

Albany SEPAC Annual Report to the Superintendent

(Special Education Parent Advisory Council)

2025-2026 School Year



Authored by SEPAC Officers & Committee Members, albanysepac@gmail.com

Becky Zimmerman, parent (Co-Chair)

Mary Nolan, retired CSDA Speech Language Pathologist (Co-Chair)

Charise Parris, parent (Secretary)

Maureen Aromi, CSDA Speech Language Pathologist (Member at Large, Faculty & Staff Representative)

Melissa Baer Bourgeois, past CSDA parent (Member at Large, Community Representative)

Amy Wilson, retired CSDA Special Education Teacher (Member at Large, Community Representative)

Tina Collymore, parent (Member at Large, Parent Representative)

Jason DiNovi, parent (Member at Large, Parent Representative)

Mark Keegan, parent (Committee Member)

Reported within the Areas of Focus in our Mission Statement

[SEPAC Mission Statement, Purpose, and Areas of Focus](#)

1. COMMUNICATION - MEETINGS

District personnel who are not administrators are not named

- Quarterly and planning meetings with the Department of Special Education (3 meetings), where SEPAC shared areas of concern as seen in parent and community input section below
- Annual Meeting with Superintendent Hochreiter, requesting a working group on TA hiring and training and discussing building accessibility for people with disabilities, equal access to speech and language therapy, communication about MTSS services, Magnet

School funds for Special Ed, New York State Dyslexia and Dysgraphia Task Force, and SEPAC advocacy for Preschool Special Ed funding

- Meeting with Buffalo NY SEPAC to discuss possible future collaboration
- Meeting 1/7/26 with Kate Thies, Director of Human Resources, Elaine Griessler, Director of Special Education, and Bridget Dolan, District-wide Teaching Assistant Mentor/Coach to discuss TA Staffing
- Meeting 12/11/25 and 12/22/25 with Elizabeth Morphy, Elementary Humanities / Secondary ELA, Reading & Library Media Instructional Supervisor, to discuss Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, and MTSS
- Dyslexia and Reading advocates, (2 meetings) to discuss the recommendations of the NYS Dyslexia Task Force and the need for structured reading instruction
- Long Island Literacy Coalition (2 meetings) to share information about reading and Dyslexia
- Meeting with NSES Principal and Assistant Principal to discuss TA training
- Meeting with Inclusive Schooling to discuss TA training
- Meeting with Eve Schwacke, Social Work intern at PHES to discuss Master's Degree community service project (an IDD Awareness Resource Fair to be held 8/15/26 at Crossgates Mall)
- Officer Attendance at Equity in Transition Summit by SUNY Albany Division of Special Education, October 2025

2. COMMUNICATION - MEMBER FEEDBACK

- **Concern about difficulty hiring and retaining Special Education Teaching Assistants**
 - Families report the adverse impact on their students from classrooms being understaffed and needing substitutes
 - Staff report feeling burned out from classrooms being understaffed and relying on substitutes
- **504 Plans**
 - Desire that the application process be standardized and equally accessible regardless of building or principal
- **Multi Tiered System of Supports MTSS**

- Want information about MTSS overview and eligibility communicated to all district families in an easy to digest informational format
- Communicate expectations and process for progress monitoring for students receiving MTSS
- Communication about what programs are used for academic interventions in MTSS
- **Desire for training and education for principals in how they can best support special education staff**
 - Principals in all buildings should be knowledgeable about students with disabilities and about how to provide a supportive environment for their special education staff
- **School bus stop-arm cameras (BusPatrol)**
 - Cameras have been installed on all First Student buses, but not on all buses from other companies that transport students with disabilities to out of district placements (Durham, Rejha)
 - Desire to have these cameras installed on all buses that transport students with disabilities to out of district placements
- **Desire for more attention to the 1 in 5 students with Dyslexia**
 - Early screening with a dyslexia screener
 - Certified Orton Gillingham practitioner to oversee intervention
 - Structured literacy reading intervention program used with fidelity for all students at risk of Dyslexia
- **AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) devices for K/1 and other new students**
 - Educate parents that they can request an evaluation for a device and don't have to wait to be offered one
- **ENL Language Line Translators for families of students with special needs**
 - Want to address that the translators from the Language Line aren't necessarily translating what is being said and are adding their own ideas
- **Desire for more attention to inclusion of people with disabilities**
 - It's a challenge to ensure reliable accessibility and positive experience for all students and parents who use our buildings

- Inclusion cannot just be the responsibility of the Special Education Department & Staff
- Desire for the district to build and expand inclusion opportunities

3. RESOURCES

- SEPAC held 6 virtual program meetings during the school year
 - [10/16/25 Program Meeting Notes](#)
 - [11/13/25 Program Meeting Notes](#)
 - [1/15/26 Program Meeting Notes](#)
 - [3/12/26 Program Meeting Notes](#)
 - [5/14/26 Program Meeting Notes](#)
 - [6/11/26 Program Meeting Notes](#)
- SEPAC officers provided support for families
 - Sitting in on eligibility, IEP, and 504 meetings
 - Providing advice and resources to families preparing for IEP meetings
 - Maintaining a Facebook page and website to share resources and information
 - Facebook page, www.facebook.com/albanySEPAC
 - Webpage, www.albanysepac.org
- SEPAC Membership - 91 people; plus 104 on email list; 255 followers on Facebook
- [2025-2026 Balance Sheet](#)
- [Albany SEPAC Bylaws, amended 5/14/26](#)

