

# SOMERVILLE SEAPAC

Special Education  
Parents Advisory Council

## '24-'25 PARENT SURVEY RESULTS



# AGENDA

1. Who we are/Vision Statement
2. Establishing Initiatives
3. Survey Results
4. '24-'25 Initiatives



# OUR VISION

A public school system with equal access to opportunities and education for students with disabilities, where all students are *supported* in realizing their full potential.

The Somerville **Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC)** is a State mandated volunteer-run advocacy group that represents all families of children with disabilities from the entire school district.



# 2024-2025 TIMELINE- BUILDING COMMUNITY

General:

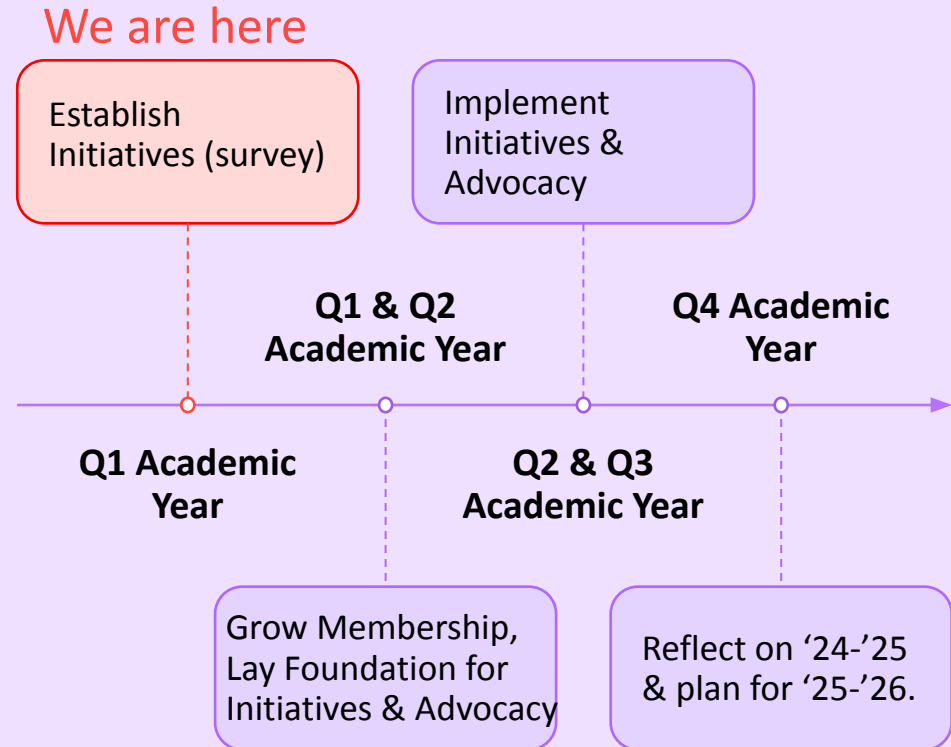
Re-establish trust in the SSEPAC as a reliable and effective advocacy group

