Special Education & Services Committee

Spring 2015 Report

Approved by CAC Executive Committee - April 23, 2015
Approved by the CAC General Council - May 7, 2015
Presented to the Board of Education - May 18, 2015
COMMITTEE CO-CHAIRPERSONS:
Melissa Owens (Nature Ridge Elementary)
Sarah Thompson (Creekside Elementary)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:
Ruth Beckner (Bartlett Elementary)
Mary Gonzalez (Streamwood High School)
Lisa White (Liberty Elementary)
Robert Salis (Streamwood High School)

DISTRICT LIAISON
Leatrice Satterwhite (Director of Special Education)

DISTRICT SUPPORT STAFF
Jillian Barker (Special Education Specialist)
Melissa Waxler (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 Specialists Melissa Waxler and Jillian Barker for their assistance this year. 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

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 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.
INITIATIVES FOR 2014-2015 SCHOOL YEAR

The Citizens’ Advisory Council Special Education & Services Committee had two objectives for the 2014/15 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 2014/15 school year were as follows:

• November 12, 2014 - Special Education University, “U-46 Transition Programs”.
• March 7, 2015 - 5th Annual Special Needs Parent Resource Fair.

SPECIAL EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

The first event of the year was our third Special Education University Program, held the evening of November 12, 2014 at the Educational Services Center. Based on feedback from prior events, the Committee decided to focus this year on transition programs within the lifespan of an IEP. While “transition” in IEP terms generally refers to the Transition Plan put into an IEP at 14 ½ years old, the Committee wanted to focus on three distinct areas of transition that mark significant turning points in a child’s educational plan. Because these three topics are so distinct, we broke the evening into three 45-minute programs, allowing parents to pick those programs most applicable to them:

• **U-46 Services for the Early Learner**
  For parents with children aged 2-6, this program focused on the transition from IFSP to IEP. Families were given information to help them prepare as they approach Early Childhood services and elementary school. Presented by Michelle Cork and Therese Gingerich.

• **Transition Planning**
  Planning for post-secondary success starts at the age of 14. This program discussed the IEP Transition Plan, which maps out future IEP services that further education, employment and independent living. The target age for this program was for parents of 7th - 10th graders. Presented by Laurie Stage.

Special Education University Feedback from Parents

“{the best part of the class was} Realizing after high school you have to have the child be their own advocate.”

“{need} More information concerning autistic student’s training.”

“I will be back. They (presenters) were engaging and made this seem easy, not so scary.”

“{the best part of the class was} Seeing, hearing and learning of additional programs and tips for the future.”
• **Looking Beyond High School**

For parents with children in 11\textsuperscript{th} grade - 21 years of age, this program focused on what families need to know as their children move out of the public education system. Presented by Laurie Stage.

Between the three sessions, we had 38 attendees total. The Transition Planning session attracted the most attendees, followed by Looking Beyond High School and Early Learner. While we knew that attendance might be lower than previous Special Education University programs because of the more targeted topic, the attendance level was less than we were anticipating. Still, parents that did attend sessions were overwhelmingly positive about the information given to them, with 97% of the attendees responding favorably.

One of our goals from last year’s Special Education University was to foster small group discussion, and because of the targeted topic sessions, we feel we were successful in having more meaningful discussions between the facilitators and parents.
5TH ANNUAL SPECIAL NEEDS PARENT RESOURCE FAIR

Our second event was the 5th Annual Special Needs Parent Resource Fair held at Elgin High School on March 7, 2015. 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.

Highlights of the Event:

Because of significant growth of the Resource Fair, the Committee decided at the end of last year to look for a new venue. While Elgin High School served us very well for four years, the library space was not adequate, and spilling over into the hallways created traffic issues and a disjointed feel to the Fair. Some exhibitors felt as though they were disconnected from the main area of the Fair. Unfortunately, larger space was not available to us at EHS.

The Committee found a solution by moving the Fair over to the Commons at South Elgin High School. This move allowed us to accommodate all of our exhibitors into one organized space, with ample room to group exhibitors into five main categories to simplify the experience for attendees. These categories were: Autism, Educational Services and Adaptive Technology, Comprehensive Disability Services, Specific Disabilities and Mental Health, and Special Recreation.

Response to the move was overwhelmingly positive by both attendees and exhibitors. The Committee would like to thank the staff at South Elgin High School for their work in helping us to get the Fair up and running at the new location.

Other highlights of the event include:

- **Attendance:** Well over 300 individuals including parents, U-46 staff, committee members and the community at large attended the Fair, representing a slight increase over last year.
- **Service Providers:** Invitations went out to 84 service providers - a 24% increase from the number invited last year. Of those, 52 service providers reserved table space at the Fair. Unfortunately, we had about six exhibitors cancel at the last minute due to funding issues or illness.
- **Presentations:** The Committee scheduled two presentations during the Fair.
  - **Student Self Advocacy**, presented by the National Association for Down Syndrome: The National Association for Down Syndrome launched an innovative speakers program three years ago that has enhanced opportunities for Self-Advocates to be involved in the organization in a variety of ways. The public speakers program has been a success and 14 public speakers have been trained and working in the community to spread the news about Disability Awareness. Our Self-Advocates share their own unique success stories on how to achieve their potential in all aspects of community life. They have been well known all over the Chicagoland area in speaking in hospitals, churches, schools including (elementary, junior high, high school, universities), various organizations, special fundraisers and state conferences. Come see and support these inspiring Self-Advocates as they proudly “Speak Up and Speak Out”.
Cool Apps for Kids, presented by Infinitec: Infinitec, which stands for infinite potential through technology, is the technology program of UCP of Greater Chicago. The mission of Infinitec is to advance independence and promote inclusive opportunities for children and adults through technology. Join us for this fun program as we review cool digital learning apps and games suitable for all kids with special abilities!

