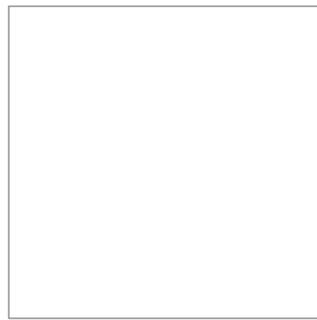


Guide to Greater Inclusion



Wake PTA Special Education & Inclusion Committee

www.wake-seic.org

www.facebook.com/wakeseic

Dear Local Wake County PTA Leaders:

We, the Special Education & Inclusion Committee of Wake PTA (also known as Wake SEIC), are excited about the opportunity to introduce ourselves to this year's new leaders and to reacquaint ourselves with those with whom we have worked with in the past. We are also excited to announce a few new initiatives we have planned for this year.

We are expanding our efforts to reach out to local PTA's to start conversations about inclusion and support for special-needs students and families. We are improving our on-line presence by updating our website, creating electronic newsletters and keeping our Facebook page active. (If you haven't liked our Facebook page yet, you can find us at www.facebook.com/wakeseic.) We will continue to provide quality workshops on special education topics and represent our committee on the Special Education Advisory Council.

As part of our expanded initiative to reach out to local PTA's, we will be producing "tip sheets" listing ways to make participation easier for special-needs families at common PTA-run events and programs. We will be posting tip sheets under a special heading on our website called *PTA Support* and distributing them by e-mail as they are developed.

WCPSS has 170 schools and almost 150,000 students. It also has over 20,000 children enrolled in Special Education Services. That's over 13% of the entire population.

Every school in WCPSS has a child who receives special education services. These students are either in mainstream classes with limited support, to children who spend part of their day in mainstream classes and part in special classes and others who are in these rooms the majority of the day. While the regional programs are not at every school it is important to know that these children are part of your school's family and want to feel welcome.

In this guide you will find information on how to access the resources we offer and how to start a conversation with your special-needs community about how to create accommodations that allow greater participation in your programs.

We look forward to working with you to make this a fantastic year for your PTA.

Sincerely,

Kia Slade

Chair, Wake SEIC

seic@wakepta.org

What is Inclusion?

If you are the parent of a school-age child, it is likely your child interacts with children with special needs on a regular basis. Students with all sorts of disabilities and challenges are in our schools, and they are part of our school community.

Federal law requires that schools educate students receiving special education services with their regular-education peers as much as possible. However, these students often are not included in activities outside of the classroom, such as those organized by school PTAs.

This exclusion isn't on purpose. While teachers have special training on how to accommodate the needs of special-education students, PTA organizers do not. In addition, most parents of special-needs children don't participate in the PTA because their children are not included in PTA activities. So there's no one at the PTA meetings to help organizers create activities that include all of the school's students.

It's an unfortunate cycle, and one that the Wake County Special Education Inclusion Committee wants to break. What we ask of you is to Tell Your Community about Wake SEIC, Include Special Needs in Your Planning and Include Special Needs in Your Parent Outreach

Wake-SEIC is here to offer guidance and resources to PTAs throughout Wake County. Our goal is to have a committee member in every school and ensure that member is active in the PTA.

We invite everyone who is involved with Wake County schools—teachers, administrators, and parents (even if you don't have a child with special needs)—to join our Google group and like our Facebook page. That way you can find out about upcoming workshops and events, as well as inclusion efforts in Wake County and around the country.

So what is inclusion? It's building a school community of which every student is a part.

Wake SEIC Resources

Our Website

www.wake-seic.org

On this site you will find a wealth of resources to support special-needs families as they navigate through Wake County's special education services. There are also many links to community resources geared toward providing assistance to special-needs families.

Our website also contains the *PTA Support* tab that contains information on how PTA's can better engage and include special needs families. Expanding this section is one of the main initiatives we are undertaking this year. Feel free to add a link to our website on your own website.

Our Google Group

This is a forum for posting information about news stories, resources, and upcoming events. This group is also used to discuss threads on topics concerning special education and inclusion in Wake County Schools and Wake PTA.

To join, send an e-mail request to *wake-seic+subscribe@googlegroups.com* or click on the "join our list serve" link on our website.

Our Facebook Page

www.facebook.com/wakeseic

On this site we post links to current news, upcoming events, and other useful information. We are new to the Facebook arena and are having fun watching our timeline grow.

Services We Provide

Our Newsletters

Wake SEIC will continue to produce newsletters for distribution at the school level. These newsletters cover special education topics affecting Wake County students and highlight upcoming events. We sent out newsletters quarterly.

