

**St. James Parish Special Education Advisory Council
Annual Report – May 2023 for School Year 2022-2023**

St. James SEAC Members for 2022-23:

1. Senecca Boudreaux – Director of Special Education (Council Chairperson)
2. Tammy Templet – Principal (Council Note Taker)
3. Dr. Melissa Roussel, Ph.D. – Parent
4. Roxanne Washington – Parent
5. Donna Arceneaux – Parent
6. April Cole – Parent
7. Madeline Young – High School Student
8. State Representative Ken Brass – Other Stakeholder
9. Renee' Frye – Representative from Entity that Serves Families of Students with Disabilities

General Meeting Information & Highlights:

St. James Special Education Advisory Council (St. James SEAC) met on the following dates in person at the St. James Parish School Board Office:

Thursday, October 13, 2022

Thursday, December 8, 2022

Thursday, March 16, 2023

Monday, April 24, 2023

Positive outcomes from 2022-2023 St. James SEAC committee members:

- Resources for students and parents were identified and shared by Bayou Land Families Helping Families representative
- Parents were shown how to access the Special Education Departments tab on the district's website to locate information applicable to students with disabilities
- St. James Parish Government Recreational Administrator invited the St. James SEAC to share any ideas that will help his department make the recreational parks more handicap accessible
- Parents were given the opportunity to learn about the programs offered by Opportunity Now and to seek out how students can participate in the programs to build functional and life skills.
- Ideas to promote Inclusive Education evolved
- SJP first annual Special Olympics was promoted
- A desire was expressed for the district to hold Parent Workshops
- Resources were shared to assist families of students with Autism

October 13, 2022 Meeting Minutes:

The following members were present: Senecca Boudreaux, Tammy Templet, Dr. Melissa Roussel, Roxanne Washington, April Cole, Donna Arceneaux, Madeline Young, Ken Brass, Renee Frye

Senecca Boudreaux welcomed all parents and shared a presentation that included:

- An overview of the advisory council including purpose for SEAC
- Procedures for public comments
- Introduction of the 2022-2023 SEAC Members
- The special education monthly newsletter
- The special education tab on the district's website
 - i. Special education survey
 - ii. Child search policy
 - iii. SEAC meeting dates, email address, and agendas
 - iv. Copy of the Rights of Parents with Children with Disabilities

Renee Frye gave an overview of Bayou Land Families Helping Families

- History of the program through ACT 378
- Peer to Peer Support
- Education in Training
- Information resource outreach

Dr. Melissa Roussel shared concerns regarding Community and School Awareness and Involvement through board discussions

- Concerns about special needs students not shown equally on district website
- The community lacking arts for special needs students (dancing, art classes)
- The need to get companies and businesses to support for increased opportunities
- School to Work Programs
- Buddy Buddy System to support some special needs students

On motion by Ken Brass, seconded by Tammy Templet and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 7:04PM.

December 8, 2022 Meeting Minutes:

The following members were present: Senecca Boudreaux, Tammy Templet, Dr. Melissa Roussel, Roxanne Washington, Donna Arceneaux, Ken Brass, and Renee Frye. Absent members were: April Cole and Madeline Young.

Senecca Boudreaux, Council Chairman, welcomed all parents and guests in audience. Then the Chairman

- reviewed the public comments procedures
- reviewed the SEAC process
- asked each member to introduced themselves to the audience

The Chairman opened discussion on old business, which included the continuation of a discussion from the 10/13/2022 SEAC meeting.

The Chairman recapped on the previous agenda item discussion in which council member Dr. Melissa Roussel shared concerns and recommendations regarding community and school awareness and involvement, concerns about special needs students not being shown equally on district website, and the community lacking arts for special needs students.

The Chairman noted that the St. James Parish Recreational Administrator and Opportunity Now representatives were invited to the meeting this evening to address concerns and share available resources in reference to this previous discussion. The Chairman introduced Brent Dicharry, St. James Parish Recreational Administrator.

Brent Dicharry shared a presentation about making the districts' recreational parks more accessible to children with special needs. Sport programs for children with special needs such as Special Olympics, Buddy Baseball and Buddy Soccer were also recommended by council members Ken Brass and Dr. Melissa Roussel. Brent Dicharry extended an invitation to the council to meet with him to share any ideas that will help his department make the recreational parks more handicap accessible. The Chairman thanked Brent Dicharry for his participation in the meeting and thanked council member Ken Brass for inviting him.

