



# Shrewsbury SEPAC

## **Special Education Parent Advisory Council**

**April 12, 2017**



# Acknowledgements

- School Committee
- Dr. Joe Sawyer
- Meg Belsito
- Special Education Staff
- PTO Presidents' Council
- Parents and Caregivers



# SEPAC Board Members

- Bashar Jarkasy, Co-President
- Sanjiv Lal, Co-President
- Colleen Corbett, Secretary and Communications Chair
- Rajesh Chug, Treasurer and Technology Expert
- Jill DeBender, Outreach Chair
- Blake Poggi, Membership Chair



# SEPAC Toolbox

- Defined our mission statement
- Updated bylaws
- Defined officer roles and responsibilities
- Created a brochure
- Determined an officer election schedule
- Formalized meeting schedule



# Mission Statement

Shrewsbury Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) is a volunteer organization made up of parents and caregivers whose children receive special education services through Shrewsbury Public Schools. We were created under Massachusetts law and serve as a voice for parents by advising the Shrewsbury school administration and School Committee on matters related to the education of students with disabilities. The SEPAC provides a forum for parents and caregivers to share experiences and exchange information. Together, we work for understanding, respect, support and the appropriate education of all children with special needs in our community.



# Outreach and Communication

- Advertise and promote meetings and events via email, Facebook, Community Bulletin, and Principal's Newsletters
- Greatly increased our presence on social media to 127 Facebook followers by connecting members to resources through daily postings from advocacy groups, news sources, MassPAC, and neighboring PACs.
- SEPAC members attend PTO meetings, give a brief overview of our group, and distribute brochures



# Parent Participation and Involvement

- Despite our outreach efforts, our current family participation rate is 7%.
- Partner with District to increase awareness and participation
  - Link to SEPAC Facebook page on school website
  - Include SEPAC brochure in school mailings involving screenings and evaluations
  - Offer SEPAC brochures to parents and caregivers in 504/IEP meetings



# 2016-2017 Education and Training Opportunities

- *Meet and Greet with Special Education Director Meg Belsito on 10/24/16 at 7:00 pm at Floral Street School Media Center*
  - This was a wonderful opportunity for our community to meet and hear from our new director.
  - The meeting was well attended and parents and caregivers were able to ask questions and share their concerns.
- *IEP 101 for Families on Tuesday, 11/29/16 at 10:00 am at the Shrewsbury Public Library*
  - This workshop was designed for parents and caregivers to understand all sections of the IEP and the basic requirements for compliance under special education law for services and supports for students with disabilities.
  - The workshop was co-hosted by Westborough SEPAC and presented by Melissa Carriveau, M.S.Ed. from Bay State Advocacy and a SEPAC member.
- *When you Disagree about an IEP: How to Effectively Resolve Special Education Conflicts*
  - Presented by Attorney Daniel Perlman on Wednesday, 3/8/17 at 7:00 pm at Algonquin Regional High School Library.
  - This event was co-hosted by Northborough Southborough SEPAC and Westborough SEPAC.



# Education and Training Continued

- *The Most Common Cause of OCD and Anxiety that Your Pediatrician Has Never Heard Of.....P.A.N.D.A.S.* on Thursday, 3/16/17 at 7:00pm at Floral Street School Media Center
  - Presented by Kim Turgeon, a mom with two children affected by this disorder, discusses her experience with Pediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorder with Streptococcal Infections (PANDAS).
  - This event was co-hosted by Westborough SEPAC.
- *Eat Bread to Raise Dough* fundraiser at Panera Bread in Shrewsbury (White City Plaza) on 3/30/17 from 3:00--9:00 pm
  - To support SEPAC, customers presented our flyer when ordering. 46 flyers were collected and we made 15% of \$960 total sales, which is \$144.
  - Thank you to all the families who participated.
- *Coffee and Connect* on Tuesday, 4/11/17 at Café Noir from 10:00 am - noon
  - As many of our members struggle to make evening meetings due to family demands and schedules, daytime gatherings can help members connect at a more convenient time.



