

Merrimack Special Education Support Group
Monthly meeting
March 17, 2009

Meeting began at 7 pm. Approximately 10 people were present at the start of the meeting.

Topic 1: next major event

Barb Publicover(BP) said she met with Marge Chiafery and David St. Jean about the literacy event that was discussed at last month's meeting. BP indicated they seemed interested. There is a reading consultant in the district who could be involved, by the name of Dr. Kim Boothroyd. This project is proposed for May.

BP said Chiafery and St. Jean also supported the other two proposals, a wellness event and a discussion about the medical side of special needs. Both items were discussed as district events for next year.

Bonnie Dunham(BD) from the Parent Information Center said PIC has info on literacy. She mentioned Dr. Carl Cooley, Medical Director at Crotched Mountain Rehabilitation Center in Greenfield, NH, as having being a potential speaker regarding children with disabilities.

BD also mentioned Rick Lavoie as a possible speaker. Rick Lavoie is a nationally known speaker who focuses on self esteem and how kids with disabilities can try to fit in.

BP mentioned that St. Jean wants us to help promote the parent survey the district sends out to all parents of children with IEP's. The greater the response, the more meaningful the data will be.

Topic 2: presentation: Procedural Safeguards

Tricia Swonger(TS) handed out a document she had prepared based on her work with the state organization that revised the Procedural Safeguards (PS). TS said the new document is more readable, but some information that she considers important was left out to keep the total size of the pamphlet reasonable. She included in her handout the information she felt should have been in the pamphlet.

The PS is divided into two basic parts. The first is the IEP process, and the second is the dispute resolution procedures. TS said if the front part of the book goes well for a family, meaning that if the IEP is prepared well and procedures followed, a family will never need to use the second part involving dispute resolution.

BP asked if there were a way for the MSESG to be a resource for people new to the process. Paula Warren, the special education coordinator for James Masticola Upper Elementary School, said she is planning on photocopying our brochures to hand out. BP said parents often are more willing to let other parents know they are overwhelmed than to discuss it with the school officials.

TS then began presenting the information. The first section is on the members of the IEP team, one of which might be the child. The group discussed when it is advisable to include the child. The list of possible members also includes people who are familiar with the child who might be able to provide meaningful information. Parents also are entitled to participate in meetings about the evaluations that form the basis of the IEP.

TS said 504s do not require short-term objectives, so the child can go through the entire year before it is determined they have made no progress. In NH short-term benchmarks are required, but some software used in preparing 504s/IEPs follows the national guidelines and specify that benchmarks are not required.

Discussion of the document continued for more than one hour. [The PS may be viewed in its entirety on the MSESG website.]

Topic 3: upcoming conferences

BP mentioned numerous conferences that are coming up within the next 2 months, including conferences sponsored by the Parent Information Center, NH Connections, New England Inclusive Education, National Alliance on Mental Illness, and a Family Support Conference. BD mentioned the Northern New England Down Syndrome Conference.

At this point, BP asked a new attendee to the MSESG what her motivation was for attending. The attendee said she was looking for more information on the IEP process and terminology. Paula Warren asked the attendee for specifics of what was confusing, because the special education coordinators are working on ways to better explain things to parents new to the process.

The meeting ended, but several attendees remained, discussing issues with others in the group, for many minutes more.