

Bernards SEPAC Bylaws
Agreed Upon: March 22, 2024

Article I: Name and Purpose

Section 1: The name of the organization shall be The Bernards Township Special Education Parent Advisory Council (Bernards SEPAC).

Section 2: The Bernards SEPAC exists to meet the New Jersey state law, New Jersey Administrative Code 6A:14-1.2(h), which states: *Each Board of Education shall ensure that a special education parent advisory group is in place in the district to provide input to the district on issues concerning students with disabilities.*

Section 3: The Bernards SEPAC is therefore organized to provide input to, and collaborate with, the Bernards Township school district's department of Special Services and BOE in a mutually respectful manner on the development of policies, programs, and practices that widely impact students receiving special education and related services.

- a. Recommendations will also be shared with additional Bernards school district administrators and the Superintendent.
- b. The Bernards Township SEPAC will also assist the local school district in interpreting plans to the community for meeting the needs of children with disabilities for educational services.

Section 4: The Bernards SEPAC does not exist to advocate on the behalf of single families or children, but rather to provide input to the district on systemic issues that widely impact children with IEPs and 504s within its school district.

Article II: Membership

Section 1: All parents and guardians who have a child or children with an IEP or 504 plan administered by the Bernards Township school district are considered members of the organization.

- a. Members have the right to provide input to the Bernards Township SEPAC Executive Board directly, either in person or through email or Feedback Forms; or indirectly, through SEPAC Liaisons as outlined in Article III, Section 5, in order to further the SEPAC's purpose as stated in Article I, Section 3.
- b. Members have the right to attend Open SEPAC meetings.
- c. Members have the right to attend any event organized by the SEPAC.
- d. Members must abide by Article 1, Section 4 in order to be a member in good standing.

Article III: Executive Board Composition & Roles

Section 1: The Bernards Township SEPAC Executive Board shall consist of: a President, Committees, at least 7 SEPAC School Liaisons.

Section 2: Executive Board Rights & Responsibilities

- a. The Executive Board has the right to collect, aggregate, and analyze the Special Education trends and needs in Bernards Township and share these findings with school district administrators.
- b. The right to access Feedback Forms that may include sensitive and/or identifying information regarding classified students.
- c. The right to identify themselves as a SEPAC Executive Board member in order to gather information on special education in Bernards Township.
- d. The right to request data from the District regarding special education and related services in order to identify special education trends.
- e. The responsibility of keeping any student-identifying information confidential, unless given written permission from the parent/guardian.
- f. The responsibility to act as a liaison for a broad section of special education students, rather than raise concerns that relate only to their child/children.
- g. The responsibility to attend training on SEPACs and the Bernards Township SEPAC so they are familiar with their roles and responsibilities.
- h. The responsibility to attend 70% of all meetings hosted by the SEPAC inclusive of Open, Executive and Administration meetings. Any Executive Board member who fails to attend 70% of these meetings may be removed from office by recommendation of the Executive Board. The officer shall be given the opportunity to submit in writing an explanation showing good cause which explains his/her reason for not attending these meetings for the Board's consideration.

Section 3: The President's Responsibilities

- a. To set annual goals for the SEPAC.
- b. To coordinate meetings with the district.
- c. To set the agenda for any meetings, based on member input.
- d. To preside at closed Administration meetings with Special Services.
- e. To oversee the Committees and SEPAC Liaisons.
- f. Other duties as needed.
- g. Length of service as president shall be no more than 2 consecutive years, unless term is extended by Executive Board vote.
- h. Only SEPAC Executive Board Members and SEPAC School Liaisons may apply to be SEPAC President.

Section 4: Committees

- a. Committees may be created or disbanded each year based on the needs of the district, the needs of the SEPAC and the SEPAC's annual goals.
- b. All efforts will be made to ensure the Committee members represent a broad section of pupil ages, schools and classifications.
- c. Committees will attend closed Administration meetings.

