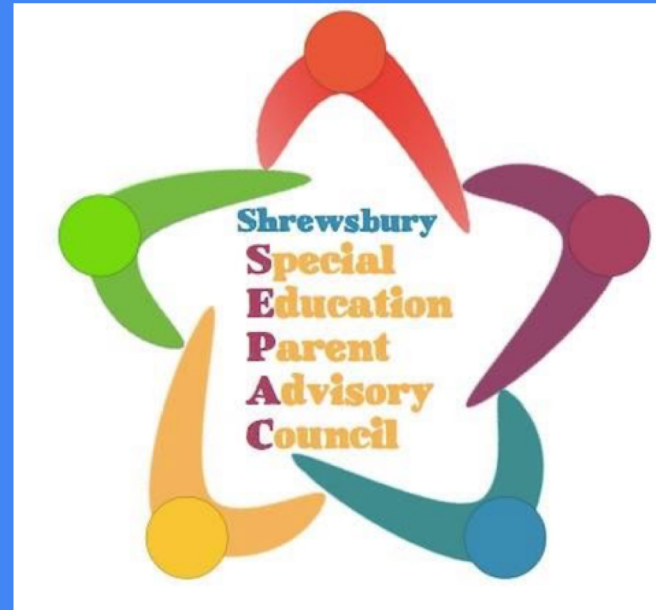


Shrewsbury SEPAC

Special Education Parent
Advisory Council

June 9, 2021



Acknowledgements

- ❖ School Committee
- ❖ Dr. Sawyer
- ❖ Meg Belsito
- ❖ Special Education Staff
- ❖ Parents and Caregivers

SEPAC Board

Colleen Corbett

Jill DeBender

Blake Poggi

Ashley Faladys

“Leadership
and learning
are indispensable
to each other.”

John F. Kennedy

Mission Statement

We believe in the power of parents working together to make an impact.

- 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 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.
- 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.

What we do

We strive to help parents participate effectively in the special education process by:

- Hosting opportunities for parents to connect through general meetings and social events, where they can find support and seek advice.
- Providing educational workshops and presentations to inform parents and help them advocate for their children.
- Informing parents about their rights regarding Special Education laws and procedures.
- Maintaining a Facebook page and website offering community resources and services, news articles, and a forum for parents to post questions and information.
- With feedback from parents, we work to identify areas in the special education system that need improvement.

2020 -- 2021 Highlights

- Held five virtual general meetings, plus
 - ◆ Basic Rights: Transition Planning Workshop
 - ◆ Hosted school reopening webinar for Special Education parents on 9/3
- Issued a survey in November to assess how remote learning was working for our families.
- Launched our website: shrewsburysepac.org
- Moved to an integrated email marketing platform to engage and manage our email contacts.
 - ◆ Increased our membership to 240 families
- Became a 501c3 non-profit organization

A year like no other

We all remember that day in March when school abruptly ended and the rug was pulled out from under us.

We began to realize that we were dealing with a public health crisis of epic proportions.

We looked to our state and community leaders for guidance.



Gov. Baker announces Massachusetts school closures on March 10, 2020.

We all needed to shift our mindset

As COVID 19 cases surged in the US, we adjusted to our new normal: staying home, wearing masks, learning Zoom, searching fruitlessly for hand sanitizer and toilet paper.

We had to accept that staying home was the best thing we could do. We supported our children as remote learning began. We all struggled to make an unprecedented and difficult situation work.

Mindset Shift During a Pandemic

I'm stuck at home



I get to be SAFE in my home and spend time with my family

I will get sick



I will self-isolate and wash my hands, this will significantly DECREASE my chances of getting sick

I will run out of items at home during self-isolation



I have prepared for this and I will use my items wisely. I have everything I NEED for now

Everything is shutting down, I'm panicking



The most IMPORTANT places, such as medical centers, pharmacies and grocery stores, remain open

There is too much uncertainty right now



While I can't control the situation around me, I CAN control my actions. Doing breathwork, calling loved ones, getting enough sleep and proper nutrition, prayer, and doing activities I love at home will all help during this time

Triggers

Now that most adults and age-appropriate children are vaccinated and new cases of COVID-19 have plummeted, we might have forgotten the overwhelming uncertainty that gripped our community last year. As COVID cases grew, so did our feelings of fear as our friends and family members became affected and hospitals filled.

