

Somerville Special Education Parent Advisory Council By-Laws

Article I: Name of Organization

The name of this self-governed organization shall be the Somerville Special Education Parent Advisory Council, also known as the Somerville SEPAC.

Article II: Purpose of the PAC

The mission of the Somerville Special Education Parent Advisory Council is to work for understanding of, respect for, and support of all children with disabilities in the Somerville community. To that end, it will work to:

- Promote a network of parents of children with special needs for information-sharing purposes.
- Provide informational forums (fora) to parents, educators, students, and professionals surrounding issues related to special needs and special education.
- Work with the Director of Special Education and School Committee on operations and development of special education programs, parent and teacher training needs, and policy advocacy.
- Promote communication between SEPAC members, and related local, state and national organizations.
- Promote communication and programs within our community to encourage understanding, acceptance, and inclusion of children with special needs.
- Promote the interest of special needs parents regarding matters that come before the Somerville Public School system.
- SEPAC will not make political endorsements. This, however, does not preclude SEPAC from participating in advocacy for proposed legislation, or discussions on issues affecting general or public education in Somerville or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Article III: Terms of Membership

General membership shall be by request and open to any resident of Somerville who:

- is a parent/guardian of a student or former student on an IEP or 504 plan with the City of Somerville,
- is a parent/guardian of a child under the age of three with a disability,
- is a student or former student on an IEP or 504 plan with the City of Somerville.

Other interested parties who have a stake in the education of Somerville students with disabilities may also become general members, with the exception of school administrators and elected officials.

A general member shall attend at least one PAC event or meeting during the past 12 months.

Voting membership is a subset of the general membership. Voting membership is open to any of the Somerville residents listed above for general membership, and SEPAC officers. Voting membership is not open to other interested parties. Voting members must attend at least one SEPAC business meeting in the past 12 months, plus one additional SEPAC meeting or event in which attendance is taken.

The voting members as a group shall be known as the Somerville SEPAC Advisory Board.

Article IV: Organizational Structure of the Somerville Special Education Parent Advisory Council

No single person can hold multiple offices simultaneously in the Somerville SEPAC.

Officers may hold simultaneous titles of authority to other organizations, which are aligned with the objectives of the Advisory Board.

Chairperson/Co-Chairpersons:

It is the duty of the Chairperson/Co-Chairperson to represent all children with special needs and their families within our schools and community.

- There shall be one Chairperson or 2 Co-Chairpersons who will be elected by the Advisory Board as dictated by Article V of these by-laws. The responsibilities of the (Co)Chairperson(s) include:

- Serve as the first point of contact for the SEPAC.
- Schedule Meeting Spaces
- Schedule Interpreters and Arrange for Translation of Documents

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- Arrange an annual Basic Rights presentation
- Arrange for educational trainings or presentations.
- List SEPAC events and meetings with the Somerville Public Schools website, social media and local news outlets
- Check (no less than weekly), SEPAC email and voicemail and respond to inquiries.
- Patrol social media for any abusive or inappropriate content and remove. SEPAC social media content must serve to educate and exhibit no political or other bias.
- Preside at all meetings of the Somerville SEPAC.
- Set the agenda for the meetings of the Somerville SEPAC
- Create subcommittees as needed.
- Represent the SEPAC at community meetings, such as meetings of the Somerville School Committee or related meetings or activities that may have impact upon or be of interest to the Somerville special needs community.

Secretary:

- The SEPAC Secretary is responsible for keeping accurate membership, attendance and outreach files. Membership listing shall be recorded and kept only for the use of the SEPAC and cannot be shared or sold to anyone. The SEPAC Secretary shall coordinate the recording and filing of minutes of the Somerville SEPAC and its sub-committees.
- If needed, the SEPAC Secretary shall prepare periodic reports for the Special Education Administration regarding SEPAC activities and needs.
- The SEPAC Secretary shall assist the (Co)Chairperson(s) and the SEPAC Coordinator with any communications, newsletters, emails, etc. as may be required or requested by the (Co)Chairperson(s) and/or the Coordinator.
- The SEPAC Secretary shall maintain the SEPAC Listserv.
- The SEPAC Secretary may contribute and adjust content to any social media representing the SEPAC in accordance with the guidelines established for the Chair or Co-Chairs.
- Collect all documentation such as forms, procedural guides, contact information, By Laws and so forth, in the Google Drive account or by hard copy.

