

St. James Parish Public Schools Special Education Advisory Council Handbook

The purpose of this handbook is to provide operational guidance for the St. James Parish Public Schools (SJPPS) local Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) regarding its statutory purpose and related functions. Louisiana law¹ requires each local public school superintendent and the administrative head of each charter school or other public school to create a SEAC not later than January 1, 2020.

Mission

Our Mission is to **Empower Students** with Disabilities with **Skills** necessary to become **Life-Long Learners** and **Productive Citizens** of **Society**.

Statement of Purpose

To provide advice and feedback regarding special education policies, procedures, and resources and engage in outreach to the community at large to increase the level of knowledge, support, and collaboration with respect to special education. The intent of the SEAC is to provide thoughtful insight in support of students with disabilities.²

Focus

- Promote communication, collaboration, and trust among educational service providers, students, parents, and school district administrators
- Serve as a connection to the community at large regarding the role of public schools in addressing the needs of students with disabilities
- Assist with development of annual report to the Superintendent in May of each year regarding SEAC activities.

How SEAC Functions

The responsibility of the SEAC members is to advise and provide feedback to the Superintendent, not to advocate for an individual position or agenda. Advice may be defined as opinion about what could be done about a situation or problem, or feedback regarding an appropriate course of action.

- Advisory groups provide input rather than governance.
- Advisory groups do not have any formal authority to issue directives. They do not set policy but may make suggestions for consideration by school district administrators.

SEAC functions to provide advice and feedback based on information and good judgment. The following are duties and responsibilities of the SEAC:

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1. ¹ Act 274 of the 2019 Louisiana Legislature.
 2. ² References to students with disabilities and special education are specific to eligible students with disabilities identified in accordance with Louisiana Department of Education Bulletin 1508. The operation of SEAC does not apply to students identified under Bulletin 1508 only as Gifted or Talented without a qualifying disability.
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- Advise and provide feedback on special education topics and goals at the district level, including the needs and priorities of students with disabilities
- Advise and provide feedback on development and implementation of educational programs
- Serve as a source of information between the school district and families
- Inform members of proposed initiatives affecting special education
- Participate in annual report to the Superintendent
- Engage the community at large by promoting increased knowledge, awareness, and collaboration regarding special education

Membership

SEAC members are unpaid volunteers appointed by the Superintendent. The membership must consist of at least eight persons.³ Fifty percent of the SEAC must be parents of students with disabilities residing in the SJPPS district and receiving special education services provided by the SJPPS district under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) and Louisiana Department of Education Bulletin 1706.⁴ To the extent practicable, selected parent members will represent different student age levels and disabilities. The remaining SEAC members will be selected from teachers, principals, or paraprofessionals employed by the district and will include other special education stakeholder(s). One high school student with a disability will also be appointed to the council upon recommendation from the school's principal or lead special education teachers. Members (except the high school student) must be at least 18 years of age. No member of the SJPPS school board shall be a member of the SEAC.

Chairperson

The Superintendent shall designate the Chairperson of the SEAC. The Chairperson shall be responsible for calling the Council's meetings, presiding over the meetings, and establishing the agendas for the meetings.

Terms of Membership Service

SEAC members shall be appointed to a one-year term. Members in good standing may reapply and may be reappointed for a second term at the discretion of the Superintendent. Terms begin

on the first day in August and end on the last day in April. All members must meet SEAC attendance and other requirements outlined in this Handbook. The Superintendent shall be responsible for selecting a new applicant in the event of a vacancy. A member may be removed and the member's seat declared vacant if absent from two of the three scheduled meetings without reasonable notice to the Chairperson; if the parent representative and his/her child are no longer residents in the boundaries of the school district; or if the member is no longer employed by the organization or agency he/she was appointed to represent. The Superintendent also reserves the right to remove a member who exhibits repeated disregard for the SEAC ethical standards, other procedures established in the SEAC Handbook, or any other behavior which the Superintendent deems contrary to the safety or well-being of SEAC members or those who attend the SEAC meetings.

³ Fifty percent of the designated council members must be parents of students with a disability. The maximum number of SEAC members shall not exceed eight persons.

⁴ SEAC does not include representatives of students identified with the exceptionalities of Gifted and/or Talented only.

Membership Qualifications

No special skills are required to be a SEAC member. However, each SEAC member must agree to the following:

- **Put children first.** A qualified SEAC member should believe that every student deserves an equitable, quality education and should have a true commitment to the successful future of all students in the district.
- **No personal or political agenda.** SEAC members may not promote their own personal or political agendas. SEAC members must have a passion for public education and believe that all students with disabilities are entitled to a quality education.
- **Provide leadership.** A SEAC member must be committed to engaging in respectful dialogue, building consensus, and working collaboratively with other SEAC members.
- **Appreciate diversity.** A SEAC member respects the diversity of cultures and abilities across the district and demonstrates a willingness to address the needs of all children and their families.
- **Follow applicable policies, laws, and regulations.** A SEAC member must agree to follow federal, state, and local school district requirements, including confidentiality rules and district safety policies.
- **Demonstrate integrity.** A SEAC member must be a person who demonstrates honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness and adheres to SEAC ethical standards.
- **Engages in community outreach.** A SEAC member understands the importance of sharing information regarding special education and engaging the community at large in educational discussions and planning for special education students in the district.

