

Merrimack Special Education Support Group  
June 16, 2009

Meeting started at 7:15 pm. Four people were in attendance.

Topic 1: Bedford Parent Support Group.

Barbara Publicover met with members of the Bedford Special Education Parent Support Group to compare notes on practices and results. The Bedford group has similar concerns to ours, in terms of the difficulty of funding events, and not having enough volunteer participation yet. The Bedford group has had more success in getting partnerships with other organizations in the community, but they have nowhere near as much support from their school district as we have in Merrimack.

The Bedford group also is looking for a fiscal sponsor, which would allow it to apply for grants. B. Publicover said she is considering a similar arrangement for MSES. Bedford is meeting with PASE, while Publicover is considering the Parent Information Center.

One attendee suggested joining forces and co-sponsoring an event. Publicover mentioned the fact that they will be having Teresa Bolick as a speaker, which is a speaker she was hoping to get for our group.

Topic 2: Meeting with David St. Jean and Marge Chiafery

Barb Publicover said she has a meeting scheduled with St. Jean and Chiafery to discuss the district's involvement with Merrimack Special Education Support Group in 2009-10. She said she is supposed to bring a list of potential speakers for the quarterly events the district has agreed to host. Several names were raised last month, and this month Joan Celebi, or someone from National Alliance on Mental Illness.

Publicover said she will be presenting our review of the parent survey. One attendee suggested we have a meeting to review the validity of the results once they are available. Last year's results did not come out until this year, so it takes a while, Publicover said.

Topic 3: Improvements for next year

Barb Publicover said she is preparing a survey for distribution on SurveyMonkey.com to ask parents in the district what sort of topics they would like to see at the meetings of Merrimack Special Education Support Group. She then asked the attendees what sort of adjustments the group should make to improve its penetration next year, such as having some morning meetings, having speakers only every other month, etc. One attendee said a meeting without a "topic" would lose the hook to get some people to come.

Publicover then asked for suggestions to promote the group better. Currently we have posters in the library, brochures in the special education offices, notices in the paper about the monthly meetings, and a website. Among the suggestions was to get our brochure included in the beginning-of-the-year packet of information sent home with every student; participate in the open houses; create some sort of promotional item such as a keychain or magnet that people would take with them that would always have the e-mail address. One idea is to compile a list of parents who have been through the "trenches" and could provide advice or mentoring to parents new to the system.

The idea of running the meeting during the daytime drew mixed responses from the attendees. One said it would be a different group of parents, so perhaps occasionally try it.

Publicover asked if the school room was a good site for the meetings. One attendee said it shows the school is supporting the group. This could be a question for the SurveyMonkey. Publicover also asked about the start time (7 pm) and the length (2 hrs), both of which seemed good to the group. One person suggested the Get Set room, which has a physical therapy room adjacent, so if parents had to bring their kids, there would be someplace for the kids to relax. That raised the possibility of offering child care during the meeting for parents who cannot leave their kids at home or who could not participate if the kids attended without other supervision.

One attendee mentioned having a blog, but that would pose the risk of becoming negative and would require oversight.

One attendee mentioned that the links on our website, when they are saved as a “favorite, sometimes just list the site as “home”, because it is the home page of the site being visited. If there were a way to code them so they would show the name of the organization, that would be helpful.

Publicover said we also want to make sure our website gets listed on the district’s website. Currently, all the links we have on our website are listed on the district’s but not actually a link to our site.

Meeting adjourned at 9 pm.