Special Education & Services Committee

Spring 2014 Report - draft

Approved by CAC Executive Committee - 04/24/14
Approved by the CAC General Council - 05/08/14
Presented to the Board of Education - 05/19/14
COMMITTEE CO-CHAIRPERSONS:
Melissa Owens (Nature Ridge Elementary)
Sarah Thompson (Creekside Elementary)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:
Ruth Beckner (Bartlett Elementary)
Mary Gonzalez (Tefft Middle)
Lisa White (Liberty Elementary)
Robert Salis (Tefft Middle)

FRIENDS OF THE COMMITTEE:
Veronica Noland
Claudia Diaz
Antonita King
Brandy Carbery

DISTRICT LIAISON
Pamela Harris (Director of Special Education)

DISTRICT SUPPORT STAFF
Jillian Barker (Special Education Specialist)
Melissa Waxler (Special Education Specialist)
Leatrice Satterwhite (Assistant Director of Special Education)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The CAC Special Education Committee would once again like to thank District U-46 Director of Special Education Pamela Harris and her staff, and in particular Special Education Specialists Melissa Waxler and Jillian Barker, and Assistant Director Leatrice Satterwhite for their assistance this year. The Committee would also like to thank Patrick Mogge, Director of School and Community Relations, and his staff for their support and collaboration in helping us to publicize our 2013/14 events through various district, community and media outlets. And thank you to all teachers, department specialists, and support staff for their contributions to our annual Parent Resource Fair.

A special thanks goes to CAC members who volunteered their time to the committee and/or supported our programming. Last but not least, thank you to the Citizens’ Advisory Council Executive Committee and the Board of Education for their continued support for this Committee. We appreciate being able to give support to the parents of special education students within District U-46 and we look forward to continuing our work.

COMMITTEE MISSION

The Committee will act as a resource for parents of students in special education or those receiving special services/support by facilitating information sharing and making parents aware of both U-46 and outside community programs and resources available to their special needs child. The Committee also works to provide opportunities for parent engagement.

SUMMARY OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

This year we had many changes in the makeup of our committee. We lost 3 long-term committee members but gained one new member. So while there continued to be strong interest and participation on the Committee, we realize our pool for potential committee members within the CAC is quite small; the combination of SPED parent/CAC member is a very select group of parents within the District. Our membership includes representation from a variety of schools across the district, primarily at the elementary and middle school levels. The majority of our members have had direct experience with special education services and are committed to enhancing services for the special education community in this district. We continued our work to establish parent education opportunities and create awareness amongst district staff and parents of outside resources for the special needs community.

Friends of the Committee are not full CAC voting members, but do participate in our Committee events and lend valuable support to the Committee.
INITIATIVES FOR 2013-2014 SCHOOL YEAR

The Citizens’ Advisory Council Special Education & Services Committee had two objectives for the 2013 - 2014 school year:

1. Continue Special Education University with an enhanced in-depth topic.
2. Plan and coordinate the Annual Special Needs Parent Resource Fair.

SUMMARY OF COMMITTEE WORK

Our two events for the 2013/14 school year were as follows:

- November 13th, 2013 - Special Education University, “Parents on the IEP Team: Strategies for Success”.

SPECIAL EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

The first event of the year was our first Special Education University Program, held the evening of November 13, 2013 in the Educational Services Center auditorium. The purpose of this event was to focus on the role of the parent in the IEP team. Pat Khuzik Stauch, resource specialist from STAR NET, was the guest speaker. The presentation specifically covered:

- The role of the parent on the IEP Team.
- Parent rights and responsibilities.
- How a parent can participate on the IEP team.
- What does it mean to be a parent advocate your child in the IEP meeting.
- What information goes into an IEP.

The result was a two-hour program given in English and simultaneously translated into Spanish.

Our intention was to build on the previous year’s program covering the IEP basics. What we learned was that our audience had different levels of knowledge and experience. The speaker spent a majority of the 1st hour of the program going over IEP basics to bring parents up to speed on the IEP process so they would have a basic understanding for the discussion about a parent’s role on the IEP team.

We realized as this event continues to grow, we need to better anticipate the differences in parents’ knowledge and experience with special education services. Next year we would like to present multiple sessions geared at different levels. One session would cover IEP basics and could include our automated IEP presentation from 2012 for parents.
new to U-46 special education. The main presentation would focus on a more advanced topic and would assume the parents had a basic knowledge of special education. In order to achieve this, we would like to continue to collaborate with outside service agencies that have previously developed presentations and have a deep knowledge of topics of interest to parents including early childhood education & early intervention, IEP development, and transitional programs.

