

SEPTEMBER 2009

## Success brings change

### SPEDWatch alters operational structure

NATICK – “We need to make some significant changes to the way we do business. Otherwise we risk being crushed under the weight of our own success.” This was the message SPEDWatch Director Ellen Chambers repeated throughout the day at the organization’s Annual Business Meeting on September 12<sup>th</sup> at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Natick.

“In a little under four years SPEDWatch has grown from 39 to nearly 800 members,” said Chambers. “We are seeing an explosion in the number of calls and emails we get from parents, professionals, and the media. We’ve earned a reputation as a reliable, no-nonsense source of information. We’ve met privately with Governor Patrick to discuss special education rights violations in the Commonwealth, and he has instructed the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to work with us on this issue. No other special education advocacy organization has succeeded in getting state government to listen to parents’ concerns the way we have.”

At the same time, this extraordinary success has created demands on the organization that can no longer be met by a small, centralized management structure. Until funding and paid staff can be secured, SPEDWatch will require broad volunteer support and a decentralized operational model.

“We have an incredible amount of work to do if our children are ever to receive the education to which they are legally entitled,” said Chambers. “Because of SPEDWatch, parents are finally gaining a voice. How clearly our voices are heard will depend on how willing people are to help run this organization. If

people roll up their sleeves and volunteer, our voices will be amplified. If not, our voices will fade along with children’s chances for success. It’s really that simple.”

### Management by Committee

Among the major changes taking place is the creation of committees which will assume responsibility for managing the core functions required to keep SPEDWatch running smoothly.

Committees will develop action plans for their respective areas and under the direction of the SPED-Watch Board of Directors, will carry out the tasks necessary to execute those plans. At present the following standing committees are in place:



**Ellen Chambers addresses the SPEDWatch Annual Business Meeting.**

#### Fundraising Committee

This committee is responsible for exploring and securing all available income sources for SPEDWatch. Traditional and non-traditional fundraising events, foundation grants, individual and corporate donations, and product/service sales are but a few of the income sources that will be considered.

### Public Relations Committee

This committee is responsible for developing, managing, and executing SPEDWatch's marketing programs utilizing various media (print, radio, television, tradeshows, conferences) to secure broad awareness of and support for the SPEDWatch movement.

### Membership Committee

This committee is responsible for managing the SPEDWatch membership database, recruiting new members, attending to membership affairs, and encouraging and facilitating the volunteerism of members.

### Direct Action Committee

This committee will continually scan for opportunities to engage in direct action events or campaigns, will recommend these to the Board of Directors, and will manage the logistics of such events and campaigns.

### Newsletter Committee

This committee will research and write articles for the SPEDWatch newsletter, and manage the production and distribution of the newsletter.

### Technology Committee

This committee is responsible for the management of SPEDWatch's forums, listservs, websites and databases (with the exception of the membership database).

Ad hoc committees currently include the SPEDWatch Walk Committee and the SPEDWatch Annual Business Meeting Committee.

## **SPEDWatch Chapters**

In order to establish a local presence and facilitate connections between members, SPEDWatch Chapters will be formed. The number and location of chapters will be determined by the number and location of SPEDWatch members who are willing to form and run a chapter.

Every chapter will have direct support from a SPEDWatch board member and will have some flexibility to determine how it wishes to function. Chapters will engage in activities such as public awareness, education, direct action, member support, and fundraising under the direction of their board manager.

## **Two Membership Levels**

To encourage and reward volunteerism within SPEDWatch, two membership levels have been established.

### Sustaining Members

Sustaining Members are those members who volunteer their time, talent and/or resources to SPEDWatch. In return, Sustaining Members will be able to join the SPEDWatch Sustaining Members Listserv. This will be a traditional members-only listserv where the majority of SPEDWatch's day to day activity and communication will occur. (Sustaining Members also have access to the SPEDWatch Forum).<sup>1</sup>

In order to be designated a Sustaining Member a person must volunteer an average of 4-6 hours per month to SPEDWatch (or donate resources of comparable value) and must attend at least two SPEDWatch sponsored events each year (trainings, conferences, legislative visits, demonstrations, etc.).

### General Members

General members are those who do not volunteer time or donate resources to SPEDWatch and/or who do not attend at least two SPEDWatch events each year. General members will have access to the SPEDWatch Forum.

Readers can access the *How You Can Help* link on the SPEDWatch web site to view current volunteer and resource donation opportunities. [www.spedwatch.org](http://www.spedwatch.org)

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<sup>1</sup> SPEDWatch will waive a Sustaining Member's volunteer and event attendance requirements for an annual fee of \$500.