

SPECIAL EDUCATION & SERVICES COMMITTEE



SPRING 2016 REPORT

Accepted by CAC Executive Committee - 04/28/2016

Accepted by the CAC General Council - 05/05/2016

Presented to the Board of Education - 05/16/2016

COMMITTEE CO-CHAIRPERSONS:

Melissa Owens (Nature Ridge Elementary)

Sarah Thompson (Creekside Elementary)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Ruth Beckner (Bartlett Elementary)

Lisa White (Liberty Elementary)

Robert Salis (Streamwood High School)

Rebecca Miller (Otter Creek Elementary)

Sara Siddiqui (Hilltop Elementary)

DISTRICT LIAISON

Leatrice Satterwhite (Director of Specialized Student Services)

DISTRICT SUPPORT STAFF

Melissa Waxler (Private Placement Specialist)

Denise Matthews (Assistant Director of Specialized Student Services - Compliance)

FRIENDS OF THE COMMITTEE

Marisol Gonzalez (Streamwood High School)

Jules O'Neal (Larkin High School)

Christine Cagney (Special Education Specialist)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The CAC Special Education Committee would once again like to thank District U-46 Director of Special Education Leatrice Satterwhite and her staff, and in particular Special Education Administrators Melissa Waxler and Denise Matthews for their assistance this year. And thank you to all teachers, department specialists, and support staff for their contributions to our committee.

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

Our committee continues to have a small number of highly dedicated parents; 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 high school levels. The majorities 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.

INITIATIVES FOR 2015-2016 SCHOOL YEAR

The Citizens' Advisory Council Special Education & Services Committee had two objectives for the 2015/16 school year:

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

The Committee was aware from the beginning of the year that coordinating our 5th Special Needs Parent Resource Fair would present some unique challenges. We had lost several exhibitors at our previous Fair due to the state's ongoing budget crisis. Over the summer, a few more agencies began reporting that they were halting some services and consolidating or streamlining operations. Nonetheless, we began the process of registering exhibitors for the Fair early in the fall.

By November 2015, only 16 exhibitors had registered for the Fair despite numerous phone calls and reminder emails. By December, the number of registered exhibitors had increased only slightly. It was clear at our December committee meeting that we did not have enough exhibitors to make holding the Fair a viable option. A substantial amount of volunteer effort is needed for this event and without enough vendors to attract enough attendees, the committee could not see value in continuing the effort.

SUMMARY OF COMMITTEE WORK

SPECIAL EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

The first event of the year was our fourth Special Education University Program, held the evening of November 4, 2015 at Elgin High School. This year, we focused on programs and services that students may receive as part of their IEP. The evening consisted of a comprehensive presentation on the U-46 programs offered across the special education continuum, and a meet & greet with staff members immediately following the presentation. Programs and services covered included:

- *MLP and ILP classroom programs*
- *Exceptional Needs programs*
- *SWEP, Center House and Central Schools programs*
- *Hearing and Vision Itinerant services*
- *Speech/Language Therapy, OT and PT services*
- *Deaf / Hard of Hearing Instructional*
- *School Social Worker and Psychologist services*

Close to 30 parents attended the session, along with numerous staff members. Surveys collected indicated that for many of the parents, this was the first time that they received in-depth information on many of the programs that are offered in U-46. The parents also appreciated the chance to meet with staff afterward to discuss their child's education on a more personal level.

The committee feels that the attendance level was much lower than what is desired, based on the amount of work that district staff needed to undertake to create the presentation, and based on the work the committee did to promote the session. Unfortunately, many parents reported that they did not receive promotional flyers, which are a major communication tool the committee relies on to get the word out about events. This is an ongoing issue that continues to impact the viability of holding parent sessions.

PRESENTATION: EUREKA MATH ACCOMMODATIONS

On February 16, 2016 the Committee hosted a workshop for parents and U-46 personnel on Eureka Math Accommodations. The content was specifically geared for elementary school parents whose children receive IEP accommodations in Math. The workshop was presented by U-46 Specialized Services staff Alicia Fabianczyk-Liakopoulos, Rebecca Dahn, and Melissa Waxler. LaShawn Lomax contributed to the creation of the presentation but was not able to attend the session.

The Eureka Math Accommodations presentation first gave an overview of the various components of the Eureka Math curriculum. The presentation then focused on Eureka Math resources available to parents on the U-46 website and other websites. The presenters gave various examples of accommodations and modifications that could be made to the curriculum to meet the needs of unique learners. Finally, all participants created their own "Rekenrek" which is a "Make and Take" hands-on manipulative that supports learning underlying math concepts.

We had 9 parents (including committee members) and 9 teachers/teachers aids in attendance. Although the turnout was low, the response from those that attended was highly favorable. Many parents stated that they are still learning the basics about Eureka Math and commented that it would have been helpful to receive this information earlier in the school year. The Committee feels that additional elementary special education parents would benefit from a repeat presentation of this workshop. However, in order to improve the turnout, a more reliable means of communicating with special education parents is necessary. Also, more advance notice would be needed prior to repeating it. This workshop was not scheduled until January, 2016 after the resource fair was cancelled. Please see more discussion in our recommendations for the 2016/2017 school year.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2016/17

1. The committee remains committed to being an informational resource for parents within the district. The committee would like to hold up to five different parent education sessions next year with various presenters. The months we have targeted are September, October, January, February and March. The sessions would take place during our regularly scheduled monthly committee meetings. Ideally, we would like to utilize locations across the district and include the district offices, district high schools, and area libraries. Presenters could include both district staff and external organizations, some of whom have been exhibitors at our past resource fairs. Selections would be made to target different segments of the specialized services population.
2. The committee recognizes that publicity has been an ongoing struggle, and is probably a continuing factor in lack of parent participation. We recommend working with the communications department on an overall communication strategy specifically targeted at parents with children receiving specialized student services including, but not limited to, flyers, written communications, press releases, and direct communications to principals. We would also like to work with the CAC Family & Community Engagement Committee and their network of PTO/PTA groups to foster communications at the school level.

The committee is committed to finalizing our schedule for the 2016/17 school year over the summer, so that communications regarding programming can begin immediately at the beginning of the school year in August.