Q1: Understand community needs and organize priorities

Q2: Grow membership and community support

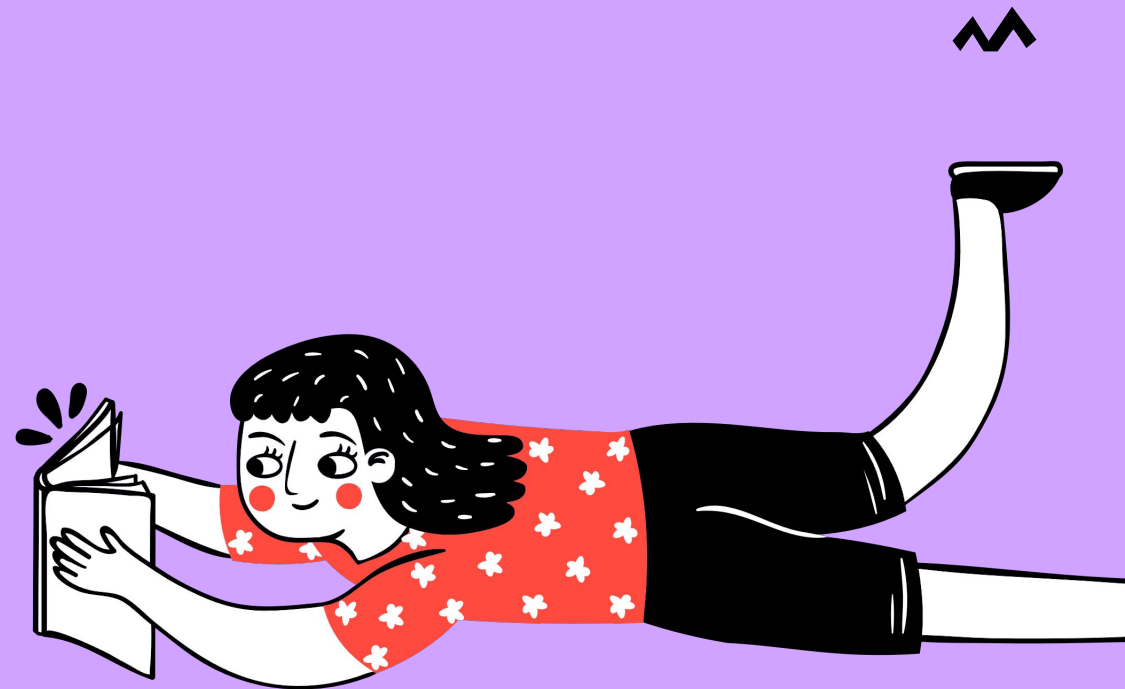
Q3: Execute advocacy initiatives

Q4: Re-evaluate success and evaluate goals for the '25-'26 school year



# ESTABLISHING INITIATIVES

feedback from 2023-2024





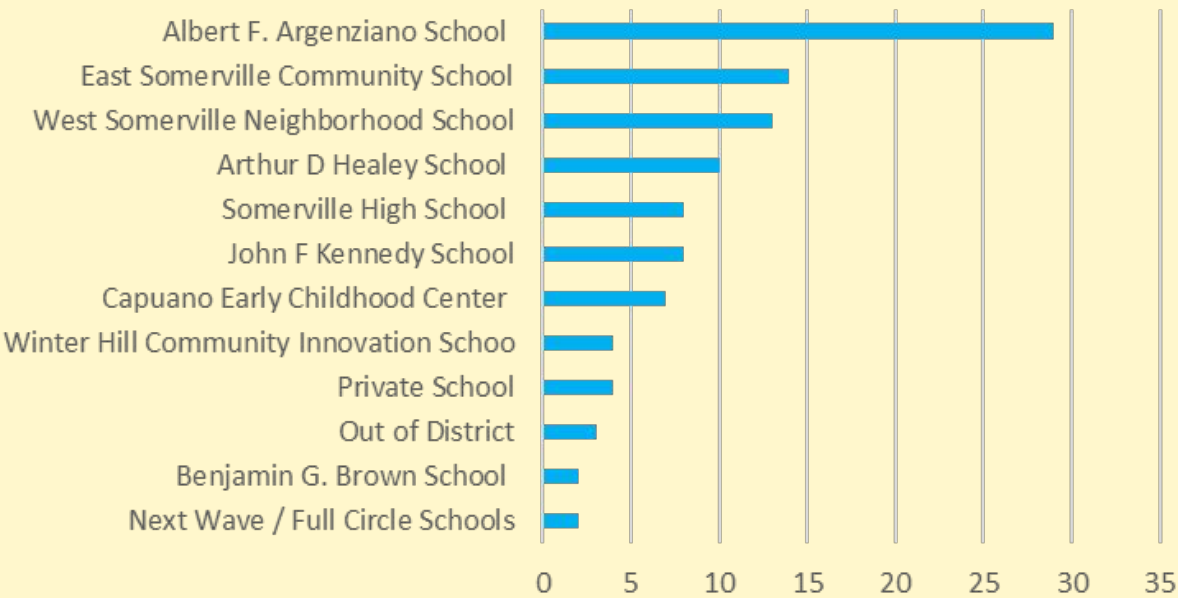
# SURVEY: UNDERSTAND CAREGIVERS' NEEDS

- 9 schools
- (4) Four languages
- 105 responses
- 76 families with IEPs/504s and in the process of being evaluated/recommended for services or recently lost their IEP/504. Representing approximately **8% of the 995 students** with disabilities.

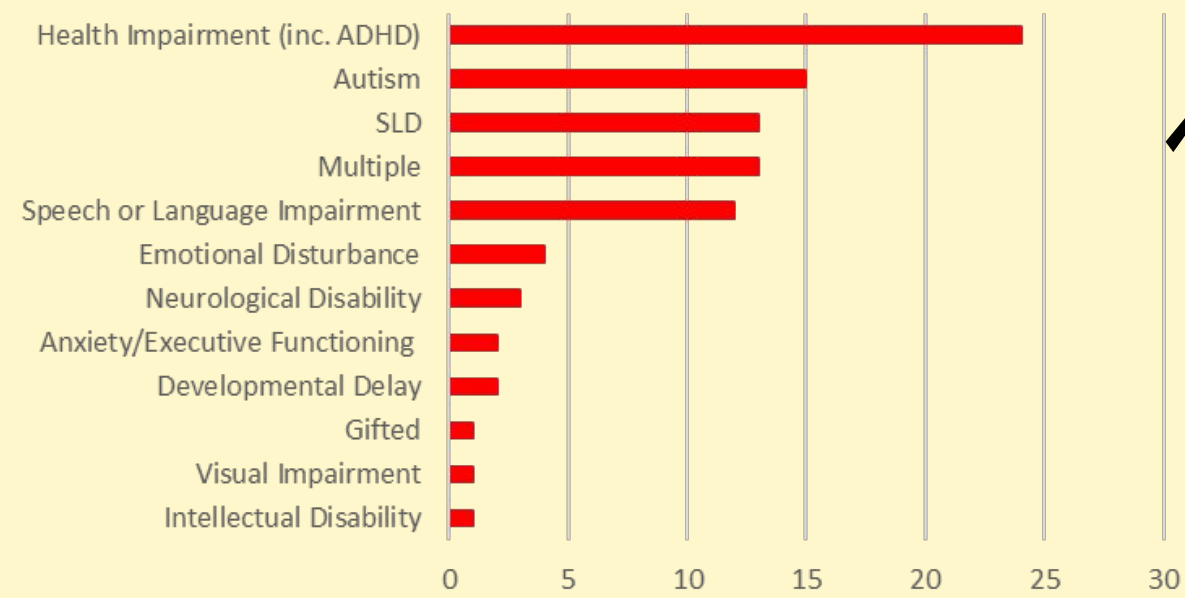


# SURVEY: UNDERSTAND CAREGIVERS' NEEDS

Which school does your student attend?