Why The Coronavirus Is Triggering Mental Health Issues:

Despair

Mindset switch from "living" to "survival"

Triggers feelings of hopelessness

Increased health anxiety

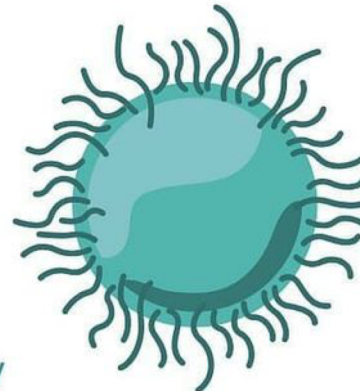
Decreased job security

Fear for loved ones lives

Promotes social withdrawal

Decreased financial security

Loneliness



Quarantine makes it more difficult to distract oneself from existing mental health issues



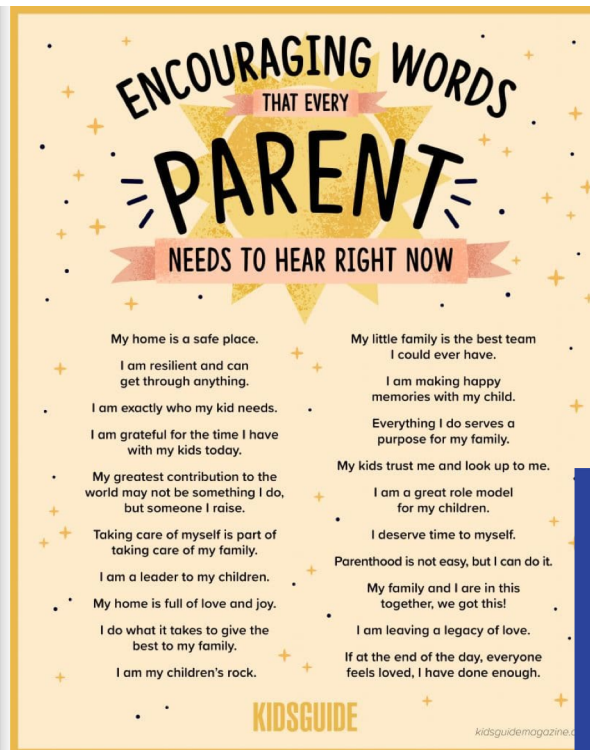
Coronavirus isn't just threatening our physical health, but our mental health too. Look after it. Please share to raise awareness.

@RealDepressionProject



Helping parents support their children

While remote learning was hard on everyone, students with disabilities and their families faced particular challenges and complicated learning environments. We supported our members by holding virtual general meetings and posting resources. We also checked in through social media and solicited questions/concerns, which we forwarded on to Meg and her team.



"At many times throughout their lives, children will feel the world has turned topsy-turvy. It's not the ever-present smile that will help them feel secure. It's knowing that love can hold many feelings, including sadness, and that they can count on the people they love to be with them until the world turns right side up again."

- Fred Rogers

School Reopening Zoom

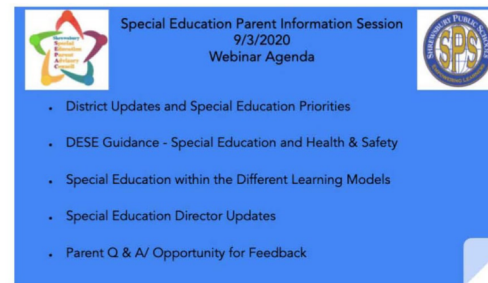
Shortly before school reopened in early September, we welcomed the opportunity to host a Special Education Parent Information Session with Meg and her team. Over 100 parents tuned in and there was ample time for Q&A. Many families were curious about how IEP services and supports would be delivered safely and how different this would be from the spring.