The Chairman then introduced representatives from Opportunity Now. Kemya Babers, Erin Champagne and Rod Washington, representatives from Opportunity Now, shared services offered to youths and young adults with special needs such as life skills, study skills, motor and engagement, school, college and work transition. They also shared information about Project Create, in which they collaborate with our local businesses to hire students with disabilities. Dr. Melissa Roussel suggested that Opportunity Now join forces with the Capable Arts Program. The Chairman announced that discussions will begin soon to have Opportunity Now extend

their mentoring program to 4th-6th grade students. The Chairman thanked Opportunity Now for their participation in the meeting and for the services they provide to students in our schools.

The Chairman opened discussion on new business.

A district agenda item, which included information on funding for cameras in Self- Contained classrooms was shared. Funding, that does not expire, was awarded to provide cameras. Procedures and policy are in process for utilization and will have to be approved by the school board. One parent has requested the installation of a camera in a self-contained classroom.

There were no Parent Agenda Items on the agenda.

The Chairman introduced a Council Agenda Item requested by council member Dr. Melissa Roussel for discussion on Programming versus true Individualized Education. The floor was opened for discussion.

Dr. Melissa Roussel shared concerns in regards to students with Individualized Education Plans receiving more programmed type of education instead of individualized education that will meet individual needs. Dr. Roussel stated that programs like iREADY and aimsweb are not as individualized as a student's Individualized Education Plan. The Chairman explained that iREADY and aimsweb are used in the district as progress monitoring tools to help measure students' growth and to drive instruction. The Chairman also explained that progress monitoring is necessary for accountability. Council Member Tammy Templet shared that iREADY is a prescriptive program that helps to identify a student's strengths and weaknesses, and it provides prescriptive lessons to address student's needs. The discussion ended with the Chairman sharing that there are some issues with the delivery of specialized instruction, which is affected by many issues such as the teacher shortage and the hiring of non-certified teachers. The Chairman stated that training on the delivery of specialized instruction will be her top priority.

The Chairman acknowledged that there were no public comments requested.

The Chairman asked for any closing comments from council members. A positive closing remark was made by Dr. Melissa Roussel about receiving four robo calls in regards to tonight's SEAC meeting. The Chairman thanked Opportunity Now, Brent Dicharry and all parents/guests in the audience again for joining tonight's meeting. The next meeting date was shared with the audience along with the council's email address to send any agenda items for the next meeting.

The Chairman asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. On motion by Ken Brass, seconded by Tammy Templet, the meeting was adjourned at 7:06pm.

March 16, 2023 Meeting Minutes:

The following council members in attendance were Senecca Boudreaux, Tammy Templet, Roxanne Washington, April Cole, Donna Arceneaux, Madeline Young, Renee' Frye. Members who were absent included Dr. Melissa Roussel Ph.D. and Representative Ken Brass. Members of the council went around and introduced themselves. Ms. Senecca Boudreaux mentioned there were two additional council members not in attendance.

A review of public comment procedures was given by Senecca Boudreaux. She also mentioned that there would be one final Special Education advisory meeting in April.

A review of the SEAC process was given by Senecca Boudreaux. Senecca Boudreaux explained the goal of the council, she mentioned that there were 9 members, members serve on the council for one year, and SEAC meets 3-4 times per year.

Senecca Boudreaux announced there was no old business that needed to be discussed, so the meeting progressed to new business.

Senecca Boudreaux opened the floor for new business by introducing Carson Phills, Unified Champion Schools Manager. Carson Phills presented the purpose and goal of the Special Olympics. One goal of the Special Olympics is to expand to focus on community, and district levels and to provide a higher frequency of activities outside the Olympics event. He explained that the Special Olympics was a sports organization but was a service organization first. The Special Olympics currently offers 14 unified sports and will be adding 2 additional sports soon. Athletes can compete on district, state, national, and international levels. He discussed inclusive youth leadership as an important component of Special Olympics. Inclusive youth leadership includes opportunities provided to the students off the sports field. Whole school engagement was also discussed as an important part of Special Olympics; he gave examples of dress down days in support of various disabilities. He stated that all programs and initiatives are free. He left booklets for anyone wanting more information to take. He presented a video featuring Ponchatoula High School, which was recognized with an ESPN Honor Roll Award. The video lasted 5 minutes. The video showed how the school practices inclusive practices through the buddy program, gardening, and unified sports. He ended his presentation by offering his help to enhance initiatives that have already been started in the district, and asked for questions.