Which best describes your student's disability?



# CURRENT ANALYSIS



Feedback reveals a disconnect between needs and support/services and desire for more transparency and communication.

We have identified important key suggested initiatives, which we'll explore in a bit:

- 1) Building community
- 2) Advocacy
- 3) Provide district and school collaboration, oversight, and advisory
- 4) Education

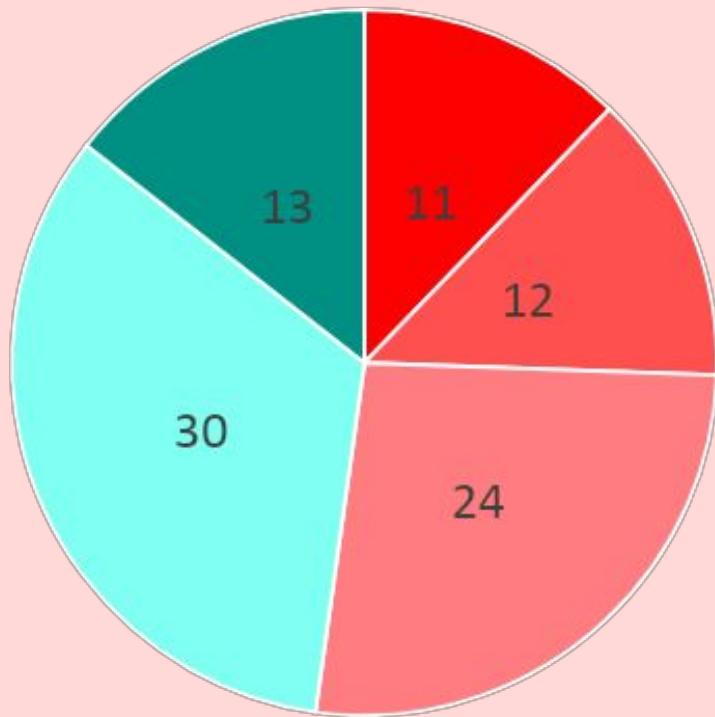


# Survey Respondent Feedback regarding Special Education in Somerville



# Overall Satisfaction with Special Education

What is your **overall satisfaction** with your student's experience with Special Education in Somerville Public Schools?



\*Pie chart represents individual respondents

Extremely Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Satisfied

47% of respondents were satisfied  
**53% of respondents were dissatisfied.**

Satisfaction can be attributed to the quality of individual general education and at times special education teachers and staff but not the education system as a whole.

There is a strong perception that the special education *'system as a whole is mostly designed to gatekeep services and provide the bare minimum.'*

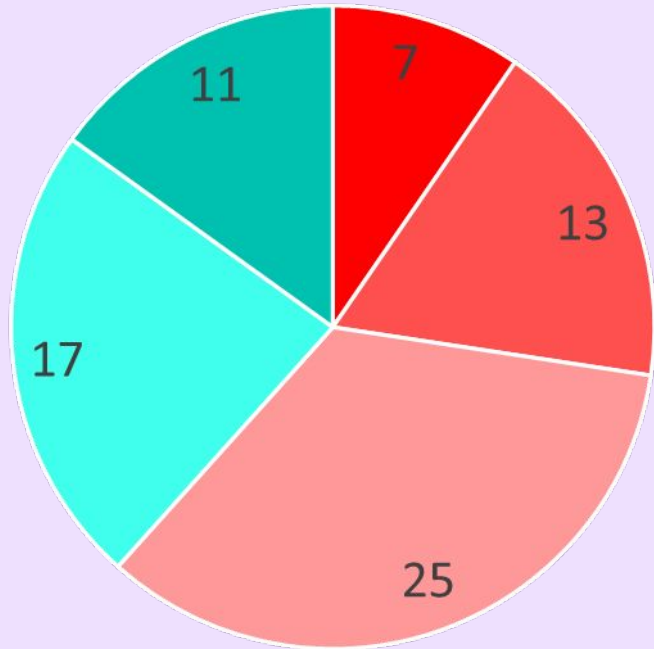
Families are having to *'fight very hard'* and *'spend a lot of time and money'* in spite of clear indicators through evaluation, family and teacher feedback.

*"SPS is constantly trying to undermine my child's IEP and special needs."*



# Special Ed Communication

How would you rate the overall quantity and quality of communication from SPS regarding your student's special education services?



\*Pie chart represents individual respondents

Extremely Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Satisfied

38% of respondents were satisfied  
**62% of respondents were dissatisfied.**

Although some families felt **“informed and involved,”** most feel that communication is lacking.