# Upcoming Events

- *Basic Rights Workshop* on Monday, 4/24/17 at 7:00 pm at Floral Street School Media Center
  - This workshop is provided through our MassPAC membership and presented by a representative from the Federation for Children with Special Needs.
  - It provides an introduction to parental rights and responsibilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and Massachusetts Special Education Law.
- *IEP 101 for Families* on Thursday, 5/11/17 from 7:00 pm at Floral Street Media Center
  - This workshop was designed for parents and caregivers to understand all sections of the IEP and the basic requirements for compliance under special education law for services and supports for students with disabilities.
  - It was co-hosted by Westborough SEPAC and presented by Melissa Carriveau, M.S.Ed. from Bay State Advocacy and a SEPAC member.



# Building Partnerships

- Benefited from having active and established neighboring PACs
- They have generously allowed us to attend their meetings and learn from their experiences
- Built relationships that have allowed us to pool resources and co-host events



# SEPAC Participation

- Youth Mental Health First Aid Training on 5/3 & 4, 2016
  - The goal of Youth Mental Health First Aid is to teach members of the public how to respond in a mental health emergency with youth and young adults and to offer support to a young person who appears to be in emotional distress until professional help is available.
- MassPAC training presented by Leslie M. Leslie, MassPAC Project Director, on *Starting and Running a Special Education Parent Advisory Council*
  - SEPAC officers attended two trainings by Leslie last May and June.
- Hosted Sandra Fryc and Dale Magee at our January meeting to discuss the structural deficit in the school budget.



# SEPAC Participation

- Shrewsbury Diversity Coalition Meeting on Special Needs in Focus on 2/4/17 at Shrewsbury Public Library
  - Shrewsbury Diversity Coalition welcomes residents of Shrewsbury from all race, religion, and cultural backgrounds to come together and help make our children and schools be accepting and proud of our diversity through support, education and programs.
- PTO Presidents' Council quarterly meeting with Dr. Sawyer on 2/14/17 at Town Hall
- Visions of Community conference (VOC2017) at Seaport World Trade Center in Boston on March 4, 2017
  - Sponsored by the Federation for Children with Special Needs; the Vision of Community Conference is an annual celebration of inclusive communities across Massachusetts where the promises of laws such as MA Chapter 766, IDEA and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) are becoming a true reality.



# Areas of Concern

## Fiscal Year 2018 Budget Reduction Plan

- Higher tiers represent deeper cuts and increase in class size
- Impact on students, staff and operations
- We are concerned about the impact of reductions on the quality of education for all Shrewsbury students.
- When teacher and clinician positions are lost and class and caseload sizes grow, children and adults experience stress.
- Students with special needs are especially vulnerable to setbacks that are lasting and difficult to overcome, even after numbers are restored.
- Parents of general and special education students will work together to support our schools and keep them at the high level we have come to expect.



# 2016 - 2017 Survey

## Family-School Partnership - IEP

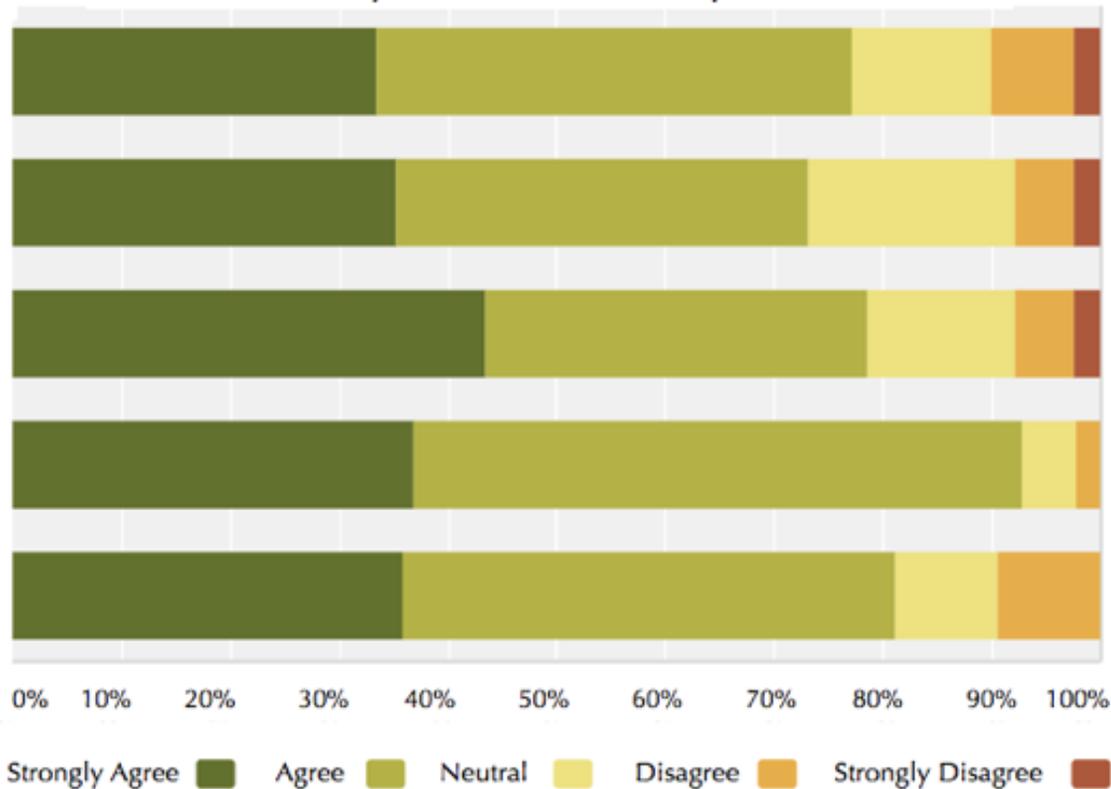
I feel my perspective was incorporated during the development of the IEP.

