

Final Report to the National Advisory Board
Special Education Advocate Training Project
USC UCEDD and COPAA
December 16, 2008



The SEAT Project will be ending December 31, 2008, after a 4th no-cost extension year. The purpose of the SEAT Project was to develop and field-test a uniform training program for professional Special Education Advocates. Four goals were proposed in the original grant:

GOAL I	To develop and field-test a uniform training program for professional Special Education Advocates
GOAL II.	To explore the feasibility of replicating the SEAT model throughout the U.S.
GOAL III:	Evaluate the effectiveness of the SEAT curriculum and training program.
GOAL IV:	To disseminate findings of the project

Below is a summary of accomplishments, issues raised by this project, and future directions for the field of special education advocacy.

GOAL I	TO DEVELOP AND FIELD-TEST A UNIFORM TRAINING PROGRAM FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVOCATES.
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1. DEFINING SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVOCACY AS A “PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE.”

Distinguishing Special Education Advocacy from other related practice groups. Because “special education advocacy” is an unregulated practice, one of the first tasks of the project was to define the group of advocates the SEAT Program was intending to prepare. The project recognized that there was overlap in the training, competency and practice of special education advocates with three related practice groups: (1) generic consumer advocates; (2) paralegals and (3) special education attorneys. See Figure 1.

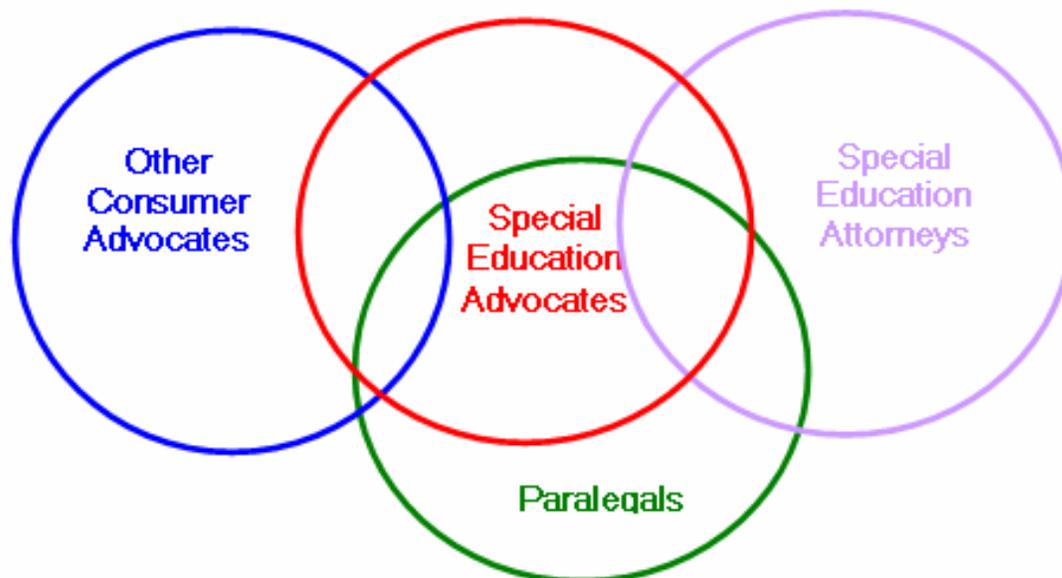


Figure 1. Overlap of Special Ed. Advocates with three other practice groups.

The SEAT Project utilizes the following definition as the targeted audience for the SEAT Training Program:

Special Educational Advocates are a distinguishable group of professionals who assist parents or guardians in securing a Free and Appropriate Public Education for their children. Advocates may do so in an unpaid or paid capacity. Advocates may work in private practice or under the auspices of a legal firm, public interest law center, or parent training information and advocacy center. There is currently no formal authority to define or regulate the practice of special education advocacy.

Special Education Advocate Training Project, 2008

Distinguishing SEAT graduates from other “special education advocates” and other “special education training mechanisms.” There are many entities throughout the nation which provide training to parents and professionals on special education law, rights, and responsibilities, including but not limited to law schools, the National Disability Rights Network (formerly Protection and Advocacy); Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs) and Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs), Public Interest Law Centers, and some Family Resource Centers. Much of existing training centers on understanding how to advocate for ones own child. However, there is not a uniformly agreed upon format to provide specialized training in how to advocate as a professional on behalf of a student with disabilities who is part of a client’s family. The SEAT Program is designed to be an advanced level, 230 hr training program which builds on previous knowledge to prepares non-attorney advocates to assist, advocate for, and when appropriate represent families/students to access FAPE, within the guidelines