Special Education Parent Information Session Webinar on Thursday, 9/3/20 @ 7:00 pm

Please join Shrewsbury SEPAC for a Zoom webinar with Meg Belsito and her team to discuss the delivery of Special Education Services as our schools reopen. After their presentation, there will be an opportunity for questions and feedback from families.

Panelists:

Meg Belsito, Asst. Superintendent for Student Services
Meghan Bartlett, Asst. Director of Special Education
Kristin Herrick, Director of Specialized Programs
Jackie Marcello, PreK-Elementary Special Education Director
Patty Waterhouse, Middle School Special Education Director
Meghan de Leon, SHS Special Education Director



Zoom Link:

<https://shrewsburyps.zoom.us/j/92391224156?pwd=TnZqSmJnMnB6bHlseiszTWQzQnNSQT09>

Phone Number: (929) 205-6099

Webinar ID: 923 9122 4156

Passcode: 930147

Please email shrewsbury.sepac@gmail.com if you would like to submit questions in advance of the webinar.

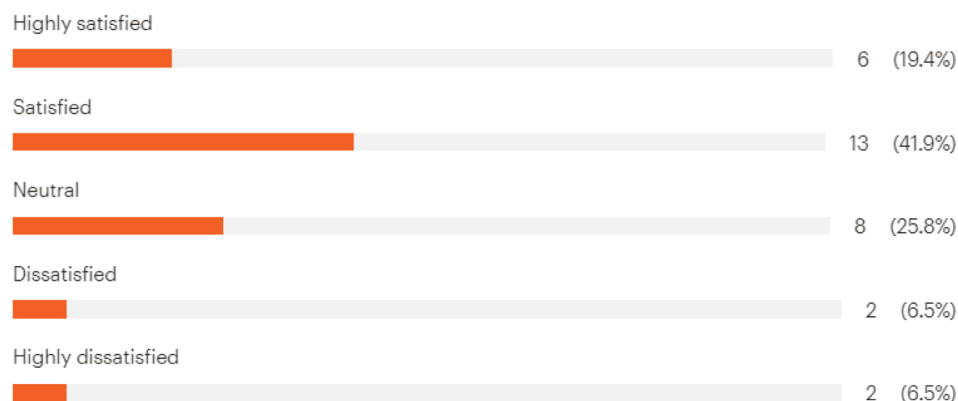
Remote Learning and Special Education Survey

Following the remote learning survey the District sent out half way through the fall term, we created a 14 question survey asking families about their experiences with Special Education and remote learning. We sent the survey to our 240 email contacts and posted it to our Facebook page. 31 families completed the anonymous survey and we shared the results with Meg and Dr. Sawyer. The results were largely positive with approximately 40% of respondents satisfied and 20% highly satisfied with the way special education services and supports were being delivered. The survey also allowed space for comments about how the delivery of services and supports could be improved.



Review your results

“Are you satisfied with the way special education services and supports are being delivered?”



Question 6 has 16 answers (Open Text)

“How could service and support delivery be improved?”

Unknown contact said:

"My child struggles to ask for help and feels that at times teachers are focused on solving the problem and not on listening to her perspective on what the root of the difficulty is."

Basic Rights: Transition Planning

The Federation offers three types of Basic Rights Workshops: Evaluations and Eligibility, Understanding the IEP and Transition Planning. This was our first year offering the Transition Planning Workshop as we learned that many of our families were unaware of this crucial process that targets students with disabilities from ages 14 - 22.



Basic Rights: Transition Planning A Free Virtual Workshop for Parents and Professionals

This workshop provides an overview of the transition planning process for youth with disabilities ages 14-22 on IEPs.

