

Rutherford SEPAG Board Meeting
Friday, May 31, 2024
7:00-9:00 pm

In Attendance: Clara Jamison, Jen DiBella, Nicky Lorenzo, Melissa Gaffney, Emily Marchese
Absent: Rujy Noor

At 7:15pm, Clara called the meeting to order. Each member introduced themselves, shared information about their background and children, and talked about why they joined the SEPAG. Thereafter:

- Clara shared her understanding of the history of the Rutherford SEPAG and how she and Jen came to restart the group along with SPAN Parent Advocacy Net's help.
- Summarized details of first two meetings between SEPAG, SPAN, and potential parent volunteers - How to set up an effective SEPAG and SEPAG's mission meetings.
- **Introduction** of all board members & experience with special education
- **Discussion of SEPAG ByLaws** - The group discussed the SEPAG Bylaws that Clara and Jen drafted for the board. Everyone took a few minutes to review and the board unanimously voted to approve and adopt the new bylaws. Jen noted that we will need to vote every time we update or change the bylaws.
- **Review what makes an effective SEPAG** - Clara shared a document that provides an overview of what makes an effective SEPAG. She asked all of the members to review the document.
- **Join the SEPAG's Facebook and WhatsApp group** - Clara asked for everyone to join the WhatsApp group so that we could communicate collectively.
- **Next Steps:** The group discussed important next steps, including branding, a communications plan, and the creation of a flyer that could be shared with parents. Melissa offered that it might be nice to create a welcome packet for families who are navigating the IEP process. Clara talked about how we hope to create transition documents for families who are navigating transitions from school to school. The group also discussed the need to have a presence at every "back to school night". Clara and Jen asked for a representative for each school to serve as a school liaison. These representatives would liaise with the PTA at their respective schools, and ask to be included in each PTA meeting in order to share updates, assist in any special education knowledge needed, and source members for the SEPAG. The group would like to send out an email to the Principals & PTA introducing each Chair before the end of the year.
- **Out of District** - Emily talked about how excited she was to see that students who were attending schools out of district would be included. She expressed how important it is to create a network for out of district parents and suggested she might host a get-together for parents from town whose children are attending school out of district.
- **Membership** - The group discussed other ways to organically grow the membership. In addition to flyers, Clara and Jen have requested for the SEPAG page of the Rutherford schools website to be updated with a link to the SEPAG website or flyer. Nikky also discussed putting together a communications plan and tracking members via

spreadsheet or other platform. Clara asked members to start sharing this form to any and all special education parents and offered to write an email or text template for sharing. The communications chairs are going to create flyers to share among school, PTA, educational organizations and around town which encourage people to join the SEPAG. Emily mentioned that she, as the founder of the Neurodivergent FB group, will provide us with the list of parents that are in the group to ask them to join.

- **Board Introductions to BOE** - The group also discussed making an introduction to the board of education. There is interest in having a presence at board meetings to assist students with disabilities and lift systemic issues.
- **Recommendations** - Clara recommended that each member join COPAA, which is an organization that provides resources to families and industry professionals. Jen asked if we might want to register for an organizational membership. It was noted that the organization provides a lot of resources and you can ask questions of lawyers and advocates that experts, organized by state.
- **Goals** - Clara shared an overview of Goals for the SEPAG. She created a Google Sheet which details all goals for each section of the SEPAG. Currently the goals included in each sheet are brainstormed goals that need to be reviewed by all board members, and to include any additional goals. Please note that not all goals will be handled at the same time. The plan is to focus on the top 1-5 right now and then move accordingly. Document should be finalized before August's meeting which discusses the entire plan for the 24-25 year. With this being said, the group discussed how each board member will review THE GOALS (under their each respective committee).
- **Fundraising** - Emily discussed that she has a background and fundraising and would love to look for grant opportunities for the district to support students with disabilities. The group discussed that although the committee could not fundraise directly, could lift Grant opportunities for the district and even drafting narrative.
- **Additional Next Steps** - Moving forward, Clara and Jen will meet with each committee to establish the goals and their ideas for their committees. They offered to reach out separately to set up a time. The meetings will be via zoom.
- During the summer, the group will be establishing details for 24-25 school year. The group hopes to meet again in August to regroup and update the organization

At 9:05 pm Jen officially called the meeting to close.