

Special Education Parent Group Meeting Minutes 1/29/16

The meeting began with a welcome from Superintendent Dr. Downs. He gave a brief update on some state legislative issues and is looking forward to working with this group and our legislators to make sure Indiana gets the best possible legislative outcomes for all children, including making diplomas accessible and the reauthorization of the federal education law IDEA. Information can be found on the Indiana Department of Education website to follow the status of important education issues at: www.doe.in.gov.

Attendees introduced themselves and then the Guest Speaker, Jan Labas, was introduced. Jan. is the mother of five children, three of whom have special needs. She is a resident of SACS and has been a lifelong advocate and is a retired family leadership specialist. Jan can be reached at: steelerfanjan@aol.com with any further questions. She shared some things she wishes she knew 30 years ago, including:

1. What you don't know may not hurt you, but it sure doesn't help. It is helpful to know about your child and their condition, but be open to other information. Set short and long-term targets. Keep balance in your life and remember this is your journey.
2. Being organized is not over-rated. Find a system such as an accordion monthly file and use it to keep track of papers. Keep a phone log notebook by the phone and put information on calls in there as they happen. Having a list of acronyms printed and even laminated with your notebook can be useful.
3. What on earth is out there? You are probably not the only one dealing with your child's condition and it is helpful to get support and information from other sources. Using the waiver for family support and respite can help you be a more effective parent. Turnstone is a great resource here in Fort Wayne.
4. You do not need a suit of armor for an Annual Case Conference meeting. Parents/guardians are a part of a team and each team member has important information to share to work toward the best possible solution for each child. Children can learn to be self-advocates and more involved in this process as they get older.
5. Support groups are not crying couch sessions. Support groups are an opportunity to share, both the hard times and the celebrations. It is also important to not forget about your spouse and the other siblings in the family so that all members of the family are supported. Sibshops can be an opportunity for siblings to get support.

Director of Special Education Roxanne May gave an update on some legislative issues. She distributed two papers: US Department of Education "Key Policy Letters Signed by the Education Secretary or Deputy Secretary" and the 1/5/16 list of legislative priorities of the Indiana Council of Administrators of Special Education. This organization's website is: www.icaso.org.

A recent event in the district was the "Champions Together" exhibition basketball game at

Homestead High School. This is a partnership with IHSAA and Special Olympics that student leaders at Homestead have initiated and hope to expand.

There was discussion about how to increase awareness of this new parent group. Some ideas were email lists, texts, getting on the district events calendar, and a Facebook page. Volunteers are needed for these ideas and to take minutes, help set agendas, manage the parent group e-mail, etc. Those interested in contributing can send an email to: specialedparentgroup@gmail.com

There was also discussion about having a Special Education Staff Appreciation Week in conjunction with Disability Awareness Month in March.

Brochures from the new IPFW Bridges Program were available, and a representative from that program will be at the next meeting.

The next and final meeting for the 2015-2016 school year will be on 4/29/16 at 12:30 – 2:00 p.m. in the district transportation/maintenance building conference room.