- **Attendee Refreshments:** For-profit exhibitors provided water and snacks for attendees in lieu of a registration fee for their tables, which was greatly appreciated by our attendees!

- **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/CAC Websites:** The Committee continues to use Eventbrite to maintain a contact list of past attendees for emailed invitations, as well as an advance reservation system for our presentations. Currently, our contact list contains nearly 400 individual names. The CAC website allows us the flexibility to tailor our online presence with downloadable resources, including the event flyer, and links to our exhibitors’ web pages, while still enabling us to integrate with the event management functions of Eventbrite.

- **Family Resources:** Each family received a packet of information, including a color map and schedule of the Fair, a printed directory of all exhibitors, SPED and student advocate related handouts, and a copy of Special Parent Magazine. All of these printed materials were donated items.
Feedback:

We received 44 responses to our attendee 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.

The Committee notes that, compared to previous years, we had a sizeable jump in the number of parents reporting high school students.

Parent Resource Fair Feedback from Parents

"The presenters were knowledgeable concerning their specific areas of service.

"Very well done. Many thanks for organizing so many useful resources all within walking distance! ☺"

"Great vendor layout & school location."

"{need} Local speech/OT/PT providers."

"Need information for deaf & hearing impairment."
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 five years.

Does Your Child Have a Disability?
According to the survey, 91% of attendees were satisfied with the service agencies at the Fair. Although we continue to expand our offerings, we still are having a difficult time finding exhibitors that adequately address speech & language impairment and hearing impairment. Of the negative responses, most the dissatisfaction stems from not addressing these two impairments. The Committee notes this and will continue to look for agencies and programs for these disabilities.

Because of the difficulty managing six presentations last year, we parred down the presentations to two longer running presentations. Response to the presentations was 100% positive.
Exhibitor feedback continued to be extremely positive. All exhibitors were enthusiastic about the new exhibitor space, and were grateful for the opportunity to continue to provide support for U-46 families. Exhibitors were also very appreciative of the hospitality we are able to extend to them by providing volunteer help to set up/tear down, assistance with maintaining their tables, and for providing them refreshments throughout the Fair.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2015/16

The feedback indicates, and the Committee agrees, that we have once again had measurable success in providing parents with beneficial programs. The Committee believes that a significant need will always exist for information to be communicated to the parents of our special needs community. We recognize that new parents enter into the special education program each year, and that special education services change and evolve with the student as he or she continues through their educational career at U-46.

The Committee will strive to align our work with the new district strategic plan, particularly with Aspiration 1: We will educate the whole student by providing an enriched, high quality experience that empowers all graduates to be competitive members of the global society, and Aspiration 3: We will engage in meaningful and effective relationships with all families and the greater community. We align with Priorities 2 and 5 by actively working to partner with families and the greater community in support of a coordinated approach to students reaching their full potential as participating members of the global society. We desire to continue to build on this work next year. The Committee therefore presents the following two recommendations for the 2015/16 school year:

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Special Education University:** The purpose of Special Education University is to provide meaningful support for parents on a broad special education topic specific to School District U-46. Past topics of Special Education University include: Understanding Your Child’s IEP, Parents on the IEP - Strategies for Success, and U-46 Transition Programs. The Committee would like to continue this series in the next school year with relevant and meaningful presentations based upon parent feedback in collaboration with the Special Education Department. Our tentative outline for next year is a program focusing on specialized services that might comprise all or part of a student’s Individualized Education Plan. Examples would be occupational or physical therapies, speech therapy, social work, hearing itinerant services, etc. The tentative date for this program would be November 4, 2015 at Elgin High School.

2. **6th Annual Special Needs Parent Resource Fair:** Following the continued success of this year’s Fair, we enthusiastically support carrying out this event next year. However, the Committee is unfortunately aware of an increasing number of long time non-profit exhibitors that are facing significant funding cuts from the State of Illinois, which could significantly impact the number of agencies available to exhibit next year. As the budget issues with the state continue to evolve, the Committee would like to reserve the option to be flexible with the composition of the Fair. Two of those options would be increasing the number of for-profit exhibitors to replace those non-profits that are no longer providing active services for the SPED population, and/or putting more of a focus on relevant presentations at the Fair by outside resources. To that end, the Committee will continue to concentrate on identifying new exhibitors, and will investigate potential resources for high-quality presentations early in the next school year. The tentative date for the next Resource Fair would be on March 5, 2016 at South Elgin High School.