

A collaboration between the CSDE, SERC and CPAC



Special Education Youth Advisory Council

Cohort III Webinar

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Background

The Special Education Youth Advisory Council has been designed to increase student involvement in the special education process and to help students develop strong, effective leadership skills in order to make positive changes in their school and community.



Our hope...

Is that this Special Education Youth Advisory Program will reach students who may not have experience in student leadership roles and or may need assistance developing their self confidence.



Purpose of the Program

Create a structure in which students with disabilities (middle and high school) can share their special education experiences and increase their capacity to make informed decisions regarding their educational programming;

Increase public awareness of the valuable role that student voice and increased student independence, can play in the lives of students, families, and communities; and

Inform the Special Education Bureau on issues that are important to special education students.

Special Education Youth Advisory Council

Cohort I (year 3)

- Milford
- West Hartford
- Bloomfield
- Rham HS
- Simsbury
- Suffield

Cohort II (year 2)

- New Britain
- Easton-Speech Academy
- Bozrah
- Wilton
- Middletown
- Clinton
- East Hartford
- Suffield*
- Simsbury*
- West Hartford*

*Added an additional second cohort of students

Some highlights from 2018-2019

- ❖ Over 165 students participated in the program and all of the 13 districts have signed on to continue in 2019-2020.
- ❖ Students shared that the youth advisory council helped them feel more confident and more comfortable advocating for themselves.
- ❖ Students said that they decided to continue participating because they felt it allowed them to connect with other students and gave them a voice.
- ❖ One student shared that, after attending the symposium, “I will be speaking up for those with mental or physical disabilities who may not have a voice or is afraid to speak up. I want to serve as a voice for all students”.

Highlights (continued...)

- ❖ Some students created mini “TED talks” and presented at the Symposium to a room of over 220 people!
- ❖ One student participated over the summer on a panel during a PPTLI series, sharing her perspective on the PPT process and how to improve it.
- ❖ Students provided feedback and suggestions for the IEP document revisions.
- ❖ Based on feedback, in 2019-2020 students will have the opportunity to share their voice with staff members at their schools through facilitated conversations and/or presentations.



Scope of Program

The district will be able to select up to 15 students.
Students will participate in:

- ❖ Student Focus Groups-onsite/in-district
(up to 2 hour time commitment).
- ❖ Student Leadership Training Sessions-onsite/in-district
(up to 3 hour time commitment).
- ❖ Student Symposium will occur on May 7, 2020 at Central Connecticut State University (approx. 7 hours)



Student Focus Groups

Student Focus Groups

- ❖ Take place between November and May
- ❖ Up to 15 students per focus group
- ❖ Up to 2 hour time commitment

The purpose of the focus group is to obtain student voice and get feedback from students about their overall experience in school.

Student's responses and names will not be used and/or identifiable in any report of these focus groups. And student's name will not be used in any reports. Group interviews may be recorded and those records deleted after they have been reviewed.

A staff member from the school will also be present during the student focus groups.



Examples of focus group questions...

How can teachers/adults help foster your independence?

What is the best teacher you have had? Why were they the best?

Do you feel like an equal member of the PPT?

If you could design your own PPT what would it look like? Who would be there? How long would it be?

How do you ensure that your disability doesn't define you as a student?

Are you motivated in school? What would help with your motivation?

What is something positive about your school? What could your school do to better meet your needs?
Student needs?



2018-2019 focus group student response samples

What does special education mean to you? What can be done to improve special education services?

- We receive extra help and accommodations to help us.
- Be aware of the stigma and the perception of what it means to be a student receiving special education services.

Things to improve:

- Misunderstandings, misconceptions, stigmatism, labels:
 - “People think we have it easy and that our work is easier.”
 - “SPED is misunderstood.”
 - “I don’t tell people I have an IEP.”
 - “GenEd teachers don’t understand, they need to know more about SPED and disabilities.”
 - “Students need to learn more about disabilities.”



2018-2019 focus group student response samples

Do you know what an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is? Do you know the purpose of the IEP? Are you familiar with your plan?

