



Effectiveness Training for
Special Education Advisory Committees

Building Local SEACs for
Better Special Education Services and
Student Outcomes

Report of
an Information Survey of Chairpersons of
Virginia's
Local Special Education Advisory Committees

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On February 7, 2005 the Partnership for People with Disabilities (Partnership), in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), mailed the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Information Survey and cover letter to all local SEAC Chairpersons in Virginia (N=134). Respondents were asked to return the Information Survey by February 25, 2005, however responses were accepted until March 31, 2005. The survey consisted of 22 questions pertaining to SEAC structure and operations. A copy of the survey is presented in Appendix A.

A total of 51 SEAC Chairpersons returned the Survey, resulting in a return rate of 38 percent. Chairpersons from every region of the state replied to our request for feedback and information about their local SEAC. Table A details the survey responses by region. A listing of school divisions in each Superintendent's Region is provided in Appendix B.

Table A.

Information Survey Responses by Region

	<u>Possible Number of Responses</u>	<u>Actual Number of Responses</u>	<u>Response rate</u>
Region 1	15	7	47%
Region 2	15	6	40%
Region 3	17	5	29%
Region 4	20	12	60%
Region 5	21	7	33%
Region 6	15	8	53%
Region 7	19	3	16%
Region 8	12	3	25%
Totals	134	51	38%

This report summarizes Chairpersons' responses to the SEAC Information Survey. Section 1 provides a narrative presentation of survey results. Section 2 presents tables of survey results by regions and narrative responses to each open-ended question. Please note that not every survey participant responded to each survey question. Therefore, the number of responses to each question in Section 2 may not total the "actual number of responses" by region listed above in Table A.

Section 1: Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Information Survey

The goal of the SEAC Information Survey was to gain insight into the composition and operating structures of local SEACs. A series of questions were asked to elicit descriptive information about SEAC meetings, members, and methods of doing business.

The survey began with items that requested information about the frequency and convenience of local SEAC meetings. The majority of SEAC Chairpersons (74%, $n = 37$) report that their particular SEAC meets either quarterly or monthly. Chairpersons overwhelmingly state (90%, $n = 45$) that SEAC meetings are scheduled at times that are convenient for all voting members. Those who stated that the meetings are inconvenient responded with quotes that ranged from, "can't please everyone," to "many members cannot attend at the scheduled meeting times."

In order to learn more about the composition of SEACs, information was requested about the numbers of voting members of SEACs and the types of individuals who participate on SEACs. Based on the responses provided by Chairpersons, SEACs have on average eleven voting members. Additionally, the typical SEAC voting membership consists of eight parents of children with disabilities, one person identified as having a disability, and three members from the community at large.¹ Community agencies that are represented as voting members on local SEACs range from non-profit, disability-related organizations such as Centers for Independent Living and local Arcs, to publicly funded entities such as the Department of Rehabilitative Services, Community Services Boards, and for-profit local businesses.

Along with voting members, local SEACs also have individuals who participate as non-voting consultants. Chairpersons were asked to identify who on SEACs participated as non-voting consultants. The majority of these participants (39%, $n = 45$) are identified as Directors of Special Education.

Several survey items concerned the structure and operations of the local SEAC. In response to a question about who chairs their local SEAC, the majority of Chairpersons (69%, $n = 34$) report that parents serve in this role.

Several items requested information about local SEACs' procedures related to the committees' communications with the public. Specifically, Chairpersons were asked

¹ Due to rounding the averages, the average number of SEAC members does not equal the typical SEAC membership composition.

to identify how the public is informed of the occurrence and outcomes of SEACs' meetings. Chairpersons report that the public is notified of SEACs' meetings equally via newspapers (28%, $n = 32$) and school announcements (28%, $n = 32$). Although the public is notified of committee meetings, the majority of Chairpersons (60%, $n = 30$) report that overall public attendance at SEAC meetings is infrequent.

Additional survey questions pertained to communication with the public including items about parental outreach, SEACs' use of the Internet, and the presence of guidelines for responding to public comment. Although the majority of Chairpersons (84%, $n = 41$) report that their SEACs receive public comment, only half of SEACs (54%, $n = 25$) have established guidelines or processes for following up on these comments. Chairpersons state that Parent Resource Centers (26%, $n = 34$) and Special Education Teachers (21%, $n = 28$) predominantly are used to inform parents of the existence of SEACs. Slightly fewer than half of SEACs (43%, $n = 21$) have either websites or links to school divisions' websites.

