

Kelly Meissner
Parents' Place of Maryland
801 Cromwell Park Dr, Suite 103
Glen Burnie, Md 20161
410-768-9100

November 25, 2013

Good afternoon,

My name is Kelly Meissner and I am the chair of the Special Education State Advisory Committee. I wear many other hats in the special education arena including sitting on the Howard County Special Education Community Advisory Committee, working for the Parents' Place of Maryland, the Statewide Parent Training and Information Center funded by the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and most importantly I am a parent of Ashley, a 19 year old young woman with severe multiple disabilities who attends her local high school in Howard County.

I am here today because I wanted to make sure that you are all aware of the many ways that special education departments in the local districts and at the state level receive information and advice. Each county and Baltimore City has a Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee that is made up of parents, school personnel, and community members. Each local SECAC is run a little differently but their role is the same and that is to advise the local school system of unmet needs as to the education of children with disabilities, assist the local school system in the development of plans for improving the performance of students with disabilities and use local information and data to determine focus issues. All of this is required in COMAR.

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) requires that each State Education Agency establish an advisory committee as well. This advisory committee is made up of 51% parents but also there are some specific roles that are required like a representative from a public policy agency, someone from department of corrections, someone who serves the homeless, someone from Department of Human Resources, an administrator from a local school system, someone from an institute of higher education, a representative of a non-public school, a specialized education, a general educator and the State Parent Training and Information Center. We are required to try to ensure that we our committee is representative of the demographics of the state of Maryland to the greatest extent possible.

The work of the SESAC includes studying and commenting on the State Performance Plan (SPP) and the Annual Performance Report (APR). The State Performance Plan includes indicators that the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) asks each state to report on. These indicators include looking at graduation and dropout rates, suspension and expulsion rates, student participation rates and achievement on statewide assessments, where students are educated, also known as Least Restrictive Environment or LRE, and disproportionality among many other topics. We also have the opportunity to explore topics like common core and the PARCC Assessments or graduation rates and what students are doing after they leave school and we have access to the expertise of the Department of Special

Education to be able to ask questions, explore data and advise the department, specifically the Assistant Superintendent.

In my role with the Parents' Place of Maryland my colleagues and I are often invited to sit on committees and workgroups. At Parents' Place of Maryland most of us are parents of children with disabilities and we also keep a great amount of data on why parents call us, the types of issues they need help with and we offer lots of training around issues related to special education topics. We work collaboratively with the department of Special Education and share our data and experiences freely.

The department is very appreciative of this data and is able to use it to help provide parents with more effective information and trainings around topics or interest.

I thank you for your time and I appreciate your attention to the way that parents and the community are involved in improving special education across the state.