

SEPAC Statement for BOE, 5/9/24

Good evening,

I'm Beth Cosentino. I live in Maplewood.

I'm President of SEPAC SOMA and I'm here on behalf of the SEPAC SOMA Executive Board. SEPAC SOMA is the Special Education Parent Advisory Committee in the South Orange & Maplewood School District.

The bottom line for all of us is the students, and what do they need to succeed?

- Opportunity & Accessibility. Students who require support, whether it is special education services or a tiered system of interventions... will they have opportunities and access to their free and appropriate public education that is rightfully theirs so that they may succeed?
 - Not if you take away the educators who provide that support, such as a special education teacher, a math interventionist or a school counselor - you are working against those students' success.
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What else do students need to succeed?

- Family Engagement & Accessibility. Research has shown that students who have parents or guardians engaged with their educational journeys will be more successful in school, yet the community parent liaison is being cut.
- Will the English language learners' families have access to be engaged if there is no longer an ELL aide/parent liaison?
- Eliminating these family engagement positions is working against students' success.

What else do students need to succeed?

- Certified Professionals. Such as a school psychologist who has a very specific skill set that cannot be 'absorbed' by anyone else except another school psychologist. We are stretched thin with our child study team members as it is.
- Eliminating someone who is a dedicated certified professional works against students' success.

The choices have been made and some of them will work against students' success. However, I urge you, the SEPAC SOMA executive board urges you, to listen to the teachers and the students and the families and work with us to help those students, bring them to the forefront of your minds and efforts. Make a commitment to those students whose success is now at risk.

Thank you.