



200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201

# Technical Assistance Bulletin

MarylandPublicSchools.org



## Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services | Bulletin # 21-02

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Date: March, 2021

### Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee (SECAC) Questions & Answers (Q&A)

The engagement of stakeholders is an expectation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for the development and implementation of special education requirements. For example, states are required to obtain and show evidence of stakeholder feedback during the development of policies and procedures, submission of their State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR), and the development of the annual IDEA grant application. A commonly used vehicle for obtaining stakeholder feedback is the Special Education State Advisory Committee (SESAC) because IDEA regulations require all states to establish and maintain a State Advisory Panel [34 CFR §300.167]. Similarly, Maryland regulations require each local school system to establish and maintain a Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee (SECAC) [COMAR 13A.05.02.13I]. The purpose of this technical assistance bulletin is to provide guidance to local school systems, local SECAC executive boards and members regarding the purpose and function of SECACs.

**Q1: What is a Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee (SECAC)?**

**A1:** A Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee (SECAC) is a committee comprised of parents, community partners, service providers, educators, and administrators to provide meaningful input 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 facilitate positive changes in the delivery of special education services and the achievement of students with disabilities.

**Q2: Is there also a Special Education Advisory Committee for the State of Maryland?**

**A2:** The IDEA requires each 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. [34 CFR §§300.167-300.169; COMAR 13A.05.02.05]

**Q3: Are local school systems in the state of Maryland required to have a SECAC?**

**A3:** Research has demonstrated the importance of educators and families working together to benefit students. An important indicator of successful schools is parental involvement. IDEA and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services (DEI/SES) 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. Meaningful participation on SECACs benefits ALL students and school communities. 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 their jurisdiction.  
[COMAR 13A.05.02.13I]

**Q4: What is the purpose of a SECAC?**

**A4:** The purpose of SECAC is to seek meaningful input on issues related to the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). SECACs actively collect parent input and concerns from many sources such as letters, comments, surveys, etc. Input from these sources should be considered in advising the district on the facilitation of positive changes. Additionally, each jurisdiction shall develop specific procedures, reports, or practices for which a local director may wish to solicit input from parents, administrators, and teachers.

One of the best indicators of student success is parental engagement. SECACs mission is to review systemic issues and trends that can be addressed through policies, programs and services that have the potential to impact many students with disabilities.

**Q5: What are the functions of a SECAC?**

**A5:** A SECAC may assist a local school system in the development, implementation, and review of a local school system's special education self-assessment as part of the DEI/SES' comprehensive monitoring process, Accountability to Improve Performance (AIP). Local school systems are expected to partner with parents, advocates, and other key stakeholders to shape their local special education accountability process in a way that drives and supports improved results for students with disabilities. The AIP 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 education curriculum. 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. 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 AIP comprehensive monitoring process;
- Participate in review and evaluation of the local school system’s Special Education Staffing Plan;
- Participate in the development and/or review of SECAC grant submission;
- Assist the local school system in the formulation and development of plans for improving the performance of students with disabilities;
- Participate in the analysis of local information and data that could benefit from renewed focus. One way to accomplish this is through comprehensive review of the yearly Parent Involvement Survey to develop initiatives on identified unmet needs of students and families;
- Submit a year-end report of activities and recommendations to the local director of special education, superintendent, and/or school board.

**Q6: Does the establishment of a SECAC require school board appointment?**

**A6:** 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.

**Q7: Is there a suggested organizational format for operating a SECAC?**

**A7:** SECACs should partner with their director of special education to determine the organizational structure and format of their committee that will align with their local system’s needs. Each SECAC must 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. Additional guidance for suggested organizational formats (including suggested by-laws structure) of local advisory committees can be found at Center for Parent Information and Resources--Advocacy in Action: A Guide to Local Special Education Parent Advisory Councils at: [https://www.parentcenterhub.org/wp-content/uploads/repo\\_items/National\\_SEPAC\\_Guide\\_120218.pdf](https://www.parentcenterhub.org/wp-content/uploads/repo_items/National_SEPAC_Guide_120218.pdf).

**Q8: How are SECAC meetings run, who chairs the SECAC, and how are members determined?**

**A8:** Each local school system’s SECAC must have bylaws that guide the local SECAC in developing policies and procedures that specify how the local SECAC is to operate within that jurisdiction. This includes procedures for membership, officers, length of service, meetings, and other operational procedures determined necessary to support the leadership, as well as meaningful participation of families of students with disabilities.

**Q9: What qualifications are necessary for a “advisory committee?”**

**A9:** While not outlined in law, to be a genuine special education “citizen” advisory committee, families of students with disabilities, students with disabilities, and community members should compose a majority (i.e. more than 50 percent) of the committee membership. 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. SECAC in partnership with the department of special education should develop and maintain a committee that reflects the population and diversity of the jurisdiction with regards to sex, race, ethnicity, geography, special education

placement, and disability.

**Q10: How can a local jurisdiction ensure broad family, student, and community involvement in their SECAC?**

**A10:** Local school systems should consider various options available for conducting outreach to students, families, and community groups about SECAC membership and activities. Potential outreach activities to be considered may include, but are not limited to:

- Including SECAC information in Partners for Success newsletters and at workshops;
- Posting SECAC meeting dates on school system calendars and websites;
- Hosting meetings in virtual format to meet the various needs of families;
- Distributing information at community outreach events;
- Distributing information through Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) meetings;
- Distributing information in school newsletters;
- Posting information on social media platforms; and
- Providing SECAC brochures and flyers to families at IEP team meetings.

**Q11: Are funds available to support local SECAC activities?**

**A11:** MSDE annually allocates IDEA, Part B, State Discretionary federal funds to local school systems to support the cost of operating a local SECAC and its activities. Each local school system submits a budget for the use of federal funds, reflecting the priorities of the local SECAC, within the school system's Application for Federal Funds. The budget submission is also signed by the SECAC Chair. Each local school system 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. Suggestions for use of SECAC funds include: resource fairs, speakers, conferences/training, educational/office supplies or materials, brochures, survey programs.

**Q12: Are local SECACs a public body subject to the provisions of the Open Meetings Act?**

**A12:** In March 2019, the Open Meetings Compliance Board issued [an advisory opinion](#) that a local SECAC is a public body subject to the Open Meetings Act. Therefore, a SECAC must comply with the requirements of the Act. [MD Code, General Provisions, § 3-300. *et. seq.*]

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