While the presentation and content covered a majority of the evening, the last part of the group session was a Q&A between parents and the presenter. Last year our attendance was small enough that we were able to facilitate small group discussions in a roundtable format. This year the attendance was so large that the event was moved into the main auditorium, at which point a general Q&A was easier. However, we believe the general Q&A was not nearly as beneficial to our parents as the small group discussions; we will be looking for ways to better facilitate discussions next year.

Special Education University Feedback

“The session was good for someone who is new to the IEP process but not as much for someone who has already been doing it for awhile.”

“Great program - needed to be longer.”

“I’m happy to see additional attempts and more parental involvement.”

{Best feature was...} “I felt like I wasn’t alone.”
4TH ANNUAL SPECIAL NEEDS PARENT RESOURCE FAIR

Our second event was the 4th Annual Special Needs Parent Resource Fair held at Elgin High School on March 1st, 2014. The goals for this year’s Fair were to:

1. Continue to increase the diversity and depth of exhibiting service agencies.
2. Continue to increase parent and community attendance.
3. Expand our panel discussion offerings.

Highlights of the Event:

• **Attendance**: Over 300 individuals including parents, U-46 staff, Committee members and the community at large attended the Fair, which is roughly double the number of attendees we had last year. Attending families were given informational packets; all 125 packets were distributed.

• **Service Providers**: Invitations went out to 68 service providers - a 41% increase from the number invited last year. Of those, 48 service providers were in attendance at the Fair.

• **Presentations**: The Committee scheduled six presentations during the Fair.
  
  o Advanced Behavioral Solutions, By Your Side and Kaitlin’s Hideout held a presentation Homework, Behavior and Schedules. Topics covered included; how to set boundaries and structure for homework completion, creating a “Child Plan” that balances all of the elements of your individual child and insights on daily life with a special needs child.

  o Representatives from Bartlett Little League’s Challenger Division and local Special Recreation Associations led “Special Recreation for your Child”. This session focused on the importance of recreation activities and how children gain therapeutic and socialization benefits and the role they play in the growth and development of the special needs child.

  o U-46 OT’s and Sovereign Pediatric Therapy; U-46 Speech Therapy Services and Advanced Behavioral Solutions did joint presentations highlighting the differences and commonalities between school based and clinic based services.

  o There were also two smaller presentations that ran at the same time as the Recreation Presentation. They were Embracing Dyslexia: What Parents Need to Know” by Holly York of York Educational Services and a “Dyspraxia Informational Session” by Warren Fried of the Dyspraxia Foundation. These sessions were not run in the main room due to their special focus and the smaller audience to which they would apply.

• **IEP Presentation**: The “Understanding Your Child’s IEP” presentation from the November 2012 Special Education University ran in a continuous loop in both English and Spanish.

• **Special Needs Child Care**: Again we worked with the Special Education Department and were able to recruit several qualified volunteers to run a limited child care service for children with exceptional needs. We were pleased to be able to provide care for four
families. The Committee extends special thanks to these volunteers, who made the Fair a great deal easier for those families.

- **Eventbrite Website**: For the second year in a row, the Committee utilized online event software to promote the Fair, and to track interest and attendance. This website, when customized, continued to allow us to provide visitors with greater detail about the Fair, and allowed us to communicate changes as they happened. The site contained links to service agency websites, a map to Elgin High School, a full schedule, and social media links for sharing the event.
  
  - Using the contact information given to us by parents at both last year’s Fair and the Special Education University session, invitations were sent out directly from the site prior to the Fair. Parents were encouraged to pre-register for the panel discussions and/or special accommodations; this allowed us to gauge attendance. A link to the website was also included on the promotional flyer, district correspondence and all press releases.
  
  - The website proved to be a great tool for the committee; by the day of the Fair, over 1300 visits had been recorded at the site, and 198 reservations to panel discussion sessions were made. 302 invitations were sent to parents, resulting in 97 of those reservations.

- Each family received a packet of information, including a color map and schedule of the Fair, a printed directory of all exhibitors, IEP Tips for Parents handout, and a copy of Special Parent Magazine. All of these printed materials were donated items.
Feedback:

Of the at least 125 families that attended the event, 52 people responded to our feedback survey. Although the quantity of surveys gathered was smaller than we would have liked, given that many people attended as parent couples or families, it is the Committee’s opinion that the surveys received still represent a reasonable sampling of the attendees. 100% of the surveys were collected onsite on paper; the paper responses were then manually entered online into a Google Doc for tabulation.

