

Merrimack Special Education Support Group
Monthly meeting
January 20, 2009
Location: Merrimack High School, Room 202

Meeting began at 7:00 pm. Approximately 5 people were present at the beginning of the meeting, with several more arriving within 15 minutes. Maximum attendance was 8 people.

Topic 1: "Including Samuel"

Barbara Publicover presented information about the upcoming showing of "Including Samuel," which is scheduled for February 12. The presentation will be held in the High School cafeteria from 7 to 9 pm, and will include a panel discussion with as-yet-unnamed participants. About 90 invitations have been sent out to individuals and groups in the school system, town government and the community.

B. Publicover said we have received grants to pay for the printing, and we are awaiting grants for the food. If these grants do not materialize, then volunteers will be needed to supply refreshments.

[Attendee] suggested having a student on the discussion panel. [Attendee] suggested Curtis Glover, who has given speeches before on the topic of disabilities.

Topic 2: Upcoming meeting topics

Suggestions included a basic explanation of the difference between an IEP and a 504; the new state procedural safeguards: Gateways; response to intervention.

On the idea of basic information for people new to the IEP process, the group discussed their feelings of not knowing what to ask, the fear that the school did not want to offer information or services, what rights they had, having someone there for support so you are not alone when facing an IEP team.

The group also discussed the feeling among home schoolers that they are isolated and do not receive the information and services provided to children/families in the public schools. [Attendee], one of the schools' special education coordinators, said the home school children have as much right to access to Sped services, athletics and after-school programs as the kids in the schools, and the schools do try to make parents of home schoolers aware of that fact. If there is a child with special needs who has never been in the public schools, it is possible the schools do not know of the child's needs, but the child is absolutely entitled to services such as OT, PT, speech therapy, etc

[Attendee], who works for Gateways Community Services and also a parent of a child with special needs, discussed the problem of disabled people being led down a path that leads only to low-level jobs such as grocery bagger. She mentioned Project Search, a program run by St Joseph Hospital in Nashua to help train people with disabilities to do jobs within the medical field.

Discussion also revolved around how to get this wealth of information out to people. B. Publicover presented a document showing many resources available to people with disabilities, prepared by Sheila Demers, Preschool Coordinator for the Merrimack School District. The local cable access TV, preschool groups, PTOs, the home school network, possibly school e-mail databases, Merrimack Friends & Families, the YMCA,

the library etc. Someone suggested flyers because it is easier to grab something to read later than to have to write down the contact info from a poster.

[Attendee] discussed a transitional program coming to town soon that will help parents find jobs for their disabled children. It is a 3-part series that will be held in Merrimack, Nashua and Milford. They will take place from March to May. The program is also for parents of older disabled people, not just transition from high school.

Topic 3: Gateways

Comments by [Attendee] about the transitional program led to a discussion about eligibility for Gateways. The individual must have had a physical or developmental disability prior to age 22. Once deemed eligible, they remain eligible; there is a periodic redetermination that could then render the person ineligible for services if their condition has improved.

Topic 4: The purpose of the committee

Several people discussed the problem of mental health, which often does not present an obvious disability to the outside world. [Attendee] said that many people did not want to come over to test the disability awareness kit she was presenting at the school open house night because they were afraid someone would find out their child has a mental illness.

This led some to ask whether the committee was only about people with IEPs, saying the term "Special Education Support Group" brings that criterion to mind. Some said the committee should not be just about the learning disabled, and others commented it is also about supporting the parents. [Attendee] suggested we get data from David St Jean on the number of kids in the system with each type of disability to determine what topics we should cover.

Topic 5: next meeting

B. Publicover said we would hold our regular meeting on the third Tuesday of next month even though we are also hosting Including Samuel. Some topics proposed include the Logic Model, Response to Intervention, having a school board member come to discuss their role in the process.

For next month, B. Publicover will attempt to have Tricia Swonger discuss the new Procedural Safeguards, as she was involved with the state committee that crafted the revised program.