

Our Children, Our Families Council

Summary of the SFUSD Community Advisory Committee for Special Education

(Last updated 6/2/15)

Goals of the Effort

The SFUSD Community Advisory Committee for Special Education (CAC) has four responsibilities, as dictated by California's Education Code:

- To review & help revise the district's Local Plan for Special Education
- To advise the San Francisco Board of Education on the policies, procedures, operations, and practices of the SpEd Department by producing an annual report
- To educate parents on Special Education policies, services, and developments in the district
- To make the community more aware of issues surrounding Special Education through community outreach

Focal Population of the Effort

The CAC focuses on students from Pre-K through Transitional-Aged Youth (aged 18-22) receiving special education services in the district. They strive to reach the parents of students receiving special education services, and at least half of the CAC members must be parents of children receiving such services. Secondly, the CAC also seeks input from educators, education-related nonprofits, community-based organizations, and others who have an interest in the accessibility and quality of special education services. Such individuals are encouraged to serve on the CAC as well.

Impact

The CAC advocated for Special Education students remaining a part of the General Education classrooms to the greatest extent possible, and a resolution reflecting the PAC's recommendations was passed. It is San Francisco Board of Education Resolution 131-22Sp1 – Guiding Principles Regarding Inclusive Education Practices for the San Francisco Unified School District, which called for the district to adopt an inclusive model for Special Education students. Because the majority of CAC members are parents with students receiving special education services from the district, the CAC is knowledgeable about current strengths and weaknesses of current special education services, and this knowledge and experience help the CAC advocate successfully.

Challenges

Because the CAC is comprised entirely of volunteers (mostly working parents), the group's capacity to cover meetings and activities is limited. While the CAC would love to be an active voice in all discussions surrounding Special Education within SFUSD, they must prioritize the most important events given their limited resources and availability.

Origins of the Effort

In 1977, all school districts and county school offices were mandated by the state of California to form consortia in geographical regions of sufficient size and scope to provide for all Special Education service needs of children residing within the region boundaries. Each regional Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) had to develop a Local Plan describing how it would provide Special Education services. Given its size, San Francisco was designated its own SELPA, and as a result was forced to generate its own Local Plan outlining its Special Education services.

This legislation (California Education Code, Part 30, Chapter 7, Article 7, 56190) also called for the creation of a Community Advisory Committee for Special Education (CAC) to help develop and revise the Local Plan by offering recommendations to the Board of Education.

Leading the Effort

The CAC is led by a 5-person board, which includes a Chair, a 1st Chair, a 2nd Chair, a Secretary, and a Parliamentarian. Each role is a two-year position, and re-election is staggered to maintain institutional memory. The current Chair of the CAC is Ms. Kimberly Webb, a parent of the child who receives special education services in SFUSD. Though her term as

Chair ends July of 2015, she plans to remain an active member of the CAC and is a good first point of contact for the CAC.

As mandated by the state law governing the CAC, the CAC also receives support from the district. Laura Savage, the Special Education Ombudsman for SFUSD, acts as a liaison between the CAC and the district. The district also supports the CAC financially by providing them with an annual budget. In the 2014-2015 academic year, the CAC received a budget of \$9,900 for attending conferences, hosting outreach events, costs associated with producing the annual report, and other miscellaneous supplies. (None of the budget goes toward a salary for any of the CAC members.)

Members of the Effort

The CAC is comprised of all volunteer members, aside from the SFUSD liaison. The CAC can have anywhere between 11 and 25 members, according to the CAC's bylaws. To become a member, individuals must first attend two general meetings and then complete an application. Once the CAC reviews the applications and selects those they would like to serve on the CAC, they submit their recommendations to the Board of Education for ultimate approval.

Currently, there are 17 members in the CAC, plus a liaison from SFUSD, Laura Savage. Of the 17 members, 15 are parents of children who receive special education services from SFUSD, one member is a special education teacher in the district, and one member represents a community organization.

Structure of the Effort

The CAC hosts a general meeting on the 4th Thursday of each month, ten months out of the year. These meetings are mandatory for CAC members, and members of the community – particularly parents – are encouraged to join. These meetings serve as outreach opportunities for the CAC, and they include a 45-minute parent education component focused on a pre-determined theme related to special education services in the district (e.g. how the new Common Core State Standards will impact special education). While every CAC member attends these monthly general meetings, overall attendance varies widely depending on how many parents and community members are interested in the monthly theme. Occasionally the parent-education component of the general meetings is led by an outside expert brought in by the CAC or by a staff member from SFUSD. Otherwise, CAC members lead the sessions.

In addition to the general meetings, the 5-person board meets separately each month, ten months out of the year, both to plan upcoming general meetings and to work on the annual report they are responsible for generating. The CAC also strives to maintain a presence at parent and community outreach events hosted by the school district or individual school sites.

The Role of Data

While the CAC does not collect its own data, it does have full access to all SFUSD data surrounding special education enrollment, services rendered, and academic achievement of enrolled students. Specifically, the CAC focuses on annual metrics surrounding special education enrollment by disability category, race, and grade level, as well as the academic gains of students enrolled by school, by race, and by disability category. CAC uses this information to help inform their recommendations to the Board of Education, to the District, and to the community.

Related Documents

- CAC's most recent annual report, submitted to the SF Board of Education in October, 2014
- CAC's official website, which contains old meeting minutes, information about upcoming events, etc.
<<http://cacspedsf.org/cacspedsf.org/Home.html>>