted to the Director of Exceptional Education by August 1 of each year. One (1) meeting annually shall be designated to review the Annual Special Education Plan and Application for Federal Flow-Through Funds. This meeting shall be at least thirty (30) calendar days prior to the Superintendent’s submission of the final documents to the School Board. The regular meeting in May shall be known as the Annual Meeting and shall be for the purpose of electing officers, recognition of members rotating off the Committee, approval of the Committee’s Annual Report to the School Board, annual sub-committee reports, and approval of a slate of nominees by the Committee for referral to the Superintendent and School Board.

Notice

Notice of regular meetings, along with the minutes from the previous meeting and any information necessary for member review before the meeting, shall be sent to each member at least one (1) week prior to the scheduled meeting date except in unforeseen circumstances.

Open Meetings

All regular meetings of the Committee shall be open to the public. Two weeks public notice shall be given.

Public Comment

A 15 minute public forum will precede each of the regular meetings. The public forum will be designated to allow members of the community the opportunity to voice global concerns and matters of interest before the Committee and staff members. In accordance with Committee guidelines, the Chair will respond in writing to persons making public comment. The Vice Chair of Planning will maintain a list of issues raised during public comment periods for use in future planning activities.

Article VII – Quorum

A minimum of eight (8) active members shall constitute a quorum.

Article VIII – Amendments

These Bylaws may be amended at any regular meeting by not less than two-thirds of the total active membership of the Committee. A copy of the proposed amendment(s) shall be submitted in writing at the previous regular meeting of the Committee.

Article IX – Rules of Order

Robert’s Rules of Order, revised, shall govern the conduct of the Committee’s meetings and other procedural matters, to the extent that such rules are applicable and not inconsistent with the provisions of these bylaws.

Adopted: _____

Chair: _____

Essential Items to Include in SEAC ByLaws

NAME: list the full name of the local SEAC

PURPOSE: define the reason for the local SEAC's existence

THE COMMITTEE'S FUNCTIONS AND PROCEDURES AS OUTLINED IN REGULATIONS:

- Advise the local school division of unmet needs in the education of children with disabilities;
- Assist the local school division in the formulation and development of plans for improving performance of children with disabilities specified in subdivision B 1 b of this section;
- Participate in the development of priorities and strategies for meeting the identified needs of children with disabilities;
- Submit periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities to the division superintendent for transmission to the local school board;
- Assist the local school division in interpreting plans to the community for meeting the special needs of children with disabilities for educational services; and
- Review the policies and procedures for the provision of special education and related services prior to submission to the local school board and the Virginia Department of Education.

MEMBERSHIP: discuss eligibility for membership; how someone applies; list of skills, knowledge and abilities that applicants must meet before they can apply; define any other limitations, i.e., geography; define attendance requirements, include disciplinary procedures and procedures for removing from membership; and list responsibilities of members. [Include information about tenure and procedure for resignation]

OFFICERS: list the offices and briefly describe the duties of the officers; describe the nominations and election process; state the length of the terms of office; when the term begins, and term limits if any; and how vacancies are to be filled.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE TO THE SCHOOL DIVISION: (Include a flow chart of organizational structure.)

MEETINGS: Define how often the local SEAC meets; tell what business is to be conducted at the regular meetings and how agendas are established; outline procedures for public comment and responding to public comment; discuss the purpose of special meetings; define what constitutes a quorum for voting on issues at meetings; identify how the public will be notified of meetings, and describe the process for adding and canceling meetings.

PARLIAMENTARY AUTHORITY: State which parliamentary authority and which edition of the authority the SEAC will use.

DECISION MAKING: Identify how decisions will be made (consensus or voting)

AMENDING BYLAWS: Describe the rules concerning how by-laws can be changed.

METHOD OF DISSEMINATING INFORMATION TO CONSTITUENTS AND THE PUBLIC

PROVISIONS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (INTERPRETER SERVICES, ALTERNATE FORMATS)

SAMPLE ANNUAL SEAC CALENDAR

August

8/15/

Orientation: *Regulations, Roles and Responsibilities*
Review of the Annual Calendar
Review of the Bylaws
Review of the Annual Report Submitted to the School Board

September

9/23/

Review of the Priorities for the Year and Budget Implications
Review of Subcommittees and their Membership
Presentation: Extended School Year
Subcommittee Meetings

October

10/28/

Report on Presentation at School Board Budget Hearing
Report from Bylaws Subcommittee
Presentation by the Superintendent of Schools

November

11/18/

Report from the Data Subcommittee
Presentation: Transition Services for Students with Disabilities
Subcommittee Meetings

January

1/27

Reports on Site Visitations
Formation of Membership and Nominating Committees
Presentation: Supports and Services for Young Adults

February

2/24/

Presentation of the __ Public Schools Budget
Review of Prioritization of Unmet Needs
Celebration of Exceptional Education Week

March

3/23/

Presentation of the __ Public Schools Annual Plan to DOE
Report from the Membership and Nominating Committees
Distribution of the SEAC Self-Assessment

