

## SEAC

Questions	Answers
<p>How did SEAC include diverse parent input across disabilities, socioeconomic, geographic zones, etc. beyond the SEAC members and meetings when the changes were being discussed?</p>	<p>Discussions regarding special education programming during SEAC are centered around all students with disabilities. The co-chairs at SEAC work diligently to attract all parents to be active through the council by communicating where meetings are located, distributing flyers, and recruiting at school events.</p>
<p>What does SEAC think the greatest risk is to implementing the new changes to the autism special education services successfully?</p>	<p>From SEAC co-chairs:  MPS has a long history of poor implementation and follow through of new initiatives, so we all have difficulty with trusting any change. SEAC has concerns that this initial impetus to make these changes successful and effective will be undermined by subsequent bureaucratic or budgetary decisions and/or by new leadership that would reduce support for special education and result in problems like: 1) reducing the number of SEAs; 2) reducing the number of DPFs and/or diluting their focus on ASD by adding to their workload in other areas; 3) increasing SERT caseloads again; and/or 4) failing to maintain aggressive training efforts. After the initial push on training staff on ASD and inclusion we are concerned it won't continue and turnover will mean lots of untrained staff. Any or all of these potential reductions in services could result in possibly worse outcomes. In addition, SEAC has concerns that the school culture shift of embracing all students who walk in the door as an integral part of a school population, will not happen as quickly or as comprehensively as it needs to. Change is difficult.</p> <p>The reason SEAC supported many of these changes is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Parents have long requested, even begged, the district to make it more possible to send their students to the same community schools that their siblings attend with their friends and neighborhood acquaintances. Parents with students at different schools have struggled with work schedules when they have wildly different school start and end times, transportation struggles, isolation, difficulty navigating multiple administrations, and struggles to attend conferences and meetings and concerts at different schools that all happen on the same nights.</li> <li>2. Two special education reviews conducted by outside consultants highlighted the high rate of segregated settings and high rate of Level 3 students. We had more than a decade of complaints from parents about the lack of flexibility, individualized approach, and responsiveness of the current system. Change had to happen!</li> <li>3. ASD service options were often presented as "all or nothing" where, if your high achieving</li> </ol>

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student did not participate in social skills programming (whether or not he or she needed it), then he or she would not be granted SEA academic supports. Disability types (ASD, served by SERT, etc.) defined what services your student got access to, like SEAS, instead of the need being determined by the IEP. There was poor gradation of services: if your ASD student started to flounder in mainstream, he or she was then offered a significantly less rigorous coursework in a segregated setting – sometimes so much less rigorous that students were watching movies, going on field trips, and participating in sheltered workshop activities, rather than working on academics, gaining skills, and earning credits toward graduation.

4. There were insufficient (and sometimes non-existent) outcome measures for elements of the ASD program (like the social skills program), many IEP meetings were not being conducted well, and transition services were not being implemented soon enough.
5. Students in citywide programs were overly segregated from the rest of the school populations, citywide programs tended to be located in large, high poverty schools further limiting how involved ASD students could be in their own community, and the “separateness” of those programs made it too easy for district officials or principals to jettison those programs from their school whenever the district redrew attendance boundaries, closed schools or underwent any other changes.
6. And because the schools didn’t “own” the programs, it was too unwieldy for families to get help or make complaints. Principals would often tell parents to talk to the district if they had any complaints, and the district was often not familiar with what was going on at the school. In addition, this lack of a sense of ownership led some principals not to track the performance of special ed staff, so problem staff maintained their employment, even in the face of highly problematic performance. If I had to articulate one point, it would be the lack of follow through by incoming administration. We can't expect to see meaningful change immediately. We need to stay committed to the vision, keep tweaking the supports so they work for individual students, and not let everything be dictated by past processes, and budget.