I feel I have an equal voice at meetings

There is someone I am comfortable contacting at my child's school when I have questions or concerns

When I contact my child's school, I receive a timely response.

I am contacted and included when there are significant changes to my child's ongoing services.



April 6, 2017



# 2016 - 2017 Survey

## Family-School Partnership - 504

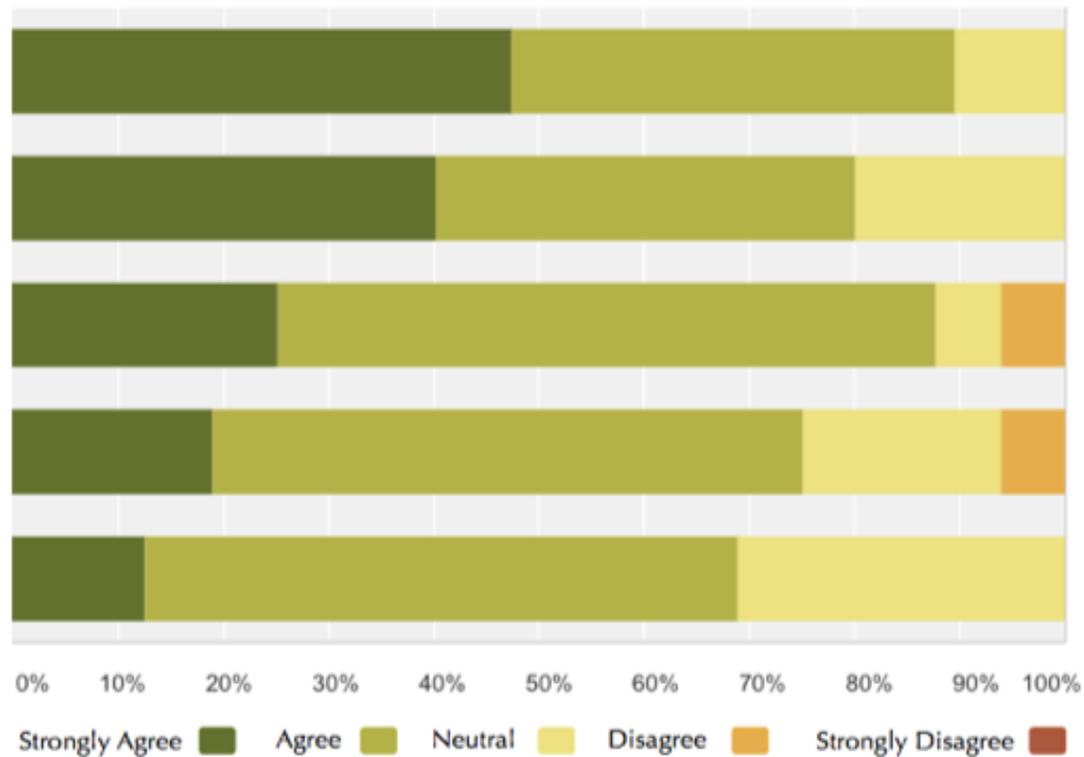
I feel my perspective was incorporated during the development of the 504 Plan.