Similar to previous Fairs, the attending parents and families represented a fairly even spread in regards to grade level of their children, except for the middle school category. The Committee has taken note of that difference and will discuss ways to attract these families next year.

Parent Resource Fair Feedback from Parents

“It was very helpful to have so many service options and information in one place.”

“My first time attending - absolutely wonderful! Thoroughly appreciated the wealth of resources represented. Thank you!”

“{need} Parent groups to allow parents to network.”

“{need} Support groups for parents, information on these support groups and/or education centers.

“{need} More for high level kids with autism - social groups.”
Respondents were asked to enter their child’s disability, if one existed, according to the 14 categories specified in the Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA) and recognized by the state of Illinois. As shown in the chart below, the disability categories reported most by attendees are autism, intellectual disabilities, developmental delays and speech & language impairments. This is consistent with what we’ve experienced at most of our events over the last four years.

**Does Your Child Have a Disability?**

- Autism: 16%
- Deaf-Blindness: 0%
- Deafness: 1%
- Emotional Disturbance: 4%
- Hearing Impairment: 2%
- Intellectual Disabilities: 14%
- Multiple Disabilities: 4%
- Orthopedic Impairment: 5%
- Developmental Delay: 13%
- Other Health Impairment: 6%
- Specific Learning Disability: 10%
- Speech or Language Impairment: 11%
- Traumatic Brain Injury: 2%
- Visual Impairment Including Blindness: 2%
- Other/Not Determined: 10%
According to the survey, 97% of attendees were satisfied with the service agencies at the Fair. We believe that new exhibitors at the Fair, including our new for-profit section, offered enhanced opportunities for parents. Among the new exhibitors were Advanced Behavioral Solutions, Clearbrook, Epilepsy Foundation of Greater Chicago, the Geneva High School Chess Club, Learning Disability Association of Illinois, NAMI, and the National Association for Down Syndrome.

Our presentations continue to be a highlight of the Fair. This year marks the largest offering of presentations with six sessions. The Committee notes that two of the presentations received particularly good reviews: Thriving at Home and Special Recreation. The U-46 Clinician OT session was also favorably reviewed; however, the reviews drop off somewhat for the remaining three sessions. The Committee discovered that managing six sessions is difficult with the relatively small number of volunteers we have. We do not have enough people to moderate each session, and therefore depend on the outside presenters to meet parent expectations. A more managed approach may be necessary for next year.
Exhibitor feedback continued to be extremely positive, with most of our exhibitors responding that they were satisfied with the facilities and the set-up of the Fair. With the larger number of exhibitors, we were forced to spread out more into the adjoining hallways around the library, and this did result in some exhibitors feeling disjointed from the main exhibit area in the library. They continue to appreciate the opportunity and hospitality we show them. We are now utilizing a system of advance registrations for exhibitors, and all exhibitors that have responded will be returning next year.
GOALS AND RECOMMENDATION FOR 2014/15

The feedback indicates, and the Committee agrees, that we have once again had measurable success in providing parents with beneficial programs. There remains a significant need for information to be communicated to the parents of our special needs community. We believe that this work falls solidly in line with Destination 2015: we support the aim of college and workplace readiness with post-secondary education and information at the Resource Fair, and we are actively engaging parents, community partners, and organizations under the Family & Community Engagement Pillar. We believe that we can continue to build on this work next year. The Committee therefore presents the following two goals and three recommendations for the 2014/15 school year:

GOALS:

1. **Special Education University:** Continue these sessions with relative and meaningful presentations based upon parent feedback in collaboration with an outside service agency. We feel it is important to offer multiple sessions that would appeal to parents at various levels of experience with special education. This would also allow for smaller parent groups to facilitate time for networking and the discussion of ideas presented at this session.

2. **5th Annual Special Needs Parent Resource Fair:** Following the continued success of this year’s Fair, we enthusiastically support carrying out this event next year. **Due to the increase in size of the number of exhibitors and parents, we would like to relocate the event to a larger facility.** This would allow us to have all exhibitors and parents in one location. We plan to continue to increase our exhibitor base to better service the various disability categories of our special needs community. Also, we will continue to develop panel presentations based directly from this year’s parent feedback surveys. Plans are already underway to hold our 5th Annual Fair on March 7th, 2015. We invite the Administration and the Board of Education to attend this event and meet our community!