Application

The district will solicit SEAC applicants via the district website and other similar means such as parent portals, school newsletters, or local newspaper. Beginning May of 2023, all applicants must complete the SJPPS designated SEAC application form by the identified deadline in order to be considered for membership. Late or incomplete application forms will not be considered. SEAC application forms will be accessible on the district website at www.stjames.k12.la.us and by calling 225.258.4500. Assistance will be available for applicants who may be unable to complete the application form in writing due to disability. Please call 225.210.4925 for assistance.

The Superintendent will select from among timely submitted applications, giving consideration to the required percentages of the membership categories and making an effort to incorporate the desired range of age/grade levels. Where numerous applications are available for consideration, the Superintendent may employ a blind or random selection/lottery to determine the membership appointments. The selected applicants will be notified of their appointment verbally and in writing within twenty-five (25) business days of the deadline for applications.

If the solicitation for SEAC membership fails to produce a sufficient number of applicants, the school district will repeat the solicitation notice at least one additional time using a different means of advertisement, where practicable. If the repeated solicitation is unsuccessful, the Superintendent may authorize the SEAC to operate with a reduced number of members, fifty percent of whom must be a parent of a student with a disability.

Attendance

In order to promote cohesiveness and to enable an informed advisory process, members are encouraged to attend each SEAC meeting. If a member is unable to attend a scheduled SEAC meeting, it is expected that the member will contact the SEAC Chairperson as soon as the member knows s/he will be unable to attend but not later than 8:00 am on the day of the meeting. In the case of a member missing two consecutive meetings without notice, a member may be removed from SEAC at the discretion of the Superintendent. In cases when a SEAC meeting must be cancelled, every effort will be made to notify members of the cancellation via phone call, text, and/or email. Members may also contact the SEAC Chairperson to check the status of the meeting. Where practicable, notice of a SEAC meeting cancellation will also be posted on the district's website.

Process for Resigning

A member who is unable or unwilling to continue in his/her role as a selected SEAC member may resign the seat by sending written notice to the Superintendent, with a copy simultaneously sent to the SEAC Chairperson. Such notice is requested at least thirty (30) days prior to the next regularly scheduled SEAC meeting in order to provide a reasonable opportunity for the Superintendent to fill the vacancy. Unanticipated resignations shall be submitted as soon as practicable following the member's determination that s/he will no longer be able to fulfill his/her responsibilities.

Replacing a Member

A SEAC vacancy will be filled by the Superintendent for the remainder of the departing member's term. Interim appointees may reapply for the position following completion of the interim appointment.

Meetings

The Special Education Advisory Council will meet four (4) times per year on dates and times determined by the SEAC membership at the last meeting of the school year. All meetings will occur at the St. James Parish Public Schools Central Office, 1876 West Main Street, Litcher, unless otherwise noted.

The SEAC Chairperson will prepare and advertise an agenda on the school district's website. Minutes of SEAC meetings will be posted on the school district's website.

Meeting Forum

All SEAC meetings are open to the public. Members of the public cannot request to be on an agenda. However, there will be an opportunity for public comments on the agenda items before the adjournment of each meeting. Public comments will be limited to no longer than 3 minutes.

Communication, Discussion, and Information Sharing

Agendas

Meeting agendas will be emailed to SEAC members at least one week prior to each meeting. Agendas will be posted on the St. James Parish Public Schools website. SEAC members are also encouraged to inform members of the community regarding upcoming meetings throughout the year.

Minutes

Minutes of each meeting will be recorded by a school district staff person who will also type the minutes and arrange for distribution to SEAC members and post on the district's website, generally within five (5) business days of the SEAC meeting.

Ethical Considerations

Meeting discussions must respect different perspectives, provide members the opportunity to speak, and conform to the SEAC Ethical Standards.

Participation

Members are expected to be present, listen carefully during meetings, actively participate in discussions, and request clarification when needed.

Ground Rules for Discussion

The Chairperson will call the meeting to order, guide discussion, and adjourn the meeting. Only one member may speak at a time. Member requests for the floor must be made by raising one's hand and awaiting acknowledgment and permission to speak by the Chairperson. Extended discussion may be carried over to the next meeting. Only items listed on the current agenda will be addressed at a meeting. Topics not on the current agenda may be placed in the "parking lot" for future consideration.

Stakeholder Input

Members of the community, including parents of students with disabilities enrolled in the SJPPS, are encouraged to communicate with SEAC members to share information and topics of general interest for SEAC consideration. The SEAC email address is SEAC22@sjpsb.org . A school district staff person will monitor the SEAC email address.

Confidentiality

All SEAC members are bound by strict confidentiality requirements. Members will be instructed regarding FERPA and State law requirements relating to prohibitions on the disclosure of personally identifiable information. When appropriate and necessary, documents shared with SEAC may be redacted to protect sensitive personal information.

SEAC members are not authorized to release, share, publicize, or otherwise disclose SEAC-related documents, reports, and other information to the public through any means (verbal, video, written communication, electronic transmission, social media, etc.) without the express written consent of the Superintendent or Superintendent's designee.

Decision Making

The SEAC membership serves in an advisory capacity. SEAC is not a decision-making body and has no voting authority. Accordingly, advice, suggestions, and other information considered by SEAC members will be shared with the Superintendent in its annual report. Decisions regarding special education programs and services will be made by school district officials, consistent with IDEA and other applicable requirements.

Staff Participation

A staff person will be assigned to type agendas and record minutes of all SEAC meetings and arrange for meeting space or other meeting accommodations as needed. Staff assistance may only be secured for SEAC meetings at the direction of the Superintendent.

Orientation/Annual Planning Meeting

Notice shall be posted annually to the district website listing the names of SEAC members. Interested parties may express their views to SEAC members by emailing SEAC22@sjpsb.org.