

Mayor Michael Gonnelli's Statement on Secaucus Special Education Parent Advisory Committee

With the start of the new school year this is a great time to inform you about an important parent group that was formed last year. The Secaucus Special Education Parent Advisory Committee or SEPAC is an organization created to support families of children with unique learning needs. This group encourages parental involvement in children's education and also provides families with opportunities to meet and share information with each other.

The SEPAC was founded last year by Abigail Gonzalez and Ruby Kish, both of these moms have children receiving special education services in the Secaucus School District. The group has grown to include many dedicated, passionate and diverse parents. The SEPAC is much more than a support group. They work together to actively promote the best education for children.

The common thread that brings them all together is their children, who all have either individual education plans (IEPs), 504 plans or are struggling in school. IEP's and 504's are guidelines to support a child's education based on individual needs. These guidelines are adhered to by our educators to ensure the best suited learning accommodations are met for each child.

Studies have shown that the number one indicator of academic success is not socioeconomic status or even income level; it is the degree to which families are involved in their children's education. In addition to working on understanding individual challenges children face, the SEPAC helps to identify systemic issues or other issues that affect all children and bring it to the attention of the Board of Education and the Department of Special Services.

In addition to the educational component, another important aspect of the group is community involvement. This past summer the SEPAC was instrumental in creating the first inclusive summer camp program and they organized many unique events to allow SEPAC parents and their children to meet and socialize.

The SEPAC is a great way for families that are in need of understanding and gain support for their children to connect with others. I am happy to have been a part of the events and meetings to see first-hand the difference the SEPAC makes for families in the schools and community.

SEPAC meets monthly as a group but would be happy to work individually with families. They are always available to answer questions confidentially or direct you to the appropriate resource. SEPAC members meet on the second Thursday of every month, at 145 Front Street. There will be an open house on October 9th at 7 pm where families could familiarize themselves with the SEPAC members and the SEPAC goals and mission. We are very fortunate to have supportive groups in town that are willing to assist children and families.

I encourage you to attend this informative event and learn more about this beneficial organization. As they say, "Behind every child who believes in himself there is a parent who believed first." Be the parent that believes.