I feel I have an equal voice at meetings

There is someone I am comfortable contacting at my child's school when I have questions or concerns

When I contact my child's school, I receive a timely response.

I am contacted and included when there are significant changes to my child's plan.



April 6, 2017



# 2016 - 2017 Survey

## Service Delivery - IEP

Overall, I feel the services my child receives are appropriate given his/her educational needs.

Overall, I feel my child's support is appropriate given his/her social/emotional needs.

My child responds to the behavior management system used in the classroom.

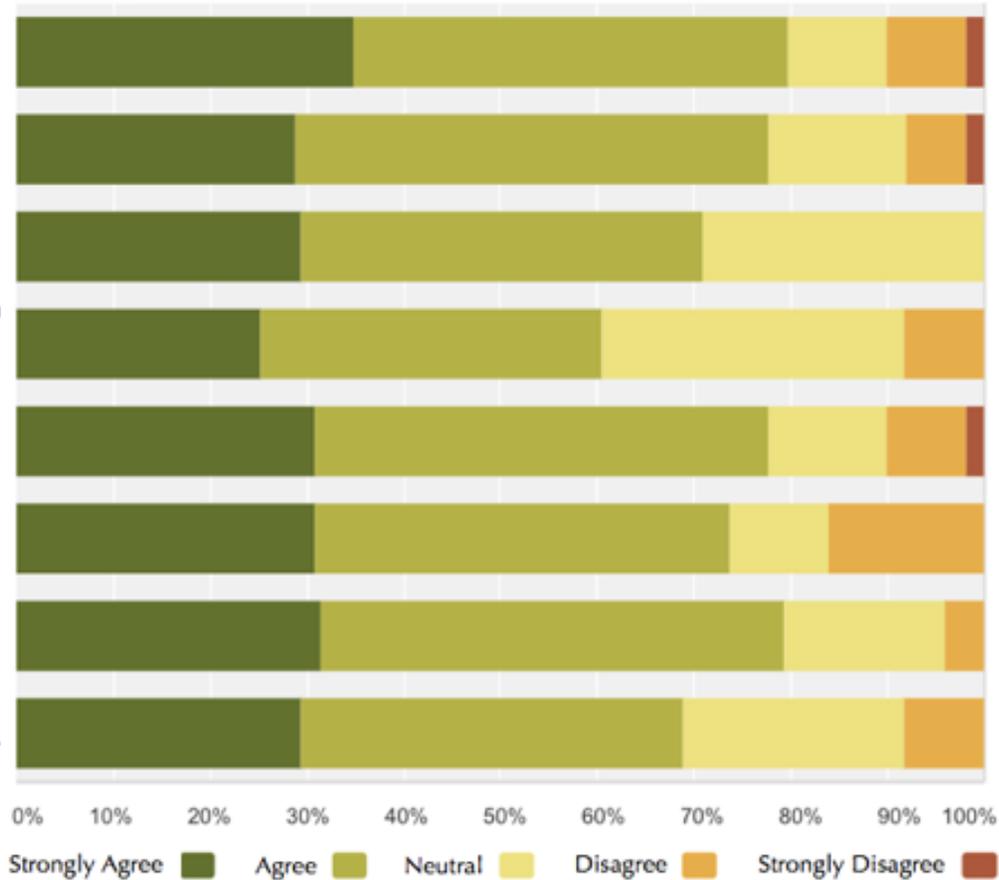
My child's team (i.e., teachers and staff) is given the time and resources needed to deliver his/her service plan.

My child's team understands his/her diagnosis and his/her needs.

My child receives all of the services I expect based on his/her IEP.

Accommodations are implemented as expected in each classroom and throughout my child's school day.

Accommodations are implemented consistently throughout the school year.



April 6, 2017



# 2016 - 2017 Survey

## Service Delivery - 504

Overall, I feel my child's plan is appropriate given his/her educational needs.