*“Communication is almost always initiated by our family. Information is often withheld until multiple requests. Our communication has been limited. There is minimal transparency and collaboration.”*

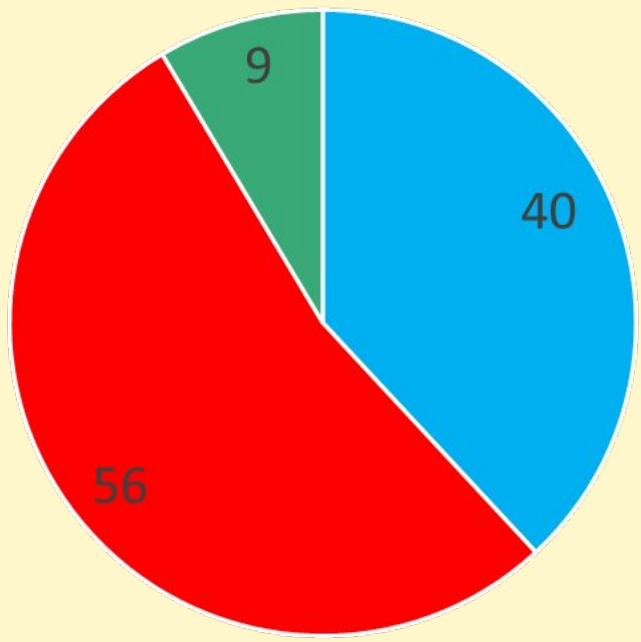
*“Even when communicating concerns with the school no problem solving is done. It’s like pulling teeth when a parent is reaching out for help.”*

*“Communication is lacking. I always find out after the fact. Most of my info comes from my kid and then I ask the school.”*

# Special Ed Outside Support

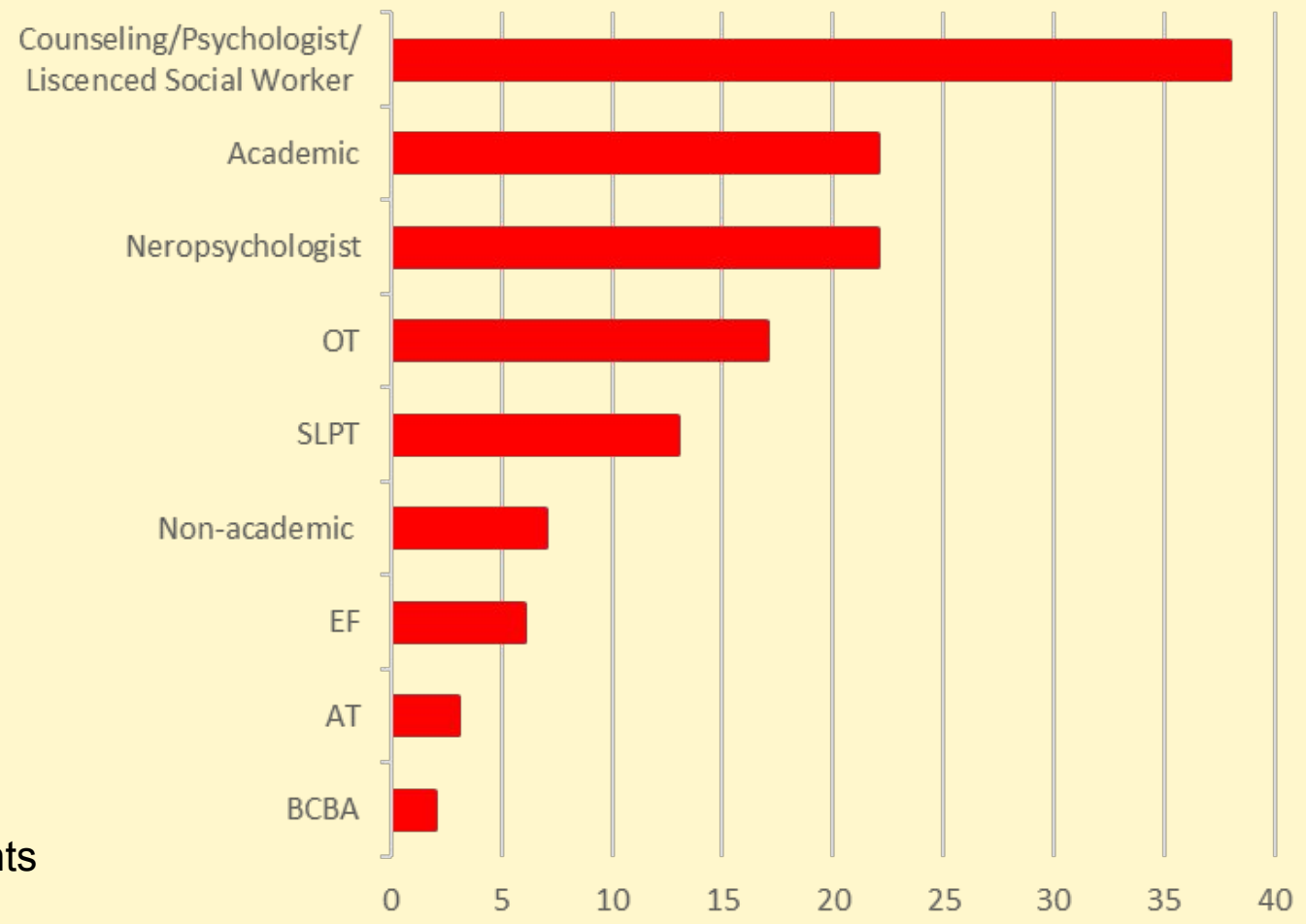
Are you seeking support outside of Somerville Public Schools Special Education to meet your child's needs?