To acquire information about local SEAC operations, several survey items covered SEAC by-laws, the creation and dissemination of periodic reports/recommendations, and parent involvement in the federal program periodic regulatory process. The majority of Chairpersons (70%, $n = 32$) respond that their SEACs have current by-laws. Overall periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities take the form of either an annual report (40%, $n = 31$) or an Annual Plan review (36%, $n = 28$). The delivery of these reports ranges from oral presentations in public settings, to written reports sent by letter or email. Individuals identified as being responsible for these presentations vary and range from the Directors of Special Education to SEAC members. Chairpersons were also asked if they knew how parents were involved in the federal program periodic regulatory process. The majority of respondents (65%, $n = 32$) indicate a lack of knowledge as to how parents are involved in this process. Chairpersons who express knowledge of parental involvement indicate that parents are involved through many different avenues, including direct participation in site visits and notification through mail or survey.

Section 2: Survey Responses by Region

Question 1: How often does your SEAC meet?

Table 1. Responses Regarding Frequency of SEAC Meetings

	Quarterly	Every Other Month	Monthly	Other
Region 1	1	2	2	2
Region 2	1	1	3	1
Region 3	3	-	-	2
Region 4	3	1	8	-
Region 5	3	1	1	2
Region 6	4	-	3	-
Region 7	2	-	1	-
Region 8	2	1	-	-
Totals	19	6	18	7

Question 2: Does your SEAC schedule meetings at times that are convenient for all voting members?

Table 2. Responses Regarding Convenience of SEAC Meetings

	Yes	No
Region 1	7	-
Region 2	6	-
Region 3	3	1
Region 4	11	1
Region 5	6	1
Region 6	6	2
Region 7	3	-
Region 8	3	-
Totals	45	5

Question 3: What is the total number of voting members on your SEAC?

Table 3. Average and Range of Number of Voting Members on SEACs

	Average Number of Voting Members	Range of Voting Members
Region 1	11	3 - 25
Region 2	11	2 - 17
Region 3	8	5 - 14
Region 4	11	5 - 32
Region 5	10	5 - 19
Region 6	11	8 - 15
Region 7	12	9 - 18
Region 8	5	2 - 7

Averages have been rounded

Question 4: How many voting members on your SEAC are parents of children with disabilities?

Table 4. Average and Range of Parents of Children with Disabilities on SEACs

	Average Number of Parents	Range of Parents
Region 1	10	3 - 25
Region 2	7	2 - 11
Region 3	10	5 - 19
Region 4	9	3 - 26
Region 5	9	3 - 19
Region 6	6	2 - 9
Region 7	6	2 - 12
Region 8	4	2 - 5

Averages have been rounded

Question 5: How many voting members on your SEAC are people with disabilities?

Table 5. Average and Range of Number of People with Disabilities on SEACs

	Average Number of Individuals with Disabilities	Range of People with Disabilities
Region 1	1	0 - 1
Region 2	1	0 - 2
Region 3	1	0 - 3
Region 4	1	0 - 4
Region 5	0	0 - 2
Region 6	0	0
Region 7	1	0 - 3
Region 8	1	0 - 2

Averages have been rounded

Question 6: How many voting members on your SEAC are from the community at large?

Table 6. Average and Range of Number of SEAC Members from the Community at Large

	Average Number of Members from Community	Range of People from Community
Region 1	2	0 - 10
Region 2	3	0 - 7
Region 3	4	0 - 8
Region 4	2	0 - 8
Region 5	1	0 - 3
Region 6	2	0 - 5
Region 7	10	4 - 18
Region 8	3	1 - 6

Averages have been rounded

Question 7: Please list the community agencies that are voting members on your SEAC?

Table 7: Reported List of Community Agencies that Are Voting Members on SEACs:

- Centers for Independent Living
- Local sheltered workshops
- Educational consultants
- Local Arcs
- Departments of Social Services
- Departments of Child and Youth Services
- Departments of Rehabilitative Services
- Community Services Boards
- Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC)
- Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center
- Private therapy groups
- Private schools
- Goodwill Industries
- Departments of Parks and Recreation
- Departments of Court Services
- Disability Services Board
- Departments of Health
- Parent Education Advocacy and Training Center (PEATC)
- PTAs/PTOs
- Civic organization (such as the League of Women Voters)
- Head Start programs
- Early Intervention Programs
- Local advocacy groups
- Medical centers
- Private service providers including: community family services organizations
- Public health nurses
- Police, fire and rescue departments
- Local businesses

Question 8: Who participates on your SEAC as non-voting consultants?

