

Sept 2024: BACK TO SCHOOL

COMMUNITY MEETING

23 SEPTEMBER 2024 / 7:00 PM / DISTRICT MEETING ROOM

ATTENDEES

35 Attendees, including SEPAC SOMA Executive Board Members and Liaisons; Superintendent Jason Bing, Assistant Superintendent of Special Services Kathleen Gesumaria; BOE Special Education Committee Members Liz Callahan and Will Meyer

AGENDA

7:00pm	Arrive, Sign-in
7:10pm	Welcome & Introductions of Executive Board & Liaisons
7:25pm	SEPAC SOMA's Purpose, Mission, Vision
7:35pm	Special Guests: Dr. Gesumaria & Mr. Bing
7:50pm	Survey Results & Goals for this Year
8:05pm	Upcoming Meetings
8:10pm	Questions, Open Talk
8:45pm	Depart

MEETING NOTES

The SEPAC Board shared our Mission, Vision, Goals, survey results & upcoming meetings.

What is a SEPAC?

A Special Education Parent Advisory Committee serves as a representative body on behalf of students with special educational needs and their families. This is in accordance with the state's special education mandate: [New Jersey Administrative Code 6A:14-1.2\(h\)](#) which states,

“Each Board of Education shall ensure that a special education parent advisory group is in place in the district to provide input to the district on issues concerning students with disabilities.” SEPAC in SOMSD was formed by a group of parents in 2012 and has been parent-led since its inception.

Our Mission:

In collaboration with the district and its commitment to excellence for all of our children, SEPAC SOMA will work for the understanding of, respect for, and support of every student with an Individualized Education Program, a 504 Plan or a special need in the South Orange & Maplewood School District. To that end, SEPAC SOMA will:

- Provide a forum to share and discuss matters of interest for parents or caregivers of students who receive special services.
- Provide input to the Board of Education and district administration on policies, programs and practices that impact students who receive special services.
- Advocate for the continual improvement of the district's programming as it relates to students with disabilities.

SEPAC SOMA's Vision for the 2024-25 School Year is for the South Orange & Maplewood School District to work in a proactive manner for students who need the greatest amount of support by intentionally engaging school and family partners resulting in an inclusive community for all learners.

SEPAC SOMA's 3 Primary Functions:

- Collect data on systemic issues and best practices related to students with disabilities.
- Provide resources and tools to help parents and educators work collaboratively.
- Make recommendations and serve as an advisory partner to the BOE and School District.

SEPAC SOMA Goals, 2024-2025

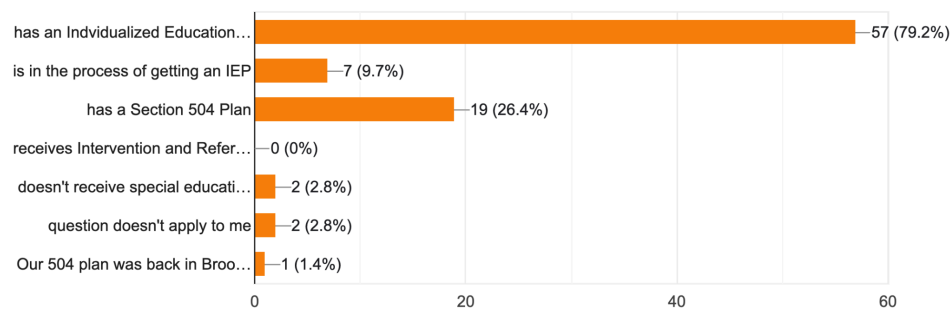
- Increase opportunities for parents to learn how to better support and advocate for their children with disabilities.
- Share information from outside resources on a regular basis.
- Increase the accessibility of information on the SEPAC SOMA website.
- Host meetings for parents to hear from support organizations who assist families.
- Further build relationships with members of our community to learn from them and invite them to share their experiences.
- Cup Chats with: teachers, students, 'veteran' parents.

- Partnership sessions with district & building administrators.
- Caregiver-to-caregiver connections via school liaisons, Cup Chats, community outreach and monthly meetings.
- Provide updates on meetings and share advisory recommendations on a regular basis to the wider community.
- Send a monthly newsletter.
- Share meeting agendas.
- Post meeting notes on the website.

