

 <p>EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL ST. JOHNS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT</p>	<p>St. Johns County School District ESE Parent Advisory Council Website: https://www.stjohns.k12.fl.us/ese/advisory/ Meeting Minutes – May 5, 2026 Document Access – CLICK HERE</p>
	<p>Email: SJCSDEPAC@gmail.com</p>

Mission Statement

The mission of the ESE Parent Advisory Council (EPAC) is to support and strengthen Exceptional Student Education in St. Johns County by fostering collaboration among families, educators, administrators, and community partners; providing informed, solution-focused input to the district; and promoting inclusive, high-quality educational

Date: May 5, 2026

Time: 6:00 PM – 7:30 PM

Location: Virtual (Microsoft Teams)

1. Call to Order, Welcome, and Attendance

- Call to Order 6:00 pm
- A welcome was provided along with a brief overview of the meeting purpose, focusing on collaboration, updates, and preparation for the upcoming school year.
- Attendees were asked to enter their name and email in the chat for attendance tracking and future communication.
- Join EPAC Contact List:
<https://form.jotform.com/sjcsdepac/join-the-sjcsd-epac-or-ese-parent-a>

Attendance

The following individuals were present:

- Anna Machiz-Dillon – Parent Member (Chair)
- Jessica Richardson – Executive Director, Exceptional Student Education
- Jeannie Potthast – CARD Representative
- Avery Greene - ESE Coordinator, Support Services
- Jennifer Argentina - ESE Coordinator - Life Work Deferment Program
- Tera Upshaw - Parent
- Karie McGuire
- Ann Diaz – ESE Teacher
- Ana Payano - Parent
- C. Arthur
- Jacalyn Hoffman

- Natalie Hammer
- Mary Caputo
- Mariola Holdcraft
- Erin Gregos – ESE Teacher
- Ailee Somaru – Parent
- Terri George - Educator
- Teresa Meritt

2. Introduction to the ESE Parent Advisory Council (EPAC)

An overview of EPAC’s structure and purpose was provided, emphasizing collaboration between families, educators, and community partners.

Discussion included:

- EPAC as a collaborative, family-driven advisory council
- Goal of creating a structured forum for feedback and engagement
- Quarterly meetings supported by bylaws, leadership roles, and membership structure
- Membership goal of approximately 15 voting members representing diverse sectors

3. Overview of SJCSD ESE Structure and Updates

Presenter: Jessica Richardson

Overview of ESE programs and supports included:

- Comprehensive support structure including program specialists, teacher coaches, compliance teams, and related services coordinators
- Services span early childhood through transition programs for ages 18–22
- Early childhood programming includes 77 Pre-K classrooms with expansion planned
- Transition and LifeWork programs support students in preparing for adulthood

Additional updates included:

- New medically fragile deferment program launching in 2026–2027 to support students with complex needs
- Continued development of programs to better align supports for varying student needs

4. Review of EPAC Progress

An update was provided on the development of EPAC bylaws.

Next steps include:

- Bylaws have been established
- Waiting on School District Leadership Review
- Final review and refinement by Council

- Formal adoption at an upcoming meeting
- Target timeline for full implementation at start of 2026–2027 school year

5. Council Formation and Application Process

Discussion focused on formalizing EPAC structure and membership, including:

- Goal of approximately 15 voting members representing diverse backgrounds (district, charter, homeschool, and community partners)
- Establishment of leadership roles including Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary
- Confirmation of Anna Machiz-Dillon as initial Chair
- Recruitment underway for Vice Chair and Secretary
- Request for assistance with ongoing recruitment and outreach efforts to build membership and engagement

Families were encouraged to apply for voting membership:

<https://form.jotform.com/tlcarcsj/Voting-Member-Ap-EPAC>

6. Summer Resources & Supports:

Presenters: Anna Machiz-Dillon, Jeannie Potthast, Avery Greene, Jennifer Argentina

Bright Feats Northeast Florida Resource Directory and Platform

Printed guides are distributed twice annually through School District to ESE students and resources may also be accessed online

Website: www.brightfeats.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/BrightFeatsNortheastFL

Summer Camp Guide: <https://www.brightfeats.com/summer-camp>

Water Safety Tips:

Drowning is the #1 cause of death in autism. Children with ASD are 160 times more likely to experience drowning than neurotypical peers.