Table 8. Responses Regarding Participation by Non-Voting Consultants

	Director of Special Education	Teachers	PRC Representative	School Board Member	None	Other
Region 1	6	5	5	2	-	4
Region 2	2	-	1	2	-	1
Region 3	4	2	2	-	-	-
Region 4	12	8	6	5	-	3
Region 5	7	2	2	3	-	1
Region 6	8	4	2	2	-	3
Region 7	3	3	-	1	-	1
Region 8	3	1	-	-	1	-
Totals	45	25	18	15	1	13

Others Who Participate in SEACs as Non-Voting Consultants:

- Assistant Directors of Special Education
- Special Education Coordinators
- County specialists for the different disabilities (vision, autism, physical therapist)
- Para-Educators

- Parent volunteers
- Parents of graduated students
- School personnel including principals and school nurses
- Visiting teacher-jail
- Superintendents of schools

Question 9: Who chairs your SEAC?

Table 9. Responses Regarding Those Who Chair SEACs

	Parent	Agency Member	Community Member	Other
Region 1	6	-	-	-
Region 2	3	-	1	1
Region 3	3	-	1	1
Region 4	11	1	-	-
Region 5	4	2	1	-
Region 6	5	1	1	1
Region 7	-	2	1	-
Region 8	2	-	1	-
Totals	34	6	6	3

Question 10: Do members of the public attend your SEAC meeting?

Table 10. Responses Regarding Frequency of Public Attendance at SEAC Meetings

	Often	Infrequently	Never
Region 1	2	3	2
Region 2	-	5	1
Region 3	-	2	2
Region 4	3	5	4
Region 5	1	4	2
Region 6	1	7	-
Region 7	1	2	-
Region 8	-	2	1
Totals	8	30	12

Question 11: How is the public notified of your SEAC meetings?

Table 11. Responses Regarding Method of Public Notification of SEAC Meetings

	Newspaper	Parent Resource Center	School Announcements or Newsletter	Radio	Other
Region 1	5	5	3	-	6
Region 2	3	5	5	-	3
Region 3	2	2	1	-	3
Region 4	7	7	9	-	4
Region 5	5	2	6	-	4
Region 6	6	4	5	1	1
Region 7	2	1	2	-	1
Region 8	2	-	1	-	1
Totals	32	26	32	1	23

Other Ways That the Public Are Notified about SEAC Meetings:

- By mail
- Email
- Website
- School TV station
- Fliers sent home with children
- Monthly with IEP
- Newsletter
- Brochure
- Posters
- PTA announcements.

Question 12: Are the minutes of your SEAC meetings posted for public review?

Table 12. Responses Regarding the Posting of Minutes for Public Review

	Yes	No
Region 1	3	4
Region 2	3	3
Region 3	1	3
Region 4	6	5
Region 5	2	5
Region 6	4	4
Region 7	1	2
Region 8	-	3
Totals	20	29

Places That Minutes of SEAC Meetings Are Posted:

- Exceptional Education Department
- Website
- Parent Resource Center
- School Division Office
- School Board Office
- Newspaper

Question 13: Where do you post/announce a list of SEAC member's names?

Table 13. Responses of the Locations of Postings/Announcements of SEAC Members' Names

	Newspaper	Newsletter	Brochure	Website	Other
Region 1	2	-	2	2	3
Region 2	-	1	3	6	-
Region 3	2	1	1	-	1
Region 4	5	5	3	6	3
Region 5	1	4	3	4	1
Region 6	6	5	2	2	1
Region 7	1	1	-	1	1
Region 8	-	1	-	1	2
Totals	17	18	14	22	12

Other Places Where SEAC Members' Names Are Listed:

- Annual Plan
- Local Education Agency office
- Notebook kept for public
- Office support services
- Parent Resource Center newsletter
- School Board office
- Special Education County guide at library

Question 14: How are parents informed of the existence of your SEAC?

Table 14. Responses Regarding How Parents Are Informed of the Existence of SEACs

	IEP Meeting	Parent Resource Center	Special Education Teachers at Child's School	Informational Brochures	Don't Know	Other
Region 1	2	6	3	4	1	3
Region 2	1	5	1	2	-	3
Region 3	1	2	2	1	1	1
Region 4	5	7	9	6	1	7
Region 5	3	5	3	4	2	4
Region 6	4	6	5	3	-	5
Region 7	2	2	3	1	-	1
Region 8	1	1	2	1	1	-
Totals	19	34	28	22	6	24

Other Ways That Parents are Informed of the Existence of a SEAC:

- Newspaper advertisement
- Back to school night
- Local support groups
- Parent Resource Center workshops
- Other members/parents
- Forum
- Mailings
- Flyers
- Parent liaisons
- School Board meeting
- Website

Question 15: Does your SEAC have a website or a link on your school district's Website?