- d. Other duties as assigned.
- e. Committee members may also serve as a SEPAC School Liaison if no other representative is available.
- f. Committee members have a term of 1 year and may re-volunteer without limits.

Section 5: SEPAC School Liaisons

- a. The SEPAC Executive Board will assign at least seven liaisons to act as representatives between the classified school community and the SEPAC Executive Board.
 - i. Any parent whose child has an IEP or 504, or is placed in an out-of-district school, may apply to be a SEPAC Liaison.
 - ii. SEPAC School Liaisons may be assigned to specific schools.
 - iii. SEPAC School Liaisons will collaborate with the principal and PTO (if assigned to a district school) to engage families and provide input.
 - iv. SEPAC School Liaisons will communicate the BT SEPAC's priorities and programs throughout their designated school.
 - v. SEPAC School Liaisons may collect parent input through Special Education Parent Feedback Form and share any collected feedback with the entire Executive Board.
 - vi. SEPAC School Liaisons have a responsibility to understand the chain of escalation when concerns are raised by a Special Education family.
 - vii. They have the responsibility to follow up with families that offer feedback, in writing, to let them know their feedback has been received, and to communicate appropriate next steps.
 - viii. Liaisons have a term of 1 year and may re-volunteer without limits.

Section 6: Ex-officio Members

- a. Ex-officio members such as the Director of Special Services, Special Education Supervisors, Child Study Team, Superintendent and Board of Education members in Bernards Township are also considered non-voting members of the Executive Board.

Article IV. Executive Board Membership Application Process

Section 1: Applying for the SEPAC Executive Board

- a. Applications for open SEPAC Executive Board seats will be posted in May/June, and all applicants who fit the membership criteria listed in Article 2 may apply.
 - i. Applications will include filling out a form and an interview.
 - ii. Acceptance onto the Bernards Township SEPAC Executive Board is at the sole discretion of the Executive Board, which will take into consideration, among other things, the applicant's ability to represent Special Education students as a whole and to work collaboratively and respectfully with the district during, but not limited to, the Administration meetings. The ability to attend 70% of SEPAC meetings.
 - iii. Candidates will be notified no later than the last day of the school year.

Article V. Data Collection on District Special Education Needs

Section 1: Data collection may be done, but not limited to, the following ways

- a. Feedback Forms
 - i. SEPAC members can access the Feedback Form in a variety of ways, not limited to: social media, the SEPAC webpage, the Bernards PEC website, the district webpage and district emails.
- b. Feedback sent via email to BernardsSEPAC@gmail.com
- c. Open meetings facilitated by the SEPAC Executive Board.

Section 2: Limits on data collection response

- a. In some instances, feedback given to the SEPAC Executive Board may be more appropriately considered and addressed by teachers and school building administrators, in which case the SEPAC Executive Board will explain the appropriate chain of communication.
- b. The BT SEPAC will conduct itself in a manner that will protect the privacy of all individuals giving feedback by withholding names and personal information from data reports.

Article VI: Meetings

Section 1: Executive Board Meetings

- a. The Executive Board will meet at minimum 3 times per year.
- b. Executive Board members may be asked to meet as a whole or in Task Forces at other times.
- c. These are closed meetings.
- d. Decision making will be done by consensus.

Section 2: Administration Meetings

- a. Meetings will be held with Special Services and other invited administrators and BOE members in October, January, and April.
- b. The SEPAC President and Committees will attend.
- c. These are closed meetings. No recording or video will be made.
- d. Minutes from these meetings will be made public no more than three weeks after an Administration Meeting occurs.
 - i. Methods of dissemination may include social media, the SEPAC webpage and the district Special Services Friday Folder.

Section 3: Open Meetings

- a. At least 3 open meetings will be held per year during which SEPAC members are invited to give feedback regarding Special Services. This may occur as a stand-alone meeting or in conjunction with a parent education or training event.

Article VII: Amending Bylaws

Section 1: Bylaws may only be amended by the Bernards Township SEPAC Executive Board

- a. Bylaw amendments will be passed by consensus.