

SECAC Follow Up with Parents for TH Meeting: 2/4/25

On the Call: Alicia Baines, Tanisha Wooten, Brandie Valentine, Samantha Dawson-Williams, Janie Payne, Jamie Anfenson-Comerau, Lisa Wilson, Genevieve Jennai, Jen Gaegler, Ayo Bello

Town Halls came about to give parents a voice in an open forum regarding Special Education in the county.

IEP Process in Social-Emotional Wellbeing – IEP noncompliance was topic of previous THM – we are meeting today to hold the county accountable and see what actions are around it.

Regarding the Last THM:

What Worked:

- One parent did receive a survey and she told the truth about how she feels

What Did Not Work:

- Some things were not communicated regarding the purpose and objectives and when people could expect to hear a follow-up
- A survey should have been announced for parents to be on the lookout for “what’s next”
- The language used to describe it being a “town hall” was unclear; the PGCPs staff were “walled-off” from the parents; “ownership culture” as if they own the process; feels “us” against “them” Taxpayers own the IEP process and we need to make them understand it is a partnership. We need to use this word and “collaboration”; there is an adversarial undertone; we need equal involvement: For example, Supt. Millhouse held a town hall. The digital platform has limitations and this community needs explicitly that same opportunity.
- Not effective; seems like the parents only have a platform to complain; takes away from the meaning of the law and the process – we deserve a THM that is not censored and unchanged; there needs to be accountability
- We are all on. The parents are asking one thing but not getting the true replies – it feels like it is edited. Seems more high-level and not concrete answers. The survey, for example, is something that is not being communicated to those who need to get them.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

- the county is not holding schools accountable for noncompliance
- Sharing some stats made it seem exactly like there is a lot of issues and the county is defending their actions, not being proactive
- there is something non-authentic about the survey – they are purporting it is a great tool, but not replying to what the results are. What does it do??

Superintendent Millhouse refuses to have an in-person meeting with SpEd parents; the culture is set at the top – lacking true collaboration and mutual trust

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-the culture of PGCPs has a deeply rooted problem when it comes to transparency; I asked my daughter every day if she saw a SE teacher – she said no. There was no response from said person in the building; daughter was not receiving services; the school lied until trust is broken; the money is not going to its intended purpose

Suggestions for IEP Noncompliance:

- Allow parents who have the skillsets to come in and help
- Refund parents the \$70 for fingerprinting for the criminal background to those who cannot come into the school to assist in the classroom, only for field days and field trips
- Implement clear consequences for non-compliance
- IEP non-compliance escalation process: develop clear tiered system where non-compliance incidents are reported and addressed immediately
- Corrective action plans: require schools that repeatedly fail IEP audits to submit detailed compliance improvement plans
- Legal accountability measures: ensure that failure to provide services result in compensatory education or additional support for affected students
- Hold administrators accountable- require school leaders to submit quarterly reports and conduct annual reviews on IEP adherence
- Teacher disciplinary actions: if a teacher is found repeatedly noncompliant, there should be mandatory training and, if necessary, disciplinary action.
- Annual school IEP report cards: publicly share schoolwide IEP implementation data to hold schools accountable
- Websites need findings publicly addressed
- Address staffing issues and resource gaps by reducing SE caseloads- cap the number of students each SE teacher is responsible for to ensure individualized attention
- Increase support staff, hire additional paraeducators and SE aides to assist in classrooms
- more teacher training for substitute teachers; ensure that substitutes are aware of and adhere to student IEPs
- Adequate AT funding: increase funding for necessary assistive technology, such as STT software and specialized learning tools
- Expand SE Services to ensure students do not have to be transferred out of their home schools due to resource shortages
- Bringing up the number of complaints from one family when sharing statistics was uncalled for. Each case seemed to be minimized
- Strengthen parent and student involvement by offering workshops that teach parents how to track their IEPs progress and navigate dispute-resolution options
- IEP coaching for parents: provide 1:1 IEP coaching sessions where parents can ask questions about their child's plan
- Student self-advocacy training: offer programs that teach students how to understand and advocate for their own IEP rights
- IEP Progress reports: require schools to send monthly progress reports on IEP goals in plain language format
- Parent-Teacher Advisory committees: create a district-wide advisory group where parents and teachers collaborate to improve IEP implementation