Table 15. Responses Regarding Existence of SEAC Websites or Links to School Districts' Websites

	Yes	No
Region 1	2	5
Region 2	5	1
Region 3	-	4
Region 4	4	7
Region 5	5	2
Region 6	3	5
Region 7	2	1
Region 8	-	3
Totals	21	28

Question 16: Does your SEAC have current by-laws?

Table 16. Responses Regarding Existence of Current SEAC By-Laws

	Yes	No
Region 1	6	1
Region 2	6	-
Region 3	1	2
Region 4	9	2
Region 5	4	3
Region 6	5	2
Region 7	1	2
Region 8	-	2
Totals	32	14

Question 17: Does your SEAC receive public comment?

Table 17. Responses Regarding the Receipt of Public Comment

	Yes	No
Region 1	5	1
Region 2	6	-
Region 3	1	3
Region 4	11	1
Region 5	5	2
Region 6	8	-
Region 7	3	-
Region 8	2	1
Totals	41	8

Question 18: Does your SEAC have established guidelines for public comment?

Table 18. Responses Regarding the Existence of Established Guidelines for Public Comment

	Yes	No
Region 1	3	4
Region 2	5	1
Region 3	1	4
Region 4	7	5
Region 5	3	2
Region 6	3	2
Region 7	2	1
Region 8	1	2
Totals	25	21

Question 19: Does your SEAC have a process for follow-up to public comment?

Table 19. Responses Regarding the Existence of a Process for Follow-Up to Public Comment

	Yes	No
Region 1	2	4
Region 2	4	2
Region 3	1	4
Region 4	7	5
Region 5	2	3
Region 6	6	-
Region 7	3	-
Region 8	-	2
Totals	25	20

Question 20: In preparing periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities in your school district, what format(s) do you use?

Table 20. Responses Regarding Formats Used for Periodic Reports and Recommendations

	An Annual Report	An Annual Plan Review	An Operating Procedure Manual	Long-Range Strategic Planning	Other
Region 1	5	2	-	-	1
Region 2	6	2	-	-	1
Region 3	1	2	1	-	-
Region 4	8	7	-	2	1
Region 5	4	4	1	2	3
Region 6	6	6	2	2	-
Region 7	1	3	1	1	-
Region 8	-	2	-	-	1
Totals	31	28	5	7	7

Other Formats Used in Preparing Periodic Reports and Recommendations:

- Chair meets periodically with Superintendent
- Letter to Superintendent
- Request via memo or email
- Resolutions
- Testimony at School Board and City Council meetings

Question 21: How are your reports presented to the local school board?

Table 21: Reported List of Method of Presentation to the Local School Board:

- Annual presentation
- Frequent testimonies
- Follow up with liaison from School Board
- School Board meeting
- Both oral and written presentation (oral is televised on local cable channel)
- Report by Director of Special Education and/or Chairperson of SEAC
- Report by Superintendent of Schools
- Copy of minutes sent to Superintendent
- Either through committee reports or Chairperson reports results
- Formal presentation after transmission through email
- In the form of Special Education Annual Plan
- Letter and meeting with Superintendent
- SEAC members speak with the Board and through the Director of Special Education
- Minutes forwarded to School Board members
- Report at regular School Board meeting
- SEAC Chairperson at monthly School Board meeting

Question 22: As the Chairperson of your SEAC, do you know how parents are involved in the federal program periodic regulatory process?

Table 21. Responses Regarding the Existence of Chairperson Knowledge of Parent Involvement in Federal Program Periodic Regulatory Process

	Yes	No
Region 1	3	4
Region 2	2	4
Region 3	1	4
Region 4	2	9
Region 5	3	4
Region 6	3	4
Region 7	2	1
Region 8	1	2
Totals	17	32

Responses Regarding How Parents Are Involved in the Federal Program Periodic Regulatory Process:

- **Comment on Annual Plan**
- **Participate in site visits and federal review**
- **Federal report every 3 years**
- **Input and participation solicited as part of public hearing**
- **Notification by mail, survey**
- **Informed by Special Education Director**
- **Parent meeting for Special Education federal monitoring review**
- **Parents are interviewed and invited to make public comment; review random IEPs**

**APPENDIX A:
SEAC Information Survey**

Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Information Survey

To be completed by local SEAC Chairpersons

We are interested in a description of your local SEAC. When asked to identify a specific number, please provide your best estimate. Otherwise give the most appropriate answer. If you do not know the information requested, you may ask other members of your SEAC or school division for assistance. Please return this survey in the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided.

