

January 3, 2018

Charter schools have been a hot topic of conversation amongst SFUSD parents this school year. CAC members believe that charter schools aren't necessarily bad. In fact, we have some great charter schools in San Francisco* that offer robust and individualized learning environments for students. As parents of students with IEPs, the biggest concern of CAC members surrounding charter schools is accountability.

California state ed code mandates "Special Education Local Plan Areas" (aka SELPAs) which are responsible for providing special education services in a particular area. In San Francisco, we are a large enough school district that we are our own local plan area. Each SELPA must have a parent advisory group, or Community Advisory Committee (aka CAC), consisting predominantly of parents. This is one of the accountability mechanisms built into the system: the CAC has to sign off on the district's special education local plan and budget before they are submitted to the state. We ask a lot of questions and hold working groups with the leadership team before signing off on either the plan or budget.

San Francisco charter schools have the choice of joining SFUSD's SELPA. Many have chosen to join the El Dorado Charter SELPA, a charter school-specific SELPA in El Dorado County, east of Sacramento.

The SFUSD CAC meets monthly (with the exception of July and December). District Special Education leadership team members attend our meetings. We have a parent education component at each meeting; topics this school year have included "Teaching Your Student to Self Advocate" and "Transition for College Age Students." Our meetings are held at Support for Families on the fourth Thursday of each month from 6:30 to 8:00 PM. We sponsor a Coffee Chat from 5:45 to 6:30 so that parents can bring specific concerns and address them individually with Special Education Supervisors. We provide interpretation services and child care (with advanced reservation), and serve a light dinner.

The El Dorado CAC, in contrast, meets three times per year via webinar. Meetings are held on Tuesday mornings from 9:00 to 10:00 AM.

SFUSD CAC members collaborate regularly with district leaders and participate in many district-level committees. We attend Board of Education meetings (as well as committee meetings) and comment regularly on matters important to students with disabilities.

Charter schools opting out of the SFUSD local plan area and creating their own SELPA 150 miles away with limited opportunities for parent participation effectively removes parent oversight. The SFUSD CAC has serious concerns about any organization that does not provide robust opportunities for parent involvement and oversight.

A few local charter schools* are members of the SFUSD SELPA. If you are a charter school family, we encourage you to find your SELPA and CAC. Ask lots of questions about service delivery models as well as oversight and opportunities for parent involvement.

Whether your student attends a public or charter school, we encourage all parents to join us at our meetings to understand how we hold our district accountable. We look forward to seeing you in 2018.

Questions? Contact the CAC at cacspedsf@gmail.com

*Charter schools participating in the SFUSD SELPA:
Creative Arts Charter School
Gateway High School and Middle School
Leadership Charter High School
Life Learning Academy Charter