Overall, I feel my child's support is appropriate given his/her social/emotional needs.

My child responds to the behavior management system used in the classroom

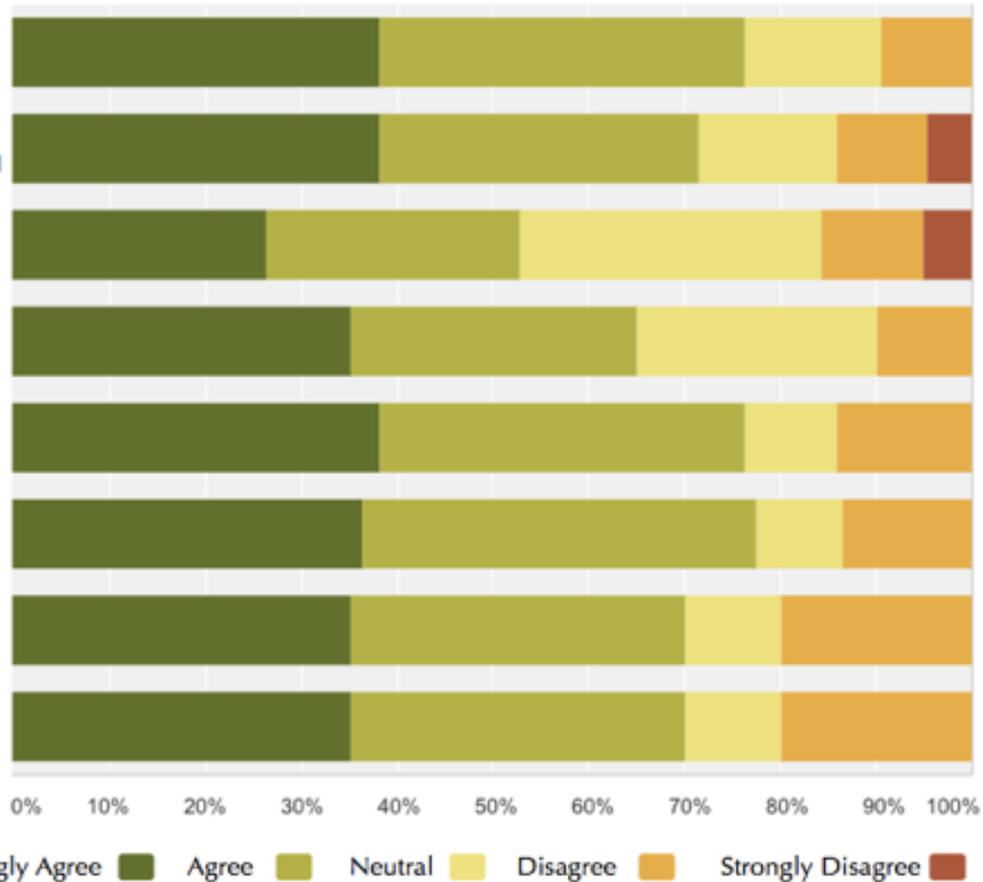
My child's team (i.e., teachers and staff) is given the time and resources needed to follow his/her plan.

My child's team understands his/her diagnosis and his/her needs.

My child receives all accommodations I expect based on his/her 504 plan.

Accommodations are implemented as expected in each classroom and throughout my child's school day.

Accommodations are implemented consistently throughout the school year.



April 6, 2017



# 2016 - 2017 Survey

## Link Between Partnership and Service Delivery

- Among parents and caregivers who agreed or strongly agreed that their child's IEP services are appropriate given their educational needs, 90% feel their perspective was incorporated during the development of the plan, and 85% feel they have an equal voice at meetings.
- Families who feel their perspectives are not incorporated into their child's IEP development, 50% feel their child's services are not appropriate given their educational needs and 50% feel their child's diagnosis is not understood.



# 2016 - 2017 Survey

## Comments

“We feel we are equal partners in our child's educational program and plan. The team is very responsive to concerns and accommodations necessary for our child to access the curriculum. Our child's needs are central to all decisions.”

“I feel that the teachers and staff who work with my child truly care for their wellbeing and want to see my child succeed.”



# 2016 - 2017 Survey

## Comments

What do you feel is working best for your child?