1. How often does your SEAC meet?

- Quarterly
- Every Other Month
- Monthly
- Other (please specify) _____

2. Does your SEAC schedule meetings at times that are convenient for all voting members.

- Yes
- No, please explain

3. What is the total number of voting members on your SEAC? _____

5. How many voting members on your SEAC are people with disabilities? _____

4. How many voting members on your SEAC are parents of children with disabilities? _____

7. Please list the community agencies that are voting members on your SEAC:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

6. How many voting members on your SEAC are from the community at large? _____

8. Who participates on your SEAC as non-voting consultants? Please check all that apply.

- Director of Special Education
- Teachers
- PRC representative
- School Board Member
- None
- Other (Please specify) _____

9. Who chairs your SEAC?

- Parent
- Agency Member
- Community Member
- Other _____

10. Do members of the public attend your SEAC meetings?

- Often
- Infrequently
- Never

11. How is the public notified of your SEAC meetings? Please check all that apply.

- Newspaper
- Parent Resource Center
- School announcements or newsletter
- Radio
- Other (Please specify)

12. Are the minutes of your SEAC meetings posted for public review?

- Yes
- No
- If yes, where? _____

13. Where do you post/announce a list of SEAC member's names? Please check all that apply.

- Newspaper
- Newsletter
- Brochure
- Website
- Other, where _____

15. Does your SEAC have a website or a link on your school district's website?

- Yes
- No

17. Does your SEAC receive public comment?

- Yes
- No

19. Does your SEAC have a process for follow-up to public comment?

- Yes
- No

21. How are your reports presented to the local school board?

14. How are parents informed of the existence of your SEAC? Please check all that apply.

- IEP meeting
- Parent Resource Center
- Special Education teachers at child's school
- Informational brochures
- Other (Please specify) _____
- Don't know

16. Does your SEAC have current by-laws?

- Yes
- No

Approximate date of last revision

18. Does your SEAC have established guidelines for public comment?

- Yes
- No

20. In preparing periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities in your school district, what format(s) do you use? Please check all that apply.

- An annual report
- An annual plan review
- An operating procedure manual
- Long-range strategic planning
- Other, (please specify)

22. As the Chairperson of your SEAC, do you know how parents are involved in the federal program periodic regulatory process?

- Yes
- No

If yes, how?

**APPENDIX B:
School Divisions by
Superintendent Regions
One through Eight**

Listing of Virginia School Divisions by Superintendents Regions

Region 1:	Charles City Dinwiddie Henrico Petersburg Richmond City	Chesterfield Goochland Hopewell Powhatan Surry	Colonial Heights Hanover New Kent Prince George Sussex
Region 2:	Accomack Hampton Norfolk Portsmouth Virginia Beach	Chesapeake Isle Of Wight Northampton Southampton Williamsburg/ James City	Franklin Newport News Poquoson Suffolk York
Region 3:	Caroline Fredericksburg King Queen Mathews Richmond County West Point	Colonial Beach Gloucester King William Middlesex Spotsylvania Westmoreland	Essex King George Lancaster Northumberland Stafford
Region 4:	Alexandria Culpeper Falls Church Loudoun Manassas Park Prince William Warren	Arlington Fairfax Fauquier Madison Orange Rappahannock Winchester	Clarke Fairfax Frederick Manassas Page Shenandoah
Region 5:	Albemarle Bath Buena Vista Fluvanna Highland Lynchburg Rockingham	Amherst Bedford Campbell Greene Lexington Nelson Staunton	Augusta Bedford Charlottesville Harrisonburg Louisa Rockbridge Waynesboro

Region 6: Alleghany Highlands Botetourt Covington
Craig Danville Floyd
Franklin Henry Martinsville
Montgomery Patrick Pittsylvania
Roanoke Roanoke City Salem

Region 7: Bland Bristol Buchanan
Carroll Dickenson Galax
Giles Grayson Lee
Norton Pulaski Radford
Russell Scott Smyth
Tazewell Washington Wise
Wythe

Region 8: Amelia Appomattox Brunswick
Buckingham Charlotte Cumberland
Greensville Halifax Lunenburg
Mecklenburg Nottoway Prince Edward



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