**84% of IEP/504 respondents are seeking support outside of SPS**



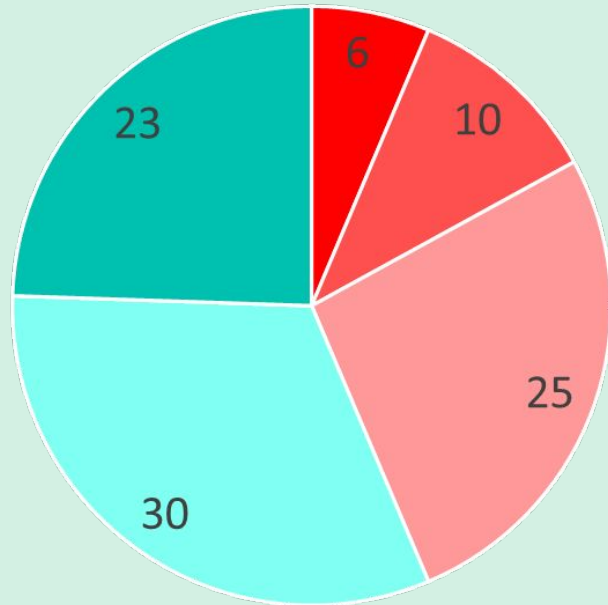
\*Pie chart represents individual respondents

■ No ■ Yes ■ Other



# SPS Responsiveness

How would you rate Somerville Public School District's **responsiveness to any questions and concerns** you may have had about your student and their education?



\*Pie chart represents individual respondents

Extremely Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Satisfied

**56% of respondents were satisfied**  
44% of respondents were dissatisfied.

Those who reported being satisfied note that the schools are **'doing their best'** but are **'short staffed'**, so proposed plans are not executed well.

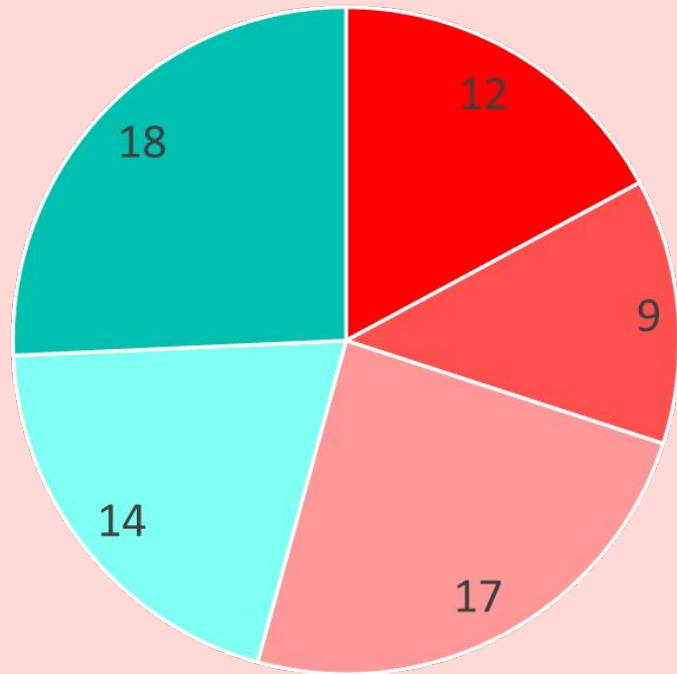
*"We raised a serious concern about a teacher this year, along with more than two dozen other parents. Our school principal was incredibly responsive... I felt we were taken seriously and that the situation was handled with great care and skill. **At the larger district level, we felt we had to work to convince central office members that we were not just complaining parents.**"*

*"Unwilling to listen, create a plan or provide the necessary support to meet my child's needs. Always gaslighting, making excuses, blaming parents. It's been a really hard experience for our family."*

*"Lack of follow through, feeling that my child's needs are not being adequately addressed."*

# Process of Seeking Initial Evaluation

How would you rate your experience with the process of seeking initial qualification of an IEP or 504 plan or other services?



\*Pie chart represents individual respondents

Extremely Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Satisfied

32% of respondents were satisfied  
**68% of respondents were dissatisfied.**

76% of special education evaluations were initiated by a parent

22% special education evaluations were initiated by a general educator or tier 1 educator.

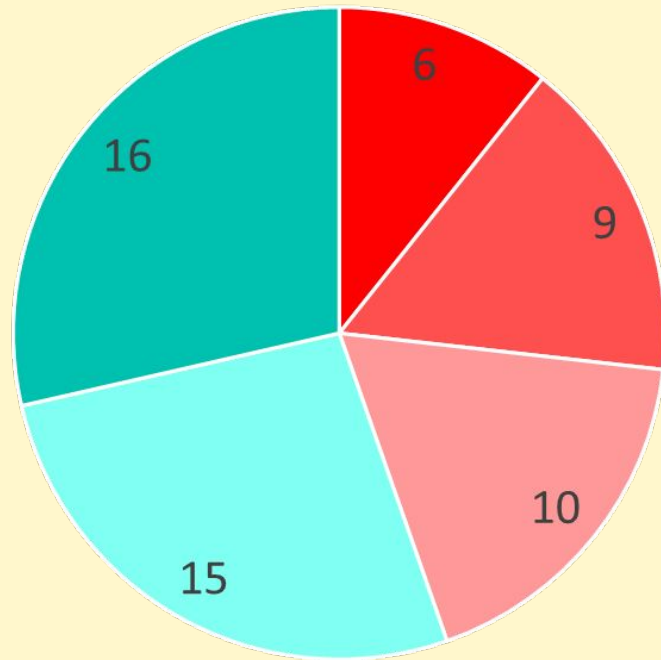
*“Although my child has an IEP the school doesn’t let parents know if their child should be evaluated for disabilities observed in school settings.”*

*“There are specific individuals working in Special Education at SPS who are amazing. However **they are not given the resources they need and this results in a competitive bloodbath among families over who gets services and who gets turned away, and burnout among the educators due to overwork and needing to tell families "no" over and over again.**”*



# Experience with IEP Team

How would you rate your experience with Somerville Public School based **IEP team** members at IEP meetings?