Prevention Strategies:

Use barriers such as locks, alarms, fencing, and visual supports

Register with community alert systems (St. Johns County: Project Lifesaver)

Plan Ahead:

Create a safety plan for your child

Identify nearby bodies of water, including pools

Keep a current photo of your child (tip: take one daily or before outings to document clothing)

Emergency Action:

Call 911 immediately, if your child goes missing - do not wait or hesitate

Water Safety:

Avoid reliance on floatation devices that can create a false sense of security

Begin survival swim lessons as early as possible, even in infancy

Never allow children to swim unsupervised

Community Awareness:

Inform neighbors, friends, and family that your child may wander and may be drawn to water

Social Skills Stories for Water Safety:

•Wandering: https://nationalautismassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/NAA_Social-Story.pdf

•Learn to Swim: <https://www.autismfl.org/drowning-prevention>

Swimming Lesson Voucher program: <https://www.floridahealth.gov/individual-family-health/child-infant-youth/drowning-prevention/swimmingvouchers/>

The Down Syndrome Association of Jacksonville provides a scholarship for their members to use for swimming lessons.

Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD)

Overview provided by Jeannie Potthast:

- No-cost, lifespan services for individuals with autism and related disabilities
- Services include social skills groups, parent workshops, and technical assistance
- Monthly satellite clinics available for screenings and resource navigation
- Upcoming trainings focused on assistive technology and visual supports

St. Johns County Satellite Clinic

Register: <https://www.arcsj.org/tlc/satellite-clinic/>

SJC Friday Workshops:

Splish, Splash, & Stay Safe May 15th 2-3:30pm

Keeping Skills Sunny all Summer: Avoiding Regression June 26th 2-3:30pm

Travel Tips & Tricks: Existing Resources & More July 24th 2-3:30pm

Register:

<https://form.jotform.com/tlcarcsj/card-clinic-supportgroup-form-926>

Pre-register for Card Services:

<https://pediatrics.med.jax.ufl.edu/patient-care/center-for-autism-and-related-disabilities/>

Sign-up for the CARD Jacksonville Email Newsletter:

https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=D8x6Ko0Q8Uyx_0D6F7gwziaTE3-aoVtJp_Hbdj-HQtJUN0s4NE5XWIZTSjI0MIMzQUVPWEFaS0FPNS4u&origin=QRCode&route=shorturl

Extended School Year (ESY)

Overview provided by Avery Greene:

- ESY is designed to maintain critical skills and prevent regression
- Determined annually based on individual student data and needs
- Services vary by student and are not guaranteed year to year
- Provided at no cost

Transition & Vocational Resources

Overview provided by Jennifer Argentina:

- Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for students ages 14–21 currently enrolled in school
- Focus on job exploration, workplace readiness, and post-secondary planning
- Early engagement recommended to align with adult services

Vocational Rehabilitation (Pre-ETS)

8E: Putnam and St. Johns 25 Deltona Blvd., Suite 3 St. Augustine 32086-4204 Phone: 904-797-6250 Fax: 904-797-7666

Napoleon Spencer, Supervisor

7. Upcoming Events, Announcements, and Opportunities

Family Care Council (FCC) – Area 4

www.fccflorida.org

Next Meeting:

- May 20, 2026 | 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM
- Microsoft Teams

Family Listening Session:

- August 19, 2026 | 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM

TCMS Special Needs Resource Expo

- May 16, 2026. 11:00 am – 3:00 pm
- Francis Field
- <https://www.tcms.care/4th-annual-special-needs-resources-expo/>

The Family Café – 28th Annual Orlando, FL

- June 12-14, 2026
- Hyatt Regency Orlando
- Free to attend
- <https://familycafe.net/annual-family-cafe/>

Lodging:

Hilton Orlando – Family Café Overflow Rate: \$139/Night

- Use Link:
<https://book.passkey.com/gt/221112776?gtid=fe413335aaf2003fa718abe746d78469>

Florida Department of Education – ESE Parent Survey

Families were encouraged to complete the survey:

https://fldoepaads.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_881xTFo6E6C6ZJI

Key Notes:

- Open throughout the 2025–2026 school year
- Results inform EPAC priorities and district planning
- Available to parents/guardians of students with IEPs and students age 18+
- Real-time data collection supports responsive planning

7. Public Comment and Questions

A public comment period was provided.

Topics discussed included:

- Importance of early intervention
- Need for clear communication and family education
- Value of continued family engagement in planning and advocacy

Closing and Next Meeting

The meeting concluded with appreciation for participation and encouragement for continued involvement.

Future meetings will focus on increased engagement, potential in-person opportunities, and continued collaboration to support families and students.

Details for the next meeting will be shared via the EPAC contact list and School District communication.