



# QUICK FACTS

## Tips for Parents to Participate in a Decision-Making Group

Even if you have not previously served on a decision-making group, it is never too late for parents to get involved. Parents belong at the decision-making table where important conversations happen, and action plans are discussed that impact student learning and development.

The following are practical tips and strategies to participate in decision-making groups, such as Special Education Parent Advisory Groups (SEPAGs), school reopening task force, PTO/PTA, school improvement teams, County Councils for Young Children (CCYC), early childhood, health advisory, bi-lingual, Title 1, or literacy committees. Use these tips to guide and empower you on your leadership journey.

### Explore opportunities to make a difference by becoming a part of a decision-making group in your school district either as a member or a leader:

- ☀ Ask what groups or committees currently exist that would benefit from families' input. Review their mission statements, purpose, and goals and make plans to attend the next meeting to learn more about their work and how to get involved.
- ☀ Consider whether a particular group has the authority to address issues you deeply care about before joining the group. For example, SEPAGs provide input on issues concerning special education policy, programs, and practices. To learn more about SEPAGs, see [What are the Results of an Effective SEPAG?](#)
- ☀ If there is no active group that works on topics that are meaningful to you, consider starting a new group. Contact a Parent Group Specialist from the START-EPSP Project for assistance with starting a parent group in your school district or community <https://spanadvocacy.org/programs/start/contact/>

### Become familiar with the processes groups use:

- ☀ Gather and organize information on past group meeting agendas and notes, written guidance documents (e.g. by-laws, procedures, participation agreements, compacts, etc.), summary reports, needs assessments, and current goals and priorities to learn how the group operates, makes decisions, and takes action.
- ☀ Request additional supports, if needed, to be able to effectively participate in the group, including hard copies of documents, a mentor or a coach, help with understanding data, childcare or transportation assistance, language interpretation. For additional strategies groups can use to effectively engage with families, see [How Can SEPAGs Build Diverse Family Engagement?](#)
- ☀ If the group does not offer a formal orientation, ask to speak with a group facilitator or another member to orient you on the processes the group uses and to clarify any questions you might have to ensure understanding of your role on the group in carrying out the group's activities.



- ☀️ Maintain frequent communication with group members, prioritize your time and commitments, build partnerships, and keep the focus on achieving positive outcomes that result in a meaningful change for children and families in your school community. For more ideas on how to make the case for change, see [How Can SEPAGs Turn Input into Action?](#)
- ☀️ Encourage other families to provide input and feedback on group's decisions, build an in-depth understanding of issues families face, and speak up at group meetings to bring family perspectives, interests, and concerns to the group's discussions.

### Share your perspective and expertise on an issue you are concerned about:

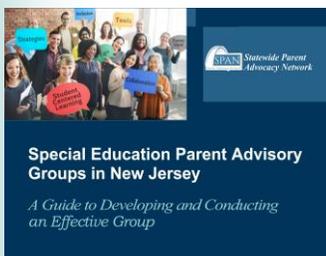
- ☀️ Talk about your unique experiences so others in the group can begin to understand why it is important when making decisions and taking action together.
- ☀️ Ensure diverse family voices are represented. Bring awareness to current systemic issues and offer potential solutions to influence the group's decisions.
- ☀️ Serve as a resource to the group by sharing your strengths, skills, and knowledge.

### Enhance or learn new leadership skills for serving on groups and other areas of your life:

- ☀️ Keep a calendar of group meetings and try to attend all meetings to continue learning, build relationships, and show your commitment to the mission of the group.
- ☀️ Prepare for the upcoming meeting ahead of time by reviewing your notes from previous meetings, reading an agenda and related materials, and writing down your questions and ideas to share with the group.
- ☀️ Volunteer to serve on a subgroup or sub-committee and try out a new role of a facilitator, timekeeper, or recorder.
- ☀️ Ask open-ended questions to clarify information, listen actively, keep an open mind, value diverse opinions, look for common ground when conflict arises, and follow through on commitments to ensure positive results are achieved by the group.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **START Project “Serving On Groups: Webinar Series & Resources”**  
<https://spanadvocacy.org/serving-on-groups/>
- **Serving on Groups** <https://servingongroups.org/>



For a complete guide to starting and supporting a SEPAG in your school, district or community, visit the START-EPSD Project web-page ([bit.ly/startepsd](http://bit.ly/startepsd)) and/or connect with a Parent Group Specialist in your region.

**Access the SEPAG Guide:**  
[tiny.cc/SEPAGguideEnglish](http://tiny.cc/SEPAGguideEnglish)

[bit.ly/startepsd](http://bit.ly/startepsd)  
[start@spanadvocacy.org](mailto:start@spanadvocacy.org)

The START-EPSD Project is cosponsored by the New Jersey Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (NJOSPEP) and SPAN Parent Advocacy Network. Funded by IDEA Part B funds.