- IEP's have goals and objectives

Things to improve:

- Awareness, Participation, Implementation:
 - “We (students) want to have input.”
 - “We want to be part of PPT process.”
 - “Feel like I need to carry my IEP around with me so teachers know what my accommodations are.”



2018-2019 focus group student response samples

How can you tell adults in the building care about students?

- “When teachers have relationships with students it helps to keep us motivated in school.”
- “Teachers actions, it’s the little things; asking how you are, check in on you.”
- “When teachers read your IEP.”
- “Some of the adults and teachers are our advocates.”

Things to improve:

- Adult/student relationships:
 - “Some teachers talk down to us.”
 - “Some teachers call us out publicly.”



Student Leadership Training Sessions

- ❖ Take place between January and May
- ❖ Same students who participated in focus groups
- ❖ Up to a 3 hour time commitment

Through the Student Leadership Trainings, students will discuss the following on both a personal and systemic level:

- Identity and Culture
- Equity and Diversity in Education
- Team-building and Leadership Skills

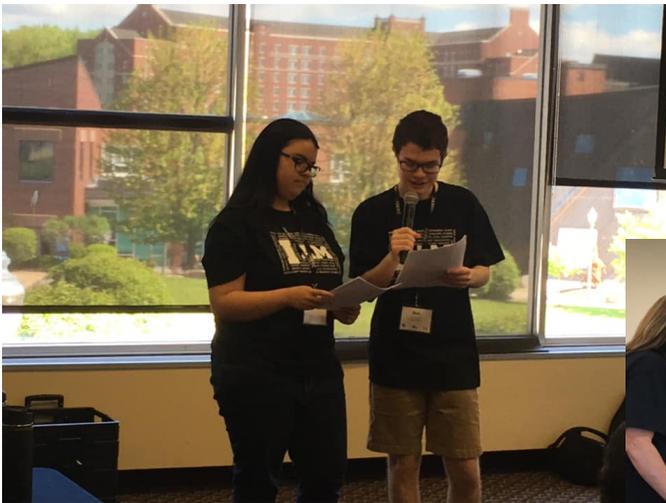


Student Symposium

- ❖ Date: May 07, 2020
- ❖ Location: Central Connecticut State University
- ❖ Time: Approximately (up to) 7 hour time commitment
- ❖ Who: Students who have participated in Focus Groups & Student Leadership Trainings
- ❖ Chaperones: Two (2) per student group
- ❖ \$250 Transportation Stipends will be available

During the Symposium, students will have the opportunity to continue building their leadership, self advocacy, and teambuilding skills, as well as work with students from around the state on creating an “Ideal School”.

From our Student Symposium...





Application Requirements

- ✓ The district/student(s) has demonstrated an interest in the program.
- ✓ The district/student(s) has demonstrated an ability/willingness to commit to all components of the program.
- ✓ The district supports student self-advocacy, self-determination, student independence.

APPLICATION DUE DATE:

October 25, 2019



Application Questions

Describe why the district/student(s) is/are interested in participating in this program. In your response, please include why you think it would be beneficial to your student(s)?

Does the district have a student (leadership/advisory) group in place that garners student voice? If so, please describe this group. If not, would you like information/resources on this topic?

Describe some initiatives that the district has engaged in related to student independence. (Example: Student led PPTs, Process for fading Adult Assistance, Student governance structures, Surveys/advisory groups, etc.)

What steps do you take to engage students in the PPT process?

Number of students interested in participating in the program?



Selection Criteria

SERC will review all applications. Based upon current capacity to support the 2019-2020 Cohort III school districts, a limited number of applicants will be selected. It is the intent of this program to represent student voice from the six (6) educational regions of the state. The application requirements, as well as the terms and conditions identified throughout this document, will be considered as part of the selection process.



Additional Information:

Sample parent letter and permission slips are available.



Plan for 2020-2021

- Continued collaboration with organizations to align efforts and increase efficiencies.
- Review, Reflect, Refine.
- Increase student input into the design of future programming.
- Expand Capacity and Offerings for Students
 - Opportunity for students to participate in various PD opportunities.
 - Work toward development of statewide student advisory council.
 - Develop a “best practice” document based on student feedback about “what works” to help them be successful in school.



What questions do you have?





Application information and questions may be directed to:

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