Advisory Board (as described in Article III):

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- ❑ The Advisory Board shall be responsible for offering aid and assistance to the (Co)Chairperson(s).
- ❑ The Advisory Board shall meet with the (Co)Chairperson(s) and the SEPAC Coordinator to discuss and help plan and carry out SEPAC activities, workshops, and events.
- ❑ The Advisory Board shall help the (Co)Chairperson(s) and the SEPAC Coordinator in community outreach and growth of the SEPAC.
- ❑ The Advisory Board shall help the (Co)Chairperson(s) and the SEPAC Coordinator in meeting, discussing, and addressing parent concerns regarding special education in the district.
- ❑ The Advisory Board members are requested to give as much time as possible to the (Co)Chairperson(s) and the SEPAC Coordinator, over and above what is required to be a member of the Advisory Board.

Article V: Elections:

Elections will be held every two (2) years for the positions of (Co)Chairperson and Secretary. This election may coincide with elections for additional organizations, providing those organizations, do not create a conflict of interest, ethics, or focus.

Special elections may be permitted outside of the regular election schedule, in order to create leadership roles in aligned organizations.

Nominations will be made by ballot. To be eligible for nomination, a member should be actively involved with the SEPAC, per Article III: Terms of Membership.

Nomination ballots will be made available to voting members at the meeting of the Somerville SEPAC during April in the appropriate year. All voting members are eligible to make nominations.

For the office of chairperson, a single person or pair of people may be nominated to be Chairperson or Co-Chairpersons.

Also, at the April meeting, two volunteers shall be recruited from the voting membership of the Somerville SEPAC for the temporary positions of Election Facilitators. It is recommended that one of the Facilitators have a child at the elementary school level, and the other have a child at the middle/high school level.

After the nomination meeting in April, the Election Facilitators will tally the nominations and announce/notify individuals nominated within two days. The nominees will be given three days upon notification of their nomination to accept or decline the nomination. The Election Facilitators shall then compile a list of eligible voting members and prepare the ballots. A ballot must be available for each voting member.

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Elections shall be the first order of business during a business meeting in May. (For the purposes of the election, the May meeting does not fulfill the requirement for voting.)

Elections shall be decided by a simple majority of the voting membership, known as the Advisory Board. If there is a tie, all other candidates will be dropped from the roster and a second vote is taken for just the tied candidates. If there still is a tie, then they will automatically serve as Co-Chairpersons or Co-Secretaries, unless one opts out.

The newly elected officers shall take office effective at a SEPAC meeting in June. The newly elected officers will hold office for two years and, if re-elected, an officer may serve multi-consecutive terms.

If a position becomes vacant, an election for that position shall be held immediately, to finish out the remaining term. If a co-chairperson cannot fill out the term, the remaining co-chair can opt to serve independently or request a special election to fill the vacancy.

The *Somerville Special Education Director* and the *Somerville School Committee* will be informed of the bi-annual elections; and will be given the names, addresses, and phone numbers of the newly elected officers by the end of June of that year.

Article VI: Meetings

- All meetings are open to the public.

- There will be a minimum of 10 monthly SEPAC meetings from September to June. Five of those meetings *must* be business meetings. Meetings may consist of a business meeting followed by some other activity such as a workshop. This would constitute one meeting even if both parts are attended. One meeting *must* be a Basic Rights Workshop, in parent friendly terms, thereby meeting the State's requirement of the district pursuant to 603 CMR 28:03 (1)(a)(4). The remaining meetings will be designed to offer families advocacy help, support, and disability related information through workshops.

- The Special Education Director of Somerville may be invited to business meetings to keep the SEPAC updated, and to gather input regarding operations and development of special education programming, parent and teacher training needs, and to help to develop special education policy for the City.

- If needed, time may be allotted at the beginning of the monthly meeting to discuss any communications issues, or other issues requiring the attention of the Somerville SEPAC.

- Notice of the meetings shall be published in the local press and on social media in advance of their date, and a notice sent to families whenever possible.

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- Matters which require a vote to be taken by the Advisory Board (as described in Article III) include, but are not limited to the following items:
 - A change in the By-laws can only be voted on at a business meeting.
 - Elections require a vote as described in Article V.
 - If appropriate, a commitment of financial resources requires a simple majority of the members of the Advisory Board present.
- Minutes of all Somerville SEPAC business meetings shall be recorded and retained for public record. They will be posted on the SEPAC web page.

Article VII: Subcommittees:

- Subcommittees shall be created as needed.

Article VIII: Amendments:

- These by-laws may be amended by a simple majority of the Advisory Board at a business meeting, but changes to the by-laws may not be voted upon in the same meeting as they are proposed, unless the entire Advisory Board votes unanimously to approve the change.