April

4/20/

Report from the Transition Subcommittee
Formation of Recommendations around Unmet Needs

May

5/18/

First Draft of the SEAC Annual Report
Recommendation of SEAC New Members

June

6/15/

Final Draft of the Annual Report
Election of Next Year's Officers
Recognition of Retiring Members

**SAMPLE LISTING OF
COMMITTEE MEETING PACKAGE**

February 10, 2005

To: All ___ SEAC Members

From: Mary Smith, SEAC Chairperson

Re: Materials for review for the March 10 SEAC Meeting

1. Agenda
2. Minutes from the February 8 meeting
3. Proposed policy on extended school year (ESY) to be discussed at the March meeting
4. Special Education Budget
5. Draft of proposed teacher survey

Please come prepared with your questions and comments.

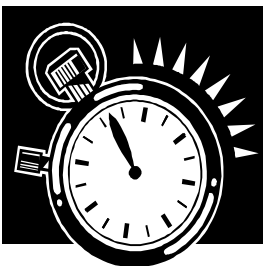
**SAMPLE
SEAC
Ground Rules**



- ❖ Respect confidentiality by not referring to families, students, or school employees by name.



- ❖ Respect each member and differing points of view.



- ❖ Respect people's time and stay on agenda (move off-topic items to a "parking lot" for later discussion).

**A Sample Collaborative
Structured Team Meeting
Record Form**

Special Education Advisory Committee

Team Members Present: _____

Date: _____

Select a

Facilitator: _____

Recorder: _____

Timekeeper: _____

List Agenda Items:

() Celebrations

() Issues/Times

_____ (Time) ____ _____ (Time) ____

_____ (Time) ____ _____ (Time) ____

_____ (Time) ____ _____ (Time) ____

*List
Agenda Items*

*Make note of
Discussions/Decisions*

What to do/who/when

<u>Celebrations</u>		
<u>Issues</u>		

Remember to note and celebrate successes; identify problems in reaching outcomes; brainstorm solutions; reach consensus on what to do, who will do it, and when. Reaching outcomes is the goal!

Agenda Items	Discussions/Decisions	What to do/who/when
<u>Other Agenda Items:</u>		

NEXT MEETING: Date/Time/Place/Agenda Items: _____

Please make a copy of each team meeting record and distribute to each team member.



SAMPLE PUBLIC COMMENT FORM AND GUIDELINES

The Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) of _____ County/City welcomes ideas, comments or concerns from the public. The comments can be provided in person or writing, by fax, mail or email. At every meeting of the SEAC an opportunity is provided for visitors to make public comment. It is received without SEAC comment. The public comment is summarized in the SEAC meeting minutes and/or a copy of this sheet is attached to the minutes. The original of this sheet is forwarded to the Director of Special Education who acknowledges in writing receipt of all public comment.

The SEAC is always looking for ideas and suggestions from students, parents and teachers that will improve the education of children with disabilities. The SEAC requests that any concerns expressed be general comments dealing with global issues rather than a specific comment dealing with a personal matter or situation. The Committee suggests that you address concerns about personal situations directly to the Department of Special Education.

Please summarize your idea or concern in the space below:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

For SEAC Use Only:

Date Received: _____
 Name of SEAC member who received form: _____
 Date when idea/concern was expressed at a SEAC meeting: _____
 Date of SEAC letter acknowledging comment: _____
 (please attach letter to this form)

SAMPLE FORMAT FOR ANNUAL REPORT TO THE SCHOOL BOARD

The role of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), as defined by Virginia Department of Education regulations, is as follows:

- Advise the local school division of unmet needs in the education of children with disabilities;
- Assist the local school division in the formulation and development of plans for improving performance of children with disabilities in the public schools and community;
- Participate in the development of priorities and strategies for meeting the identified needs of children with disabilities;
- Submit periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities to the superintendent for transmission to the School Board;
- Assist the local school division in interpreting to the community, plans for meeting the needs of children with disabilities for educational services; and
- Review policies and procedures for the provision of special education and related services (i.e., Annual Special Education Plan and Application for Federal Funds) prior to submission to the School Board and to the Virginia Department of Education.

Prioritized, Unmet Needs and Recommendations: Describe the unmet needs identified by the SEAC and selected as its priorities for the upcoming year. State your recommendations about possible plans and strategies to address these needs. Highlight any budget implications resulting from your recommendations.

Other Unmet Needs: Briefly state other unmet needs identified by the SEAC.

Data to Support Unmet Needs: Provide data and factual information to support the identification of unmet needs. State the source(s) of your data. Some examples could include the following: surveys, focus groups, interviews, and/or public comment.

Key Activities and Major Accomplishments: Tell how often the SEAC met; describe important activities, events and accomplishments from the year. Include brief descriptions of subcommittees and their work.

School Division Commendations: Thank the administration and school board for recommendations they have implemented and/or support they have provided.

Current SEAC Members: List the current members of the SEAC by name and state who they represent. This will show the diversity of the committee.

Provide any additional supporting information in appendices to the report.