\*Pie chart represents individual respondents

Extremely Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Satisfied

**55% of respondents were satisfied**

45% of respondents were dissatisfied.

Of those who reported not satisfied, comments included: **frustration, stress, being unheard, being unprepared, defensiveness, combativeness, and need for professional development.** There was a significant focus on **coordinators and IEP team leaders making meetings challenging and uncollaborative.**

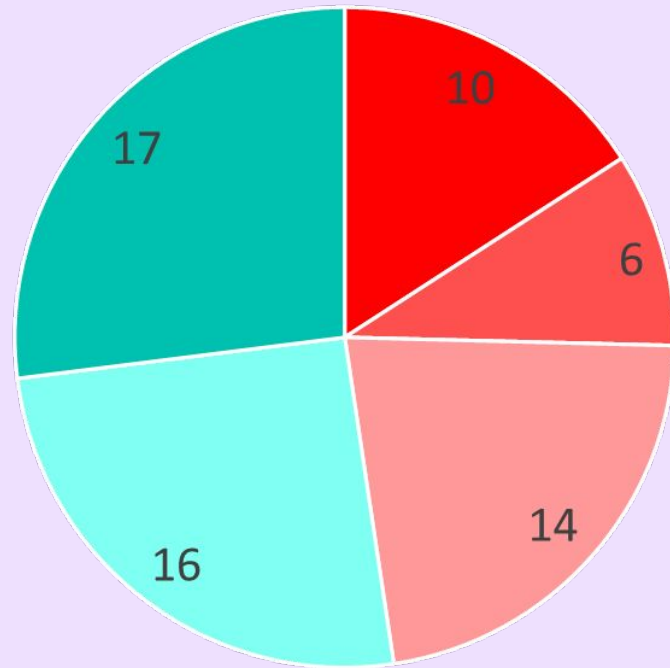
Of those who reported being satisfied, comments included: adequate, helpful, competent, knowledgeable, keeping their child's best interest in mind.

*"I think the team members are good overall, but **the incentives are to provide the bare minimum.**"*

*"**Our concerns were often met with defensiveness, combativeness and condescension. It is also clear that some staff are not willing to learn and keep up with education surrounding disability in general and especially autism.**"*

# Confidence with IEP/504 Implementation

How confident are you that your student's **IEP or 504 is being followed** as written?



\*Pie chart represents individual respondents

No Confidence    1    2    3    4    5    Extremely Confident

**52% of respondents were satisfied**  
48% of respondents were dissatisfied.

More confident respondents cited **increased parental involvement and oversight played a key role.** “Reminding” educators and being “in constant contact” with the team regarding student’s needs.

**Little communication** from educators makes families feel unsure if their student’s IEP/504 is being followed making it “harder to tell” leading to uncertainty and distrust. Of note concerns of IEP’s not be fullying followed and “**straightforward**” IEP’s/504s are **better executed.**

Less confident respondents noted **uncertainty if gen educators even read their student’s IEP, missed sessions,** and “**lost faith in SPS.**”

*“...We asked for a listing of all sessions and found **20% were missed.**”*

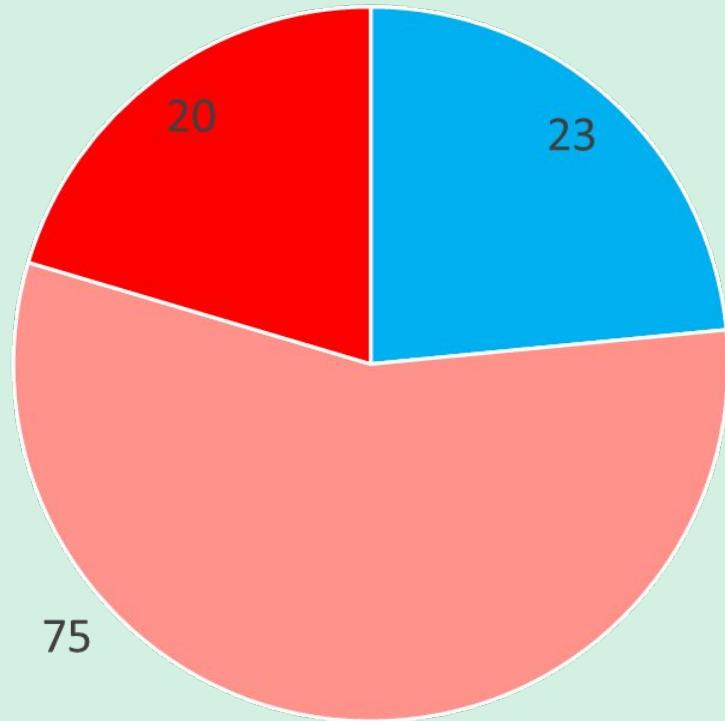
*“We know for a fact, as documented by our child’s IEP team they are not administering my child’s IEP as written. **Missed services** for many years.”*

*“Probably being followed but the **plan isn’t sufficient** and my son is too depressed and hates school to access some of the services.”*



# ESY Qualification

Did your student QUALIFY for **Extended School Year (ESY)**?