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- Utilize technology for IEP tracking:
 - o IEP digital dashboard: create a centralized system where teachers log accommodations, service minutes, and student progress
 - o Automated compliance reports: set up an alert system to remind staff of upcoming service deadlines, review dates, and doc requirements
 - o Electronic sign-off on IEP services: require staff to document when services are delivered with a timestamp
 - o Mobile-friendly IEP monitoring app: develop an app for teachers to check IEP compliance in real time while in the classroom
 - o Parent access to progress data: Allow parents to log in and view real-time updates on their child's accommodation and service minutes
- Enhance communication and collaboration
 - o IEP implementation meetings: require teachers and service providers to meet at least once a quarter to discuss student progress
 - o Shared IEP summaries: provide general education teachers with a simplified summary of each student's accommodations and modifications
 - o Collaboration logs: require staff to maintain a log of all communication related to student IEP implementation
 - o Parent-Teacher communication portals: use a digital system where parents can track their child's IEP progress and submit concerns
- Improve Monitoring and Accountability
 - o Regular IEP audits: conduct quarterly reviews of IEP implementation at each school to ensure compliance
 - o Random spot check reviews: have district-level administrators perform unannounced classroom visits to ensure accommodation is provided as required
 - o Teacher compliance checklist: implement an IEP compliance checklist teachers complete and submit monthly
 - o Performance evaluations tied to IEP compliance
 - o Dedicated compliance officers at schools to monitor progress and compliance
 - o Whistlerblower reporting system: allow staff and parents to report non-compliance anonymously
- Strengthen training and professional development
 - o Mandatory annual IEP training
 - o Scenario-based training
 - o IEP Goal writing and implementation worksheet
 - o Specialized training for general education teachers
 - o Parent training program
 - o Online learning modules that are easily accessible
- NEXT STEPS
 - o Conduct an IEP compliance gap analysis to identify current barriers to effective implementation
 - o Develop a 3-year compliance plan for a structured approach
 - o Engage parents and stakeholders in planning
 - o Pilot a digital IEP tracking system in select schools

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- Report progress publicly
- Do not assume people are uneducated because of where they live
- Collaborate with Frederick County to see what's working for them
- Public Information Act shows the money is not going to our SE students

Suggestions for Next TH Meeting; TOPIC: Social Emotional Support

- Parent countywide/pilot program: Parents volunteer during recess for children to facilitate --
 - teach leadership, sharing, collegiality, how to win and lose, and how to celebrate each other.
- What challenges do students face emotionally in and out of school?
- How does school climate impact wellbeing?
- What support systems have been helpful?
- What gaps exist in service and interventions
- Add live polling to the meeting
- How are they building emotional resilience in schools?
- PGCPs should step up to be an example of the state, not hide behind legislation
- Have townhalls where breakout groups and PGCPs leaders engage with the parents

Questions:

- What are we trying to accomplish? What changes are being made? What is the action behind it?
- How do we hold the schools accountable for what they say they are going to do? There seems to be no follow-through.
- How are we tracking action items? Implementation plans?
- Is there a list of schools that implemented the survey?

Feedback for SECAC?

- We have to be louder; no one knows we exist!
- Have partnerships with other secac groups
- Presentation at special interest group meetings
- Summer event with community
- Text messages and reminders to provide updates
- Coffee Chats
- School traveling meeting – visiting 10 schools over the course of the school year to share information about SECAC
- Have Meet n Greet
- Partner with libraries to put the word out
- Fliers in the school at front desks
- QR code with information
- Bring in a high-powered individual to support the cause

We need healing for the parents who are not getting what is needed. Support group?

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Checkout: One thing you appreciated about the meeting:

- We were able to speak our truth and not be censored
- Safe space
- Transparency of the group is a plus – everyone able to speak and get thoughts out
- This was psychologically safe space to share; there are few people who understand individual journeys and being able to share the experience that offers authenticity
- One of the biggest parts of change is showing up!

From email sent by Janie:

Check-in: I regret not being able to attend tonight's discussion, but I am Theresa Smith, parent of two PGCPs Special Education students. I thank you all for allowing my input to still be shared.

General Reactions: I believe the town-hall went well overall. The structure provided me with an opportunity to hear from others and different perspectives/experiences, in a structured manner. A concern that I had was related to a suggestion that complaints be filed for parents who posted in the chat about a concern they had (I received one). Ideally, parents have a right to their dispute resolution options. However, in today's climate and anticipated changes with the Department of Education, certain dispute options may not be in the family's best interest. I personally believe it's better to alert/remind families about the procedural rights document for MD.

Ideas for the County: Considering the violations that are occurring with the District, some of the optional trainings, should be considered as mandatory for staff (i.e. accommodations: selection, implementation, and evaluation); Competency should be measured with the trainings, if it's not already done; Collaborate with local college programs to get interns to assist with some of challenges outlined.

Future Townhall Suggestions: Would it be possible to have someone from financial operations to discuss the proposed budget and whether there are direct implications to the Special Education Program? Also, how can parents advocate beyond the school walls for the things that we need in our District? Lastly, a more deep dive about the procedural violations vs. substantive violations.

Feedback for SECAC: Has it been determined if the information presented on slide 28 are systemic concerns or are they isolated to certain schools who have repeat violations? (I personally believe it would be good to know more about the information that is within this data and what is being done to address it holistically.)

I would like SECAC to be present in forums where topics are being discussed that impact the special education population. I also would like to see SECAC initiate changes to and engagement on policies/procedures (as well as any Bills that would impact our servicing population).