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Special Education Website Resources:** With the new District website in place and expanded offerings in the Special Education Department section, we respectfully request that the District post the automated IEP program from the 2012 Special Education University, and any subsequent recordings that the Special Education Department has created from our events, to the Special Education page by the beginning of the 2014/2015 school year. We continue to receive many requests from parents for easy access to the IEP program. In addition, it is the Committee’s intention to have outside resources posted on the CAC Special Education Committee webpage; material from the most recent Resource Fair including the exhibitor directory and many of the presentations are posted as of the writing of this report. We would like to have a direct link to the Committee page on the District Special Education home page, preferably with the CAC logo, so that parents can easily find the additional information we have available to them. Likewise, we will include a link on our page to the district special education page.
2. **Event Funding:** The committee again utilized allotted funds for necessary materials and supplies for our events. While the resources helped fund the majority of committee events, without the generous contributions of businesses such as Superior Copies Inc. in Roselle and Herbs Bakery in Elgin, the Resource Fair and Special Education University would have required a larger budget or we would have been required to scale back the size of these events.

The committee recommends that we again be allotted funding in the same amount as the 2013/14 school year for both of our programming initiatives in the 2014/15 school year, as both programs are anticipated to continue to grow in size. In addition, the Committee recommends that grants be solicited to provide for family engagement of special education parents in our district, which will allow us to spend funds for items that directly benefit the families of special education children while attending our events.

3. **5th Annual Special Needs Parent Resource Fair Location:** As mentioned in our Goals, we would like to move the Fair to a U-46 gymnasium or a similarly sized, centrally located facility to better accommodate our exhibitors and attendees. We would also like to explore the ability to offer WIFI service to our exhibitors; many of the current year exhibitors mentioned that high-speed internet connectivity would have allowed them to advertise the Fair on-site and would have been very useful for them.

**ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION**

One of the benefits of our events is that they have been a focal point for special education parents in the district. However, while we have offered – and plan to continue offering - beneficial programs for parents, it is apparent that the various needs of the SPED community cannot be met by the CAC alone.

Our programming is designed to assist the Special Education Department in enhancing the educational experience of students. Among the many requests we receive from parents for additional programming, sponsoring parent support groups and children’s activities are high on the list. While we feel these other initiatives would be highly valuable to parents in the district, the Committee feels this type of programming falls outside of our scope (see exhibit below).

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<tr>
<th>CAC Special Education &amp; Services Committee</th>
<th>Other Parent Led SPED Group, i.e. SPED PTO</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programming to enhance educational experience of students.</td>
<td>Parent support groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Programming to inform parents on district SPED matters.</td>
<td>Adaptive activities for SPED children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify SPED issues in the district and bring those to the attention of BOE/Administration.</td>
<td>Social programming for parents.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fundraising for various SPED causes.</td>
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For reference, other districts in the area that support district-wide Special Education PTO/PTA groups are:

- Crystal Lake District 47 (https://www.d47.org/ss/index.php/sped-pto)
- Indian Prairie District 204 (http://ipsdweb.ipsd.org/ipsn/)
- Plainfield CCSD 202 (http://www.psd202.org/pages/PlainfieldSD202/Departments___Programs/Special_Education_Student_Serv/Special_Ed_PTA).

Just as school PTO groups in this district support school and social activities for students, so too could a district-wide SPED PTO group for the SPED population. Bingo nights, sensory nights at trampoline/inflatable gyms, adaptive bowling sessions, “quiet” movie nights are just some of the activities offered by these groups. It is important to note that, as these activities are modified for kids with special needs, they differ from many of the usual offerings made available to general population students. We believe the benefits of such activities would be far-reaching in the district.

Part of our mission as a Committee is to work towards providing SPED parents with increased opportunities for engagement. We believe that a parent-led, PTO-modeled group could be an avenue to encourage increased parent participation within the SPED community in a supportive environment. The Committee hopes that such a group could work in partnership with us and help us by supporting our events through volunteering and participation. In return, we could assist the group with communication within the district and resource connection within the larger community.

For these reasons, we would support the concept of a Special Education PTO group in this district. During the past year we have been approached by SPED parents who are not members of CAC but have interest in forming such a group. Although the Committee clearly functions in a different capacity than a PTO, we would be willing to serve as a resource to those parents who have expressed interest in forming such a group. The purpose of this additional consideration in our report is to make the Board of Education aware of this desire in the SPED community that has been brought to our attention.