Workshop Topics:

- *What is Transition and Why is It Important*
- *Legal Basis for Transition Planning*
- *Student Vision, Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy*
- *Student and Parent's Roles*
- *Transition Planning Form (TPF)*
- *Age of Majority*
- *Timelines, Resources and more!*



About Your Host:



**Shrewsbury
SEPAC**

Date: Tuesday, 6/1/21

Time: 6:30 - 8:30 pm

RSVP: shrewsbury.sepac@gmail.com

Registration Link:

<https://fcsn-org.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJEldO2sqDsvE9QVNAGWXLfjVug-DxMVEOBU>

For more information about the educational workshops available from The Federation for Children with Special Needs, please visit us at fcsn.org/ptic/workshops or email: workshops@fcsn.org

Shrewsburysepac.org

We worked with a designer to create our website which describes who we are, what we do and how we can help. It's also a repository for all the presentations and materials from previous workshops, and includes links to resources from District, State, Federal, private and non-profit organizations. It allows users to sign up for our email updates and offers opportunities to get involved.



Shrewsbury SEPAC

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Home

Search...



We believe in the power of parents working together to make an impact.

- Does your child have an IEP or 504 Plan?
- Is your child struggling with academic, social, behavioral, physical or medical challenges?
- Are you a parent or caregiver who feels overwhelmed or needs assistance navigating the system to obtain the support your child needs?

Shrewsbury SEPAC is here to help.

What is a SEPAC?

Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) is a volunteer organization made up of parents and caregivers whose children receive special education services through the Shrewsbury Public Schools. We were created under Massachusetts law to 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 the community.

Upcoming Events

Sign Up
for our email updates

Subscribe

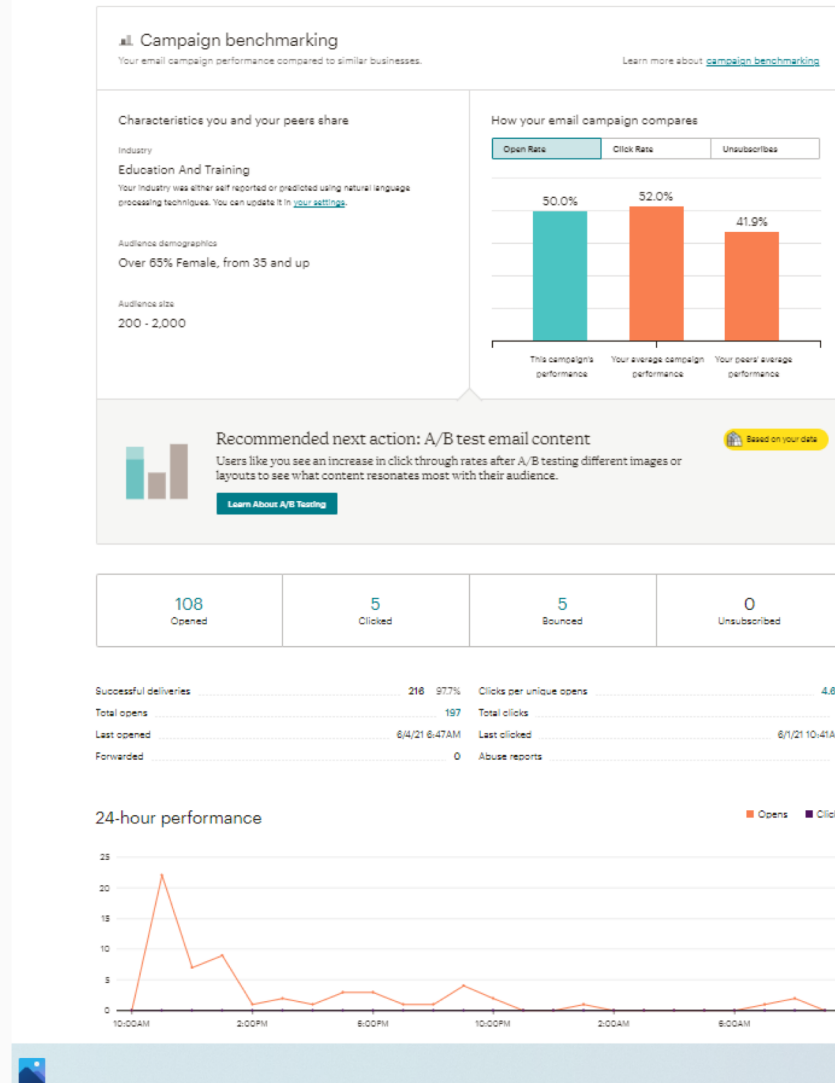
Email Address

[Subscribe](#)

[NEW TO SPECIAL EDUCATION? CLICK HERE FOR](#)

Email Marketing

We created an account with Mailchimp that enabled us to bring all our contacts together, create a consistent template that identifies us, and allows us to track our contact's engagement. During the past year, we've used this platform to announce our meetings/events, solicit feedback from members, and create and issue surveys. We plan to explore the capabilities of this platform further this year to increase contact engagement.