Questions that were presented to Carson Phills were:

Is the Special Olympics only for students enrolled in school? (by Donna Arceneaux)

Yes (Carson Phills)

Is the Special Olympics primarily focused on the students with Intellectual Disabilities? (by Tammy Templet)

Yes (Carson Phills)

What is the focus on the program offered for younger children starting at age 2? (by Tammy Templet)

The young athletes program focuses on jumping, running, and other activities. (Carson Phills)

Senecca Boudreaux mentioned some inclusive planning taking place in our district at Paulina Elementary. One of the speech therapists and PE teachers are seeking opportunities through grant funding to add inclusive equipment to their playground so all students can have equal access. A council member then welcomed the Special Olympics to St. James Parish.

Senecca Boudreaux announced that the 1st annual Special Olympics will be held May 5, 2023 at St. James High School. The goal of this event is to provide special education students, who have the most significant disabilities, an opportunity to participate safely and successfully in athletic activities. Permission slips were sent home for the Special Olympics. The event will be open to the public, and she encouraged family members to attend. She explained the Olympics will consist of 4 events: a 50 meter run, 200 meter run, softball throw, and long jump. The events will be led by the APE teachers. St. James High School's softball team will be assisting with the event. Letters about the event are going to be sent to community organizations and businesses. St James High School's media team will be covering the event. Everyone in the Special Olympics will be a winner; all students will get a medal. The council members selected the Special Olympics T-shirt design following the meeting. There were no questions concerning the Special Olympics.

There were no parent agenda items. Senecca Boudreaux announced the email address that parent agenda items could be sent.

Senecca Boudreaux announced the following council agenda items for discussion:

- How can the needs of students with specific learning disabilities be better met in the General Education Classroom?

The council spent a lot of time discussing this particular topic. The consensus of the group was that parents need help making informed decisions during IEP meetings. Parent training was suggested by several of the council members. Senecca Boudreaux led the council members in a discussion of the importance of using accommodations and modifications to help keep students participating in the general education curriculum, rather than pulling them out. Tammy Templet mentioned the importance of parents advocating for their children, and how as a principal she always welcomes questions posed by parents. Madeline Young mentioned how her special education teachers support her in the general education curriculum. Senecca Boudreaux gave a question for council members to reflect on, have we as an IEP team exhausted everything to help children be successful within the general education setting before

alternatives are considered? She also discussed that the parent is a member of the IEP team. Seneca Boudreaux discussed the importance of addressing both the students' strengths and weaknesses. She explained that we do not want a student to lose an identified strength because we spend all of our time focusing on an area of weakness. She discussed that Louisiana has high expectations for students with disabilities. We believe that all students can learn, and IEP goals should be both ambitious and attainable.

- What are the challenges our students with disabilities face when it comes to the state's accountability system?

Tammy Templet discussed the new literacy screener for K-3rd graders that is required by the state. She mentioned that this is challenging for some non-verbal students. Seneca Boudreaux explained that the state now mandates that students with certain disabilities be given the chance to take the assessments with accommodations outlined in their IEPs. The score of zero cannot just be given to a child because they are non-verbal, instead their speaking devices should be utilized to the best of their ability. Seneca Boudreaux explained that the state requires all students to be assessed. She explained the difference between the LEAP test and LEAP CONNECT test. She explained the importance of having high expectations for all students.

- What kinds of resources and/or training would be necessary for the parents of students with disabilities to support the students at home?

Council members agreed that parent workshops, and resources offered by Bayou Land's Families Helping Families could help students at home.

Seneca Boudreaux asked for public comments. Kasi Graver confirmed that there were no public comments' requests for any of the agenda items.

Closing remarks were made by each of the attending council members.

The meeting was adjourned on March 16, 2023 at 7:10 pm.

April 24, 2023 Meeting Minutes:

The following members were present: Seneca Boudreaux, Tammy Templet, Dr. Melissa Roussel, Roxanne Washington, April Cole, Renee Frye, and Madeline Young. Absent members included State Representative Ken Brass and Donna Arceneaux.

Seneca Boudreaux welcomed all parents and shared a presentation that included:

- An overview of the advisory council including purpose for SEAC.
- Procedures for public comment.
- Tonight's meeting is focused on Autism Awareness.

Seneca Boudreaux opened discussion on old business:
None

Senecca Boudreaux opened discussion for new business.
None

No SEAC emails received with agenda item requests.

Council Agenda Items:

- Presentation from LASARD presented by Julie Riley.
- Presentation from Grace Behavioral Interventions presented by Ciji Dupre.

Public Comments:

None

Closing Remarks:

- Council members gave their overview from their experience this past year.
- Senecca Boudreaux invited the council members to our Special Olympics for recognition.
- Next school years applications for Advisory Council will be available at Special Olympics.

On motion by Madeline Young, second by Dr. Melissa Roussel and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 7:15PM.