Our Workshops

Wake SEIC holds several workshops for special-needs parents each year. We select topics that will resonate with the community at large. Each year we partner with the Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC) to host an Individual Education Plan (IEP) information session. Over the past two years we have partnered with local schools to host special-needs workshops on topics in which the schools have expressed interest.

Our PTA Support Communication

We've made it a goal to have a liaison at every local PTA in the county. A liaison serves as the point of contact for distributing and receiving information to and from the school's PTA and parent communication avenues (PTA newsletter, website, etc.) The liaison also serves as a resource for all of the local PTA committee heads as they brainstorm on inclusion ideas. Communication goes two ways between the liaison and Wake SEIC. We hope that each liaison will ask us to help fill needs at the local level by developing new guidance programs or by co-hosting workshops.

How does a local PTA establish a liaison? Wake SEIC defaults to the PTA President as the contact for each school. Some PTA's have chosen to create a special committee to head this effort. This is allowed under the current Uniform By-Laws. Other PTA's have chosen to add this position to the advocacy committee. Still others simply asked for a volunteer PTA member to serve as liaison. It's up to each local PTA to decide which method is best for them. Until a liaison is designated, we will send all communication to the PTA president.

Special education and special needs are daunting even to those of us who live it every day. We do not expect local PTA's to become experts in special education law, how special education is delivered in the WCPSS, or how to make appropriate accommodations. That's why we have compiled all the great resource we offer. Please use them, and please let your members know that the resources are there for them to use as well.

Please pass along the information we provide to your liaison by adding it to your parent communication.

How to Get Started

Start a Conversation with the School

Usually the PTA establishes a good working relationship with the principal, vice principal, or both. Start by asking your contact for the best way to open a chain of communication between the PTA and the school's special-needs community. Remember that the special-needs community includes children in special classrooms and children in mainstream classrooms who receive special education services. The principal might want to be the main point of contact, or he or she might choose to put you in contact with a special education teacher at the school.

If you have not already met the special education staff at your school, now is a good time to introduce yourselves. Reach out to teachers in special education classrooms and resource rooms. Also, reach out to your school's many support teachers. Your school may have a speech therapist, occupational therapist, autism support teacher, behavior support teacher, and other special-needs support staff. Special-needs children often participate in literacy programs and ESL programs as well. Including your school's support teachers in your outreach is another way to open lines of communication.

Special Note about Discussing Special Needs

The privacy laws that govern health matters private between you and your doctors also apply to keeping special needs private between the student and the school. It is important that you never identify a child's disability or the fact that they receive special education services. It is important that you never directly discuss a diagnosis. It's entirely okay to say something like "We have several students with autism in our community" but not to say "both Jane and Susan have children with autism". When discussing a need you could say "We have a student who has trouble managing the stairs", but it would be wrong to say "Johnny has CP and has trouble with climbing stairs".

The laws that govern disclosure are rigorously enforced in the WCPSS – as they should be. Therefore, your school cannot give you a list of students with special needs. Your school staff can distribute material directly to those identified with special needs without sharing the identities of those students with the PTA. Parents can volunteer information about their child's diagnosis, but the PTA may not pass that information along to anyone without express written consent.

Host a Meet & Greet for Special-Needs Families

A Meet & Greet serves many purposes. It allows special education staff and administration to introduce themselves to the parents of the children they serve. Special education staff members are often not available at a school's Open House, and even when they are, many special-needs families cannot navigate the chaos of these events. Those who do might not have enough time to visit everyone on their child's education team.

The school PTA can use a Meet & Greet to open a dialog about how to make accommodations to allow greater access to their programs. One school might serve a higher population of students with autism while another might other serve a higher population of children with visual impairments. Each school's make-up of students with special needs is different, so it's important to know your community. This is also a great time to recruit a liaison if you don't already have one. The most important reason to host a Meet & Greet is to let the special-needs community know that they are included in your PTA programming.

Some ideas for a successful Meet & Greet are:

- Work with your school administration to send invitations to all special education students and staff.
- Advertise in your PTA newsletter, list serve, and/or website.
- Keep it simple – morning coffee in the library, dessert one evening, etc.
- Invite the school staff to provide information about how special education services are delivered in the school.
- Offer a tour of your school's resource rooms and the special education classrooms.
- Provide note cards for parents to exchange their information and encourage them to support each other outside of school.
- Use this opportunity to highlight your school's and your PTA's special education initiatives. So many of our schools are doing wonderful things – from creating buddy programs to sponsoring Special Olympic student/athletes. If you are one of them, toot your own horn. You deserve it!
- Open a dialog between special-needs parents and your PTA. Ask for advice on appropriate accommodations or needs a PTA program can support at the school. Solicit volunteer help from the parents. Let them know that they are needed.