\*Pie chart represents individual respondents

■ No ■ Yes ■ participated

**Only 26% of participants who qualified for ESY participated in services offered.**

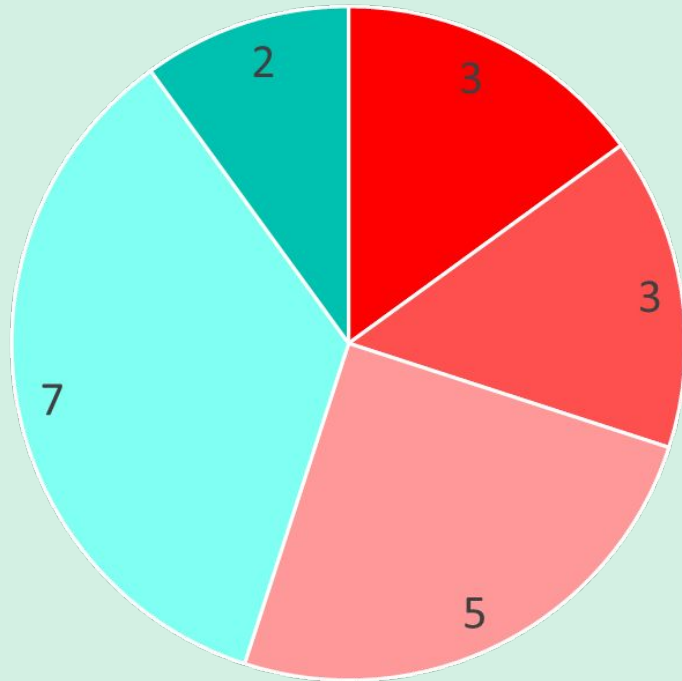
Families cited poor, last minute, or non-existent communication about service schedule and inadequate programming and lack of coordination between SPS programs as the barriers to being able attend ESY services.

***“The services are laughable. One 30 minute session per week when my child needs a full time summer program!”***

***“The staff was knowledgeable of the special needs”***

# ESY Experience

How would you rate your **experience** with SPS  
Extended School Year (ESY)?



\*Pie chart represents individual respondents

Extremely Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Satisfied

45% of respondents were satisfied  
**55% of respondents were dissatisfied.**

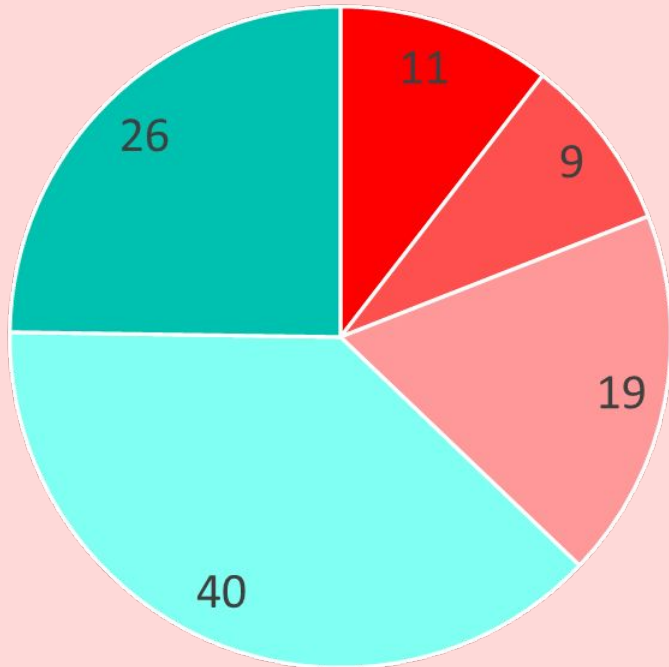
Planning, scheduling, implementation, and the services themselves were the basis of most concern.

*“..I'm not sure what the counseling goals were. The therapist seemed nice enough. This was not what he needed though, which is something Somerville doesn't provide (full day ESY with social-emotional supports so students can maintain school routine).”*

*“Last minute, under qualified educators that don't know my child nor their profile, the services are a pass at going through the motions but not provide any actual support to acquire new skills or prevent summer learning loss.”*

# Caregiver Confidence

As we embark on the 2024-2025 school year, do YOU as a **parent/caregiver feel confident** about the year ahead?



\*Pie chart represents individual respondents

Not Confident    1   2   3   4   5   Extremely Confident

**63% of respondents were confident.**  
37% of respondents were not confident.

Based on written responses, we must credit respondent's optimism to the work that families themselves have put into consistently advocating for their child.

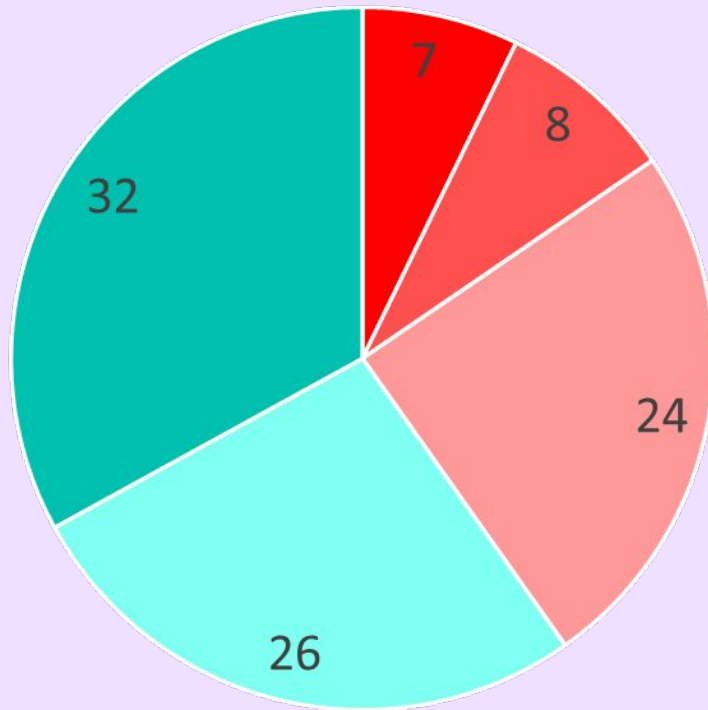
*"Not wanting to meet our child's needs due to budget constraints, leading on behavioral which makes things worse, not individualizing to our child."*