4. PROGRAMMING EVENTS & PROJECTS

- SEPAC Events & Projects
 - SEPAC held an in-person meet & greet at Albany High School on 10/4/25
- SEPAC hosted our first annual Family Engagement Conference at the Albany Hibernian Hall on 2/28/26
- SEPAC had information tables at AHES Back to School Blast and Back to School Nights at AIA, NSES, AHES, MMS, NAMS, ASH, HMMS, DCS and AHS
- Fourth Annual SEPAC HERO awards
 - SEPAC solicited nominations from the CSDA community and recognized 84 School District employees as Special Education HEROes for excellence in Special Education
 - [SEPAC HEROes Poster 2026](#)

- CSDA Events
 - Autism Fair (3/31/26)
 - SEPAC provided volunteers and an information table at the Autism Fair
- Community Events
 - SEPAC staffed an information table at the City of Albany Department of Recreation Walk for Autism (4/18/26)
- Volunteer Opportunities
 - Available for members at all the above programming
- SEPAC participated with the Special Ed Department in their presentation to the School Board on 2/26/26
- SEPAC has created a new initiative: [Families Seeking Support Staff](#)
 - This program allows District families to hire District staff after school hours to provide respite and community habilitation for children with special needs
 - SEPAC circulated and will maintain a spreadsheet where families may request a worker
 - Family posts are collected and maintained by Albany SEPAC and shared with special education staff

5. ADVOCACY

- Support for Section 504 requests - **ACHIEVED**
 - In response to parent requests for help applying for Section 504 accommodations, SEPAC requested that additional guidance be added to the District's website
 - The district improved the 504 Section of the webpage
 - SEPAC has added a sample letter template to our webpage
- Special Education Teaching Assistants (TAs) - **ONGOING**
 - SEPAC Officers are currently participating in a working group with the Department of Special Education; Bridget Dolan, District-wide Teaching Assistant Coach/Mentor; and Rosalind Gaines-Harrell, CSDA Director of Recruitment, Development, and Retention, to develop policies to improve recruitment, training and retention of District Teaching Assistants
 - SEPAC has sent a series of letters to District Administration requesting more attention and support to address this issue
 - [7/12/26 Letter Regarding the Continued TA Staffing Crisis](#)

- [2/2/26 Follow up Letter Regarding TA Staffing Concerns](#)
 - [12/2/25 Letter Regarding TA Staffing Concerns](#)
- Identification and Support for students with Dyslexia - **ONGOING**
 - SEPAC participated in Dyslexia Advocacy Day at the New York State Capital on 5/14/26
 - SEPAC continues to advocate for Dyslexia screening, a teacher certified in Structured Literacy in every school building, a certified Orton Gillingham practitioner to oversee interventions, and evidence-based intervention for students at risk of Dyslexia
- SEPAC Legislation in NYS - **ONGOING**
 - The SEPAC Advocacy Sub-Committee communicated with Bill sponsors and gathered letters of support for legislation to mandate SEPACs in all school districts in New York State
 - It is expected that work will resume on this legislation ([NYS Bill S7826](#) and [NYS Bill A 8633](#)) in the 2027 legislative session, and SEPAC will continue our advocacy on this legislation
- SEPAC presented 17 statements to the School Board during Public Comment time:
 - [10/9/25: SEPAC - Who We Are](#)
 - [11/6/25: IEPs and the 13 Disability Categories](#)
 - [11/20/25: Specific Learning Disability](#)
 - [12/4/25: Intellectual Disability](#)
 - [12/17/25: Speech Language Impairment](#)
 - [1/8/26: Autism Spectrum Disorder](#)
 - [1/22/26: Other Health Impairment](#)
 - [2/5/26: Emotional Disability](#)
 - [2/26/26: Multiple Disabilities](#)
 - [3/26/26: Hearing impairment, including deafness, Orthopedic Impairment, Visual Impairment, including blindness, Deafness, Traumatic Brain Injury, Deaf Blindness](#)
 - [4/16/26: HERO Awards and TA Working Group](#)
 - [4/30/26: SEPAC Legislation](#)
 - [5/7/26: Reading](#)
 - [5/21/26: MTSS](#)
 - [6/4/26 Dyslexia](#)
 - [6/25/26 Year End](#)

6. GOALS & OBJECTIVES

- SEPAC achieved the following goals this year:
 - Presented our first Family Empowerment Conference
 - Established an Advocacy subcommittee and worked on supporting passage of a bill mandating SEPACs in New York state
 - Presented 17 statements to the School Board
 - Participated with SpEd in their February 2026 presentation to the School Board
 - Requested and was invited to participate in a CSDA working group on Teaching Assistants
 - Secured a grant from Stewart's to support work on a new website
 - Updated and improved our website
 - Recognized and celebrated 84 Special Ed HEROes
 - Supported families with questions about special education and participated in IEP meeting at the request of a family
- Goals that we plan to continue working on for 2026-2027:
 - Continue sharing information on Facebook and SEPAC website
 - Continue offering 1:1 family support
 - Continue to hold a Family Empowerment Conference
 - Continue SEPAC HERO awards
 - Continue statements to the School Board
 - Continue support for Families Seeking Workers
- New Goals and Objectives for 2026-2027:
 - Establish and mobilize SEPAC liaisons at each school building
 - Build out our website with expanded resources
 - Streamline SEPAC operations to ensure ease of handoff for the future
 - Define clear roles and responsibilities for each committee member
 - Create standardized templates for projects
 - Establish a timeline for tasks with specific deadlines

7. OTHER UPDATES

- SEPAC made several administrative changes this year
 - Updated our bylaws to better reflect our operating procedures
 - Clarified expectations for Officers
- SEPAC Co-Chairs participated in MASS Pac Special Ed Summer School
<https://fcsn.org/sepac-summer-school/>