- Terrific teachers
- Adult support
- Small groups, pull-out services
- Great teamwork
- Special education teachers are: caring, understanding, adaptable
- Classroom environment accepting of student's unique personality and needs



# 2016 - 2017 Survey

## Comments

**What changes could improve your student's educational experience?**

- Increase communication, build relationships between schools and families
- Increase understanding of child's diagnosis
- Additional resources for special education
- Less homework

**What suggestions do you have to strengthen the partnership between families and schools?**

- Communication of progress on an ongoing basis
- Mutually respectful relationship, increased trust, empathy
- Clearer information regarding the IEP process
- Transition planning and meetings between parents and staff
- School events celebrating diversity and acceptance



# Looking Forward

- Continue collaborating with Meg Belsito
  - Further analyze survey data for themes to address areas of concern
  - Continue holding regular meetings with board and community members
- Work to grow our membership by offering engaging workshops, speakers, and trainings, while actively recruiting parents and caregivers to join our board.
- Hold officer elections in May



# Looking Forward

- Stay connected to our school community
  - Attend School Committee meeting
  - Attend PTO Presidents' Council meetings
  - Make SEPAC presentations at PTO meetings
- Continue to increase our presence and make connections on social media
- Create new website over the summer
- Continue partnering with neighboring PACs to host speakers and workshops
- Continue looking for opportunities to fundraise in the community



# SEPAC Goals

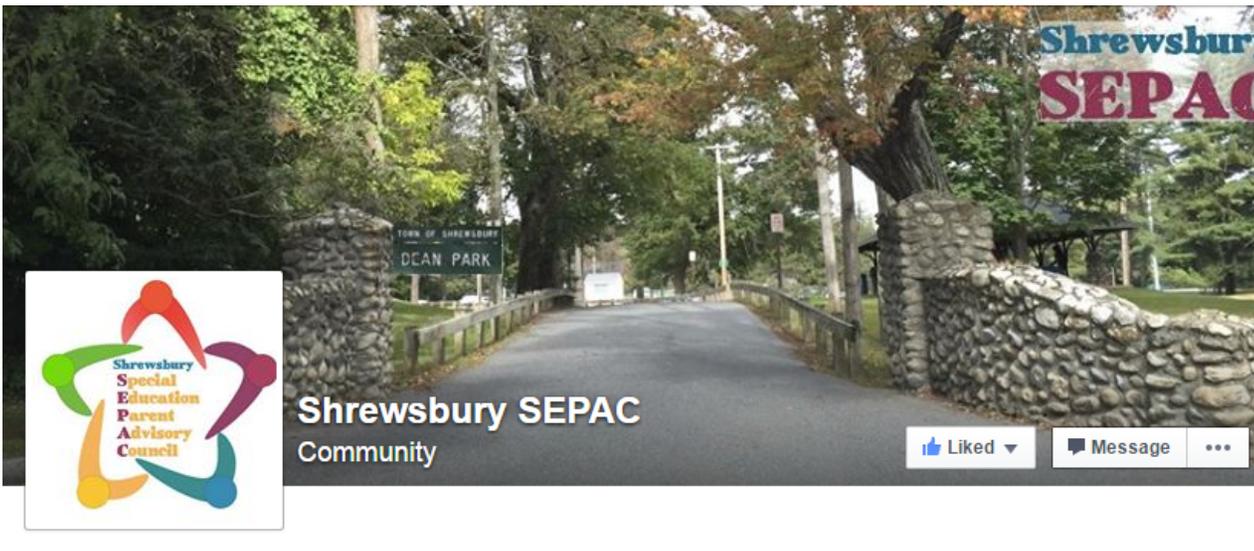
- Establish vibrant forum for parents and caregivers in the Shrewsbury Special Education community.
- Offer multiple opportunities for families to socialize and participate in special education related topics at meetings, workshops and coffee hours.
- Provide resources and assistance to parents to help them navigate the system and simplify challenges.
- Actively reach families and address their questions and concerns via social media and email.
- Build new avenues of communication and collaboration with school professionals and administrators.



# Modes of Communication

[shrewsbury.SEPAC@gmail.com](mailto:shrewsbury.SEPAC@gmail.com)

<http://www.facebook.com/ShrewsburySEPAC>



# Summary



Thank you