SEPAC SOMA Survey Highlights: 72 responses (so far)

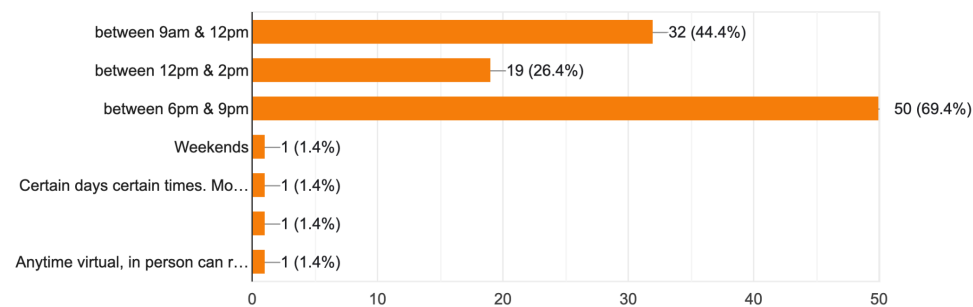
My child/ren ... (if more than one child, check all that apply)

72 responses



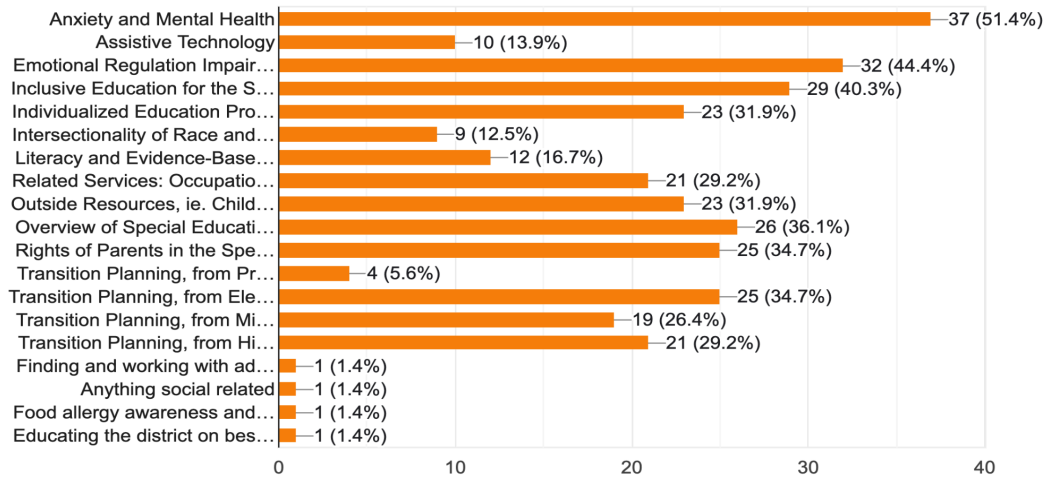
I'm interested in attending topic-based meetings (check all that apply)

72 responses



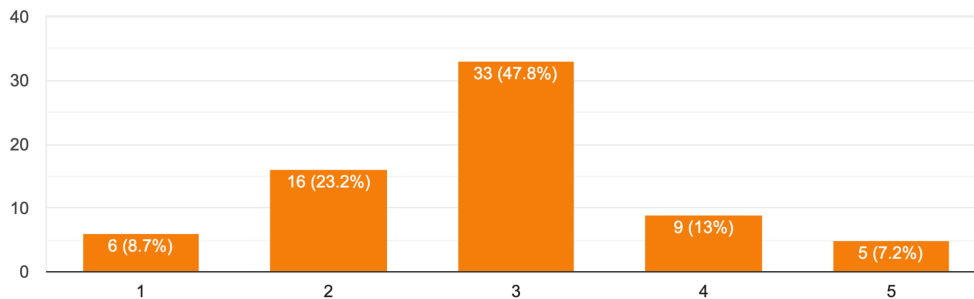
Topics I'm interested in learning more about

72 responses



On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate your experience with the district related to special education?

69 responses



Introductions: Jason Bing and Kathleen Gesumaria

Mr. Bing:

- Shared that the special education audit will be presented on Oct. 15th.
- The following BOE meeting they will share action steps from the audit and present a 3-5 year plan.
- Emphasized the importance of having a strong multi-tiered system of support.
- SOMSD is 2-4% above average classification rates for the state.
- Wants our district to be innovative and a leader in special education in the state

Dr. Gesumaria:

- Discussed her priority to have strong connection and collaboration between departments - C&I and Special Services working together and not thinking of our kids

in silos

- Has made in person visits to almost every school in first 3 weeks
- Wants all teachers to have solid reading toolbox and understand the science of reading
- More Orton Gillingham training
- More professional development (to come from internal staff)

Open Forum

Parents voiced concerns about the following:

- Basic communication not happening - parents don't have communication from case managers or know who their case manager is
- No home instruction at CHS
- PRISE not available in Creole
- No OT assigned to South Mountain
- 504 process - massively challenging to navigate
- Students in self contained classes not feeling a part of their school community
- Students separated from older siblings being placed in different school due to inclusion class not being offered in all elementary schools
- Teachers not having enough support

UPCOMING MEETINGS

October 13 @ 3pm - Cup Chat with BOE Candidates

October 14 @ 7:30pm - Parent Forum: Mental Health & Special Education

October 16 @ 7pm - Now What?! Workshop: College Transition with IEP/504