

# Special Education PTO

South Orange - Maplewood  
Minutes - October 19, 2015

## Intro

- Special Ed PTO exec committee member Sonya Selig welcomed everyone
  - Purpose of the Special Ed PTO - informal, conversational meeting format outlined; networking and mutual support encouraged
  - Special Ed PTO relationship with the Parenting Center defined
  - Special Ed PTO's website introduced – somaspedpto.com
- Members of the SOMSD Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEPAC) in attendance introduced themselves
  - Provided overview of purpose and function of SEPAC
    - SEPAC assists the district by providing input on policy issues regarding special education student services
- Everyone present introduced themselves

## Events

- Educational Summit – two special education-specific break away groups, in addition to at least 20 other group discussions. Special needs parents encouraged to attend; child care provided through the YMCA – contact Karen Weiland
  - Increased parent access to Special Ed PTO & SEPAC info will be brought up, if possible
  - Greater transparency on what services district offers struggling and special needs students will also be addressed, if possible
- PTO exec committee member Rebekah Novemsky mentioned upcoming presentation about Person Centered Thinking scheduled at Bloomfield H.S., Thursday, Oct 25 – a flyer was available
- A document prepared by the SOMSD Department of Special Services that reflects all Child Study Team members and their locations within the district was made available
- PTO exec committee member Anne Leeb gave summary of the state-sponsored LRE (least restrictive environment) training she and another parent attended at the invitation of the Director of Special Services
  - Part of a series of meetings sponsored by the county and/or state
  - Primary outcome of meeting was that greater collaboration between general and special education staff is needed
  - Brief discussion was held on a district survey of families with students attending district Focus schools (SOMS, MMS, Clinton)
- Ella Rideau, Director of Special Services, will join the Special Ed PTO January or February meeting - TBD
- Reminder about upcoming elections for Board of Education, NJ Assembly elections; encouraged parents & caregivers to learn about candidates and vote
  - SEPAC prepared Board of Education candidate surveys were available

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Conversation

- Paras
  - How to include paras in IEP and parent-teacher meetings – what are the parameters
  - Does this create a professional conflict for the para
  - Para needed with student during these meetings – scheduling conflict
  - Could a universal form be used to capture para input for these meetings, in lieu of para participation
- Case Managers/Child Study Team (CST)
  - Define/clarify role
  - Define/clarify roles of all the members of the CST
  - Document these definitions and make them available to the public
- Special Ed PTO/SEPAC outreach
  - Get parent group info out to all families: utilize school resources such as liaisons, child study team meetings (case managers), direct e-blasts from building administrators/district
    - Utilize person common to all: case manager/504 administrator
  - OOD families outreach
    - Case manager
    - district/Dept of Special Services e-blasts & mailings
    - OOD school admin could help distribute parent group info
  - Create parent-based opt-in directory
  - Social media, websites
    - Use the PTO's Facebook page for feedback/message board
    - Create feedback page on PTO's website
  - How to bring more families to meetings – conference call? Webinar?
    - Sonya Selig will explore these options with District admin
  - Parents mentoring other parents
    - One of the functions the Special Ed PTO meetings is to help facilitate these relationships
  - Reach out to SOMSD CST, building admin and teachers with parent group meeting info – are there direct email list for these groups?
  - Sonya Selig to follow up with Ella Rideau, Phil Stern, Karen Weiland & Paul Roth to confirm email and mailing addresses for 504 & IEP families are included in district & Parenting Center emails & mailings
  - Sonya Selig to follow up with Ella Rideau re CST & OOD outreach options
- Privacy
  - Limitations on district's ability to distribute info to families – confidentiality
    - Parent groups do not have this constraint

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- Transitioning
  - Little support for students transitioning between schools, or even between grades
  - Interest in how students and families can familiarize themselves with their next grade level or school before September
- Missing IEP mandated services
  - son was owed hours of therapy and how could the district make up for lost time
- Support
  - PTO exec committee member Barry Berg shared that we are all in different places, with children of different ages and abilities; each of us can bring our current experience to the table to share with other parents, for us to learn from each other, to build a community that allows us to provide a united voice in talking to the administration, but individual voices as we inform and learn from each other
  - Create opportunities for students to form peer to peer relationships - between general education and special education students – student groups tend to segregate themselves
- Parenting Center's ADHD Group
  - Concern was expressed by two parents about perceived communication issues at the Parenting Center's ADHD parent support group meetings.
    - Sonya Selig to follow up with Karen Weiland

#### Closing

- Thank you to everyone for taking the time to join the meeting
- Next Special Ed PTO meeting November 24<sup>th</sup>

#### Handouts/Flyers

- The Special Education PTO meeting agenda, with PTO executive committee & school liaison contact info
- 2015-16 Service Provider Assignments/2015-16 Child Study Team Assignments – Department of Special Services
- 2015 Board of Education Candidate Statements on Special Education – SEPAC
- Person Centered Thinking – NJ Regional Family Support Planning Council #4, in partnership with Family Support Organization of Essex County
- The Parenting Center Groups/The Parenting Center & Elementary School PTAs 2015-2016 Speaker Series – The Parenting Center
- Education Summit - SOMSD