



Action Alert #6

Special Education Advisory Panel Members Dismissed

February 26, 2024

In a shocking development, the entire membership of the Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) was dismissed this past Friday night via email. In the generic and unsigned email, SEAP members were thanked for their service on the panel and informed “we may be moving in a different direction with the seat you have held”.

Advocates across the state have been sounding the alarm since this unprecedented move unfolded, citing concerns the panel may be restructured to fit the agenda of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and not the needs of students with disabilities. This dismissal has left the state without a federally required functioning advisory panel responsible for advising the State special education staff regarding the education of eligible children with disabilities.

Advocates are encouraged to share their thoughts and opinions about this move and attend BESE's Academic Goals and Instructions committee meeting next Tuesday!

More information about this issue can also be found in the Additional Information below.

How to Take Action

1. **Email or call** your BESE member and the at-large BESE members before the Board committees begin meeting on Tuesday, March 5th.
 - [Click here](#) for BESE members' contact information.
 - Don't know who your BESE member is? Click [here](#) for a map of the BESE districts.
2. **Email** the Louisiana State Superintendent of Education, Dr. Cade Brumley, who is responsible for appointing SEAP members, at cade.brumley@la.gov.
3. **Attend Yellow Shirt Day** and share your thoughts before the Academic Goals and Instructions Committee ([Agenda](#)).
 - **WHEN:** Tuesday, March 5th at 9:00 AM
 - **WHERE:** Claiborne Building – Louisiana Purchase Room 1-100
1201 North Third Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70802

With your comments, please include your name, address, phone number, email address and the issue you are addressing. If you plan to attend Yellow Shirt Day, need help preparing your testimony, need a yellow shirt or want to find out about carpooling options, contact your [LaCAN Leader](#).

The meetings will be live streamed on BESE's [website](#) and their [YouTube Channel](#).

Additional Information

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that each state establish and maintain an advisory panel whose purpose is to advise the State special education staff regarding the education of eligible children with disabilities. Federal law also recognizes the importance of the people most impacted by education policies by requiring a majority of SEAP members be individuals with disabilities and parents of students with disabilities. Federal regulations ([34 C.F.R. §300.169](#)) and SEAP [by-laws](#) define responsibilities for each state panel as follows:

- Advise the state on unmet needs in the education of children with disabilities,
- Comment publicly on any rules and regulations proposed by the state regarding the education of children with disabilities;
- Advise the state in developing evaluations and reporting on data as required by federal special education laws;
- Advise the state in developing corrective action plans for U.S. Department of Education; and
- Advise the state in developing and implementing policies relating to coordination of services for children with disabilities.

At the January 2024 BESE meeting, the Board directed the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) and BESE staff to provide an updated report regarding the membership of BESE and LDOE advisory groups at the March 2024 Academic Goals and Instruction meeting with a specific request to review appointed members to SEAP. This eventually led to the email in question on February 23rd dismissing all SEAP members and canceling the March meeting. The email also stated applications would be open March 7th with the next SEAP meeting happening in June.

Dismantling SEAP membership and canceling their upcoming meeting raises many concerns for advocates. What sort of messaging is BESE and the LDOE sending to stakeholders? There was no indication panel membership would be dismantled leaving our state without a federally required advisory panel. All members of this panel were thoroughly vetted based on SEAP's selection process and appointed by the state's Superintendent of Education. Given this vetting process, why are the members no longer fit to serve the remainder of their terms? Our state is also about to begin its regular legislative session where many new and updated education laws will be proposed. Unfortunately, session will have ended and laws will have passed before the "new" SEAP panel has its first meeting.

Considering the needed work around policy changes to address issues flagged in recent LDOE audits, is now the best time to "move in a different direction"? The panel's most recent work was around Bulletin 1706: Regulations for Implementation of the Children with Exceptionalities Act, regarding written monitoring, evaluation, and procedural safeguards, which will also be discussed next week at the BESE meetings. SEAP had lengthy discussions on these issues at their January meeting. They recommended changes around:

- Posting results of local education agency IDEA monitoring,
- A 15-day response timeline for parent request for a special education evaluation or independent education evaluation (IEE),
- Providing a draft Individualized Education Plan (IEP) not less than 3 school days prior to the IEP meeting upon parent request,
- A 15-day timeline for prior written notice, and
- Adding available medical information and student disciplinary and behavioral records to information reviewed by IEP teams before changing placement due to violation of student code of conduct.

While these recommendations are a step in the right direction, much work still needs to be done around Bulletin 1706.

The former SEAP panel was also planning to discuss LDOE's plan of activities to support and monitor school systems using about \$24 million in special education (IDEA - Federal) dollars. LDOE just sent out a [survey](#) to collect stakeholder input on their upcoming IDEA Grant Application. This survey is set to close on March 6th, and SEAP was planning to discuss the proposal and the feedback collected in the survey. Typically, SEAP is the first stakeholder group that provides input on this grant application. Without this stakeholder input, will LDOE be submitting an IDEA application that hasn't been vetted by special education stakeholders?

Confirm Your Action

- Email your [LaCAN Leader](#) after you take action
- Why confirm your action? This helps the Council know how effective we are reaching you with important information and engaging members across our state in advocacy for systems change.

Tips & Tools for Advocacy

Looking for tips and tools to help you in your advocacy? Check out the Council's [Advocacy 101](#) page. You can also find tips for:

- [Writing/emailing your legislators](#)
- [Calling your legislators](#)
- [Writing your story](#)

Contact Us

LaCAN is an initiative of the LA Developmental Disabilities Council. If there are any questions about the information in this email, contact the Council by replying to this email, or calling the toll free number listed below:

phone: 1-800-450-8108

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