*"We have our IEP renewal coming up. I feel anxious and am preparing for a fight. I see the district as adversaries."*



# Student Confidence

As we embark on the 2024-2025 school year, does YOUR STUDENT feel confident about the year ahead?



\*Pie chart represents individual respondents

Not Confident 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely Confident

**60% of respondents were confident.**

40% of respondents were not confident.

Those who reported their child being confident attributed confidence to family established positive connections with future teachers, optimistic attitudes, confidence with home support and move to OOD or private school.

Those who reported their child's lack of confidence noted lack of self confidence and safety concerns.

*"He's scared to return to school, lost confidence in his teacher's ability to help him and keep him safe."*

*"She feels like everyone knows how to read but her."*



Special Education  
Parents Advisory Council

# '24-'25 Proposed Initiatives



# Initiative 1: Educate Caregivers

*“If you aren’t front and center making a fuss you are forgotten. Very little is done proactively. There is no guidance, so if you don’t know to ask for a particular thing, or the magic language to use, you would never know that a service or accommodation were possible. Also **offerings depend on the school, not on the disability of the child.**”*

*“What should the IEP/504 process look like?”*

*“Our initial IEP process **took over a year to complete, which is illegal...**”*

**Develop tools and resources for parents.**

E.g. Sample rejection letters, outline of clear timelines, legal timelines, advocacy workshops, compliance information, dispute resolution options, community network of support, clearer understanding of basic rights.

Establish Friends of Somerville SEPAC as 501c3 non-profit organization for future funding initiatives, educational opportunities, community organizing, and advocacy efforts.

# Initiative 2: Empower Caregivers

*“Have there be seminars on **bullying** for schools.”*

*“She knows that she is smart but she can **lose confidence sometimes when her dyslexia makes reading difficult.**”*

*“Not having adults who understand him, not having a safe place.”*

*“Wish I had more visibility into what my daughter is learning and what the expectation is from her.”*

## Individual & Group Advocacy

Create alliances to raise awareness & needs

Establish parent liaisons within each school and establish School Committee liaison

Ensure equitable access to all ESL families- translation consistently available.

Organize activity groups & community connection- Whatsapp, Facebook, Google groups etc.

Collaborate with external entities (Scouts, YMCA, Somerville Commission for Disabilities, local businesses & orgs)





# Initiative 3: Transparency & Accountability

## Advise Special Education and Review District budgets

Increase collaboration and transparency. Increase SEPAC's advisory role within SPS including but not limited to **evaluation of current and proposed programs, hiring, professional development, implementation, budgetary and fiscal discussions. We want to be involved in all the committees!**

Work with principals/staff to determine and **budget for resources** needed (e.g. start of school year preparation and professional development for staff.

*"I just wish we could fund the district to meet the need instead of it being **Hunger Games for dogged parents to "win" bare-minimum services** (let alone parents who never think to or feel empowered to ask) and educators handling huge caseloads."*

*"ESY services were inadequate (academic and non-academic). **The district receives State funding for adaptive non-academic services, yet none appears to exist. Why?**"*

*"Many of the staff have **outdated and incorrect knowledge** regarding autism, autism support and accommodations and their effectiveness and potential harm, gestalt language processing, sensory processing differences, trauma informed therapy, and neurodiversity affirming practice. **Many of the views and statement during my child's evaluation were offensive, incorrect or ableist.**"*



# Initiative 4: Proactive & Preventative

Support successful execution of state and federal laws including Child Find Law.

**Collaborate** with district and school committee to ensure current policies and procedures are effective for early identification, evaluation, diagnosis, and programming for all students within the district.

**Ultimate goal:** Ensure that all student's needs are met and they're **set on the proper trajectory academically and socially and emotionally** thus improving not only academic but also social and emotional outcomes for children with disabilities but entire classrooms.

Of note, SEPAC is also keeping a close eye on students being moved off of IEPs/504 or indicated as no longer needing services. If you're aware of anyone that has navigated this- reach out!

*“Parents need less info sessions and more advocacy. SEPAC can be a powerful voice if it chooses to be. SEPAC info sessions are nice but parents need help—if SEPAC stepped up to advocate and support special Ed families in the district, the Special Ed department would know that SEPAC is watching it could be more supportive to SPS special Ed students than it is. This was the vision of the original parent activism that brought about the creation of Somerville SEPAC. If SEPAC challenged the ways SPS is undermining vulnerable student needs, it would stop happening in the district.”*

*“There needs to be more consistent meetings, and more solid action taken by the SEPAC. I don't understand the goals of the organization, who are they helping? The district or families?”*

**Thank you!**