Override Campaign

We were active and vocal supporters of the passage of the operational override. The projected cuts -- increased class sizes, less teachers and support staff, among others -- would have been devastating for our children, who require more support to succeed. The passage of the override was a huge win for our school community.

**VOTE
YES!**

HOW TO VOTE:

*[campaignforshrewsbury.com/
voting-info](https://campaignforshrewsbury.com/voting-info)*

Non-profit Status

We are officially a 501c3 non-profit and can fundraise independently!!

Previously, we've partnered with other organizations and would have to split the proceeds of fundraisers. We're looking forward to holding our very own Textile Recycling Fundraising Drive in the fall.

Fill a bag and
make a difference!



Items collected help fund:



Sherwood PTO
and Shrewsbury
SEPAC

Help us raise funds by cleaning out your closet!
Bring your items to our fundraising event:
Saturday, 11/17
11 am – 2 pm
Sherwood Middle School
(side door)
28 Sherwood Ave., Shrewsbury
For questions contact ccorbett39@gmail.com



We are collecting:

-  Clothing
-  Jewelry
-  Accessories
-  Handbags
-  Shoes
-  Linens

Commitment to Mental Health

The pandemic has exacerbated the mental health crisis we were already facing. We thank SPS for pursuing a mental health screening tool for all students.

Also for contracting with Interface, a referral service for mental health providers. Interface uses referral counselors to help families navigate the challenges of finding mental health services, which is difficult for everyone.



Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Thank you for the work the District is doing to create an environment where everyone's success matters. First, by commissioning an Equity Audit and then by laying the groundwork for this vital work to grow, through expanded hiring practices to increase diversity, professional development activities, and reviewing and improving anti-racist educational practices.

School Committee Meeting - May 26, 2021



Diversity, Equity & Inclusion:
*Creating Cultures of Belonging
in Shrewsbury*

An Update to School Committee

**Include the kid who doesn't have anyone.
Include the kid who seems weird.
Include the kid who doesn't know how to play.
Include the kid who sits alone.
Include the kid who struggles.
Include the kid who is quiet.
Include the kid who needs someone.
Include the kid who is too shy to ask.
Include the kid who wants to be included.**

Supporting LGBTQ+ Students

I've personally learned a lot this year about how important this support is both in my home and at school for my child. Thank you to SPS for adopting the Principles for Ensuring Safe and Supportive Learning Environments for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning Students.

Since students are questioning their gender identity at a younger age, I suggest expanding the curriculum in this area to the 7th/8th grade levels.

The reason there are "more trans people nowadays":

- ~~It's trendy~~
- ~~People want attention~~
- ~~They're confused~~
- Because we are slowly moving towards a society where people are more able to openly be who they really are, rather than staying silent, suffering alone and in some cases, becoming suicidal or even being killed by intolerant people.



With crisis comes opportunity

This past year was an opportunity to connect with our children as they grow up all too soon.

With a front row seat, many families were able to experience their child's classroom first hand and appreciate the amazing work their teachers and school staff do daily, as well as our school leadership's ability to navigate this crisis.

We are grateful for our school community and its resilience.



Goals for next year

- Continue growing our membership and pursue efforts to recruit parents to serve in school liaison and other board positions.
- Resume in person meetings and coffees.
- Outreach to PTOs in the fall to introduce SEPAC and the work we do, as well as explore opportunities to collaborate.
- Continue to explore ways to leverage our email marketing platform to enhance communication and engagement with members.
- Issue a survey over the summer about what topic areas our families are interested in exploring through workshops.

