

Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services Special Education Citizen's Advisory Committee (SECAC)

1. What is a Special Education Citizen's Advisory Committee (SECAC)?

A Special Education Citizen's Advisory Committee (SECAC) is a committee established by the local school system to seek meaningful input from parents, community partners, service providers, educators, and administrators on local issues relative to the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and the achievement of students with disabilities. To work most effectively a SECAC operates as a partnership between parents and families, community leaders and organizations, educators, and administrators at the local level. A local SECAC enables a local director of special education to collaborate with others on local issues and it has the potential to facilitate positive changes in the delivery of special education services and the achievement of students with disabilities.

[COMAR 13A.05.02.13I]

2. Does the State have a Special Education Advisory Committee?

Yes. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires the State to establish and operate an advisory panel. In Maryland, this panel is called the Special Education State Advisory Committee (SESAC). Under federal law, students with disabilities and families of students with disabilities must comprise at least 50 percent of the committee's membership. The purpose of the committee is to advise the State on unmet needs of students with disabilities, including the development of evaluations, reports, and corrective action plans in response to federal monitoring, and implementing policies and procedures to coordinate services for students with disabilities.

[3F CFR §§300.650-300.653; COMAR 13A.05.02.05]

3. Are local school systems required to have a SECAC?

Yes. In a telephone survey the local directors of special education from the 24 school systems reported that each school system has established a local advisory committee. On September 28, 2004 the Maryland State Board of Education adopted regulations for each local school system to establish a SECAC to advise the local school system on the needs of students with disabilities within the jurisdiction. Membership consists of parents, teachers, related service providers school administrators and central office administrators.

Research has demonstrated the importance of educators and families working together to benefit our

children. An indicator of successful schools is parental involvement. IDEA and MSDE support strengthening the role of parents by ensuring that parents and families of students with disabilities have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home.

[COMAR 13A.05.02.13I]

4. What is the purpose of a SECAC?

One purpose is to provide a local director of special education with meaningful input as to the needs of students with disabilities within the local jurisdiction. Each jurisdiction may have specific procedures, reports, or practices for which a local director may wish to solicit input from parents, administrators, and teachers.

[COMAR 13A.05.02.07; Proposed COMAR 13A.05.02.13I]

5. What are the functions of a SECAC?

A SECAC may assist a local school system in the development, implementation, and review of a local school system's special education self-assessment for continuous improvement and results. Local school systems are expected to work with parents, advocates, and other key stakeholders to shape its local special education accountability process in a way that drives and supports improved results for students with disabilities. The continuous improvement and results model includes the collection and analysis of systemic data on compliance indicators. This includes, but is not limited to performance on State and district assessments, least restrictive environment (LRE), special education services, and supports for students with disabilities to access the general curriculum services. This process assists local school systems to make objective strategic decisions based upon reliable and valid data.

Based on local data and the needs of each school system, a local SECAC should work collaboratively with the local director of special education to identify priorities and goals designed to improve the achievement and outcomes of students with disabilities within their jurisdiction. Based upon collected information and dialogue, each SECAC should develop recommendations and advise local school systems of identified unmet needs. Two key areas of concentration may be the jurisdiction's self-assessment and needs based on State's Monitoring for Continuous Improvement and Results process, and the jurisdiction's annual review and revision of the local special education staffing plan. Each SECAC should determine its own specific functions, however a SECAC may consider the following:

- Advise the local school system of unmet needs as to the education of students with disabilities;
- Participate in the evaluation of local special education services through the Monitoring for Continuous Improvement and Results process;
- Participate in review and evaluation of the local school system's Special Education Staffing Plan;
- Assist the local school system in the formulation and development of plans for improving the performance of students with disabilities;
- Use local information and data to determine focus issues;
- Submit a year-end report of activities and recommendations to the local director of special education, superintendent, and/or school board.

6. Does the establishment of a SECAC require school board appointment?

No. The participation and membership of the local SECAC is established by the local school system and does not require school board appointment unless local policy and procedure require local school board action.

7. Is there a suggested organizational format for operating a SECAC?

It is the prerogative of each SECAC to determine the organizational structure and format of their committee that will align with their local district's needs. Each SECAC should establish local by-laws regarding membership, officers, and operational policies and procedures that support the leadership and meaningful participation of families of students with disabilities and students with disabilities.

8. Who should serve on a SECAC?

Local school systems may determine the composition of their local committees based on their identified needs. However, to be a true "citizen" advisory committee, families of students with disabilities, students with disabilities, and community members should compose a majority of the committee membership. The local director of special education should serve as a member. Additional members may include general and special educators, related service personnel, administrators, representatives from local Parent/Teacher Associations, representatives of community agencies and organizations serving children and adults with disabilities, and other members of the community at the discretion of the committee. Efforts should be made to develop and maintain a committee that reflects the population and diversity of the jurisdiction with regards to sex, race, ethnicity, geography, age span, special education placement, and disability.

9. Who chairs the local SECAC?

The decision of who should chair the SECAC meetings is left to the discretion of the local SECAC. The process of developing local bylaws will assist the local SECAC in developing policies and procedures that specify how the local SECAC is to operate within the jurisdiction. This includes procedures for membership, officers, length of service, meetings, and other operational procedures determined necessary to support the leadership and meaningful participation of families of students with disabilities and students with disabilities.

10. How can a local jurisdiction ensure broad family, student, and community involvement in their SECAC?

Local school systems should consider various options available for conducting outreach to students, families, and community groups about SECAC membership and activities. Potential activities to be considered may include, but are not limited to:

- Including information on the SECAC in Partners for Success Center newsletters and at workshops;
- Listing SECAC meeting dates in school system calendars;
- Placing public service announcements in local newspapers;
- Distributing information through Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) meetings;

- Including information in school newsletters; and/or
- Providing information to families at IEP team meetings.

11. Are funds available to support local SECAC activities?

MSDE annually allocates \$2500 of IDEA, Part B, State Discretionary federal funds to local school systems to support the cost of operating a local SECAC and its activities. A budget for the use of federal funds should be submitted reflecting the priorities of the local SECAC within the school system's Application for Federal Funds. Each SECAC is required to submit a progress report on the use of funds twice a year. The progress report is to describe the activities undertaken during the grant period and the results. In addition, each local school system must submit local policies, procedures, and practices established for the citizen advisory committee for review and approval by MSDE.

[COMAR 13A.05.02.13C(1)(b); COMAR 13A.05.02.13G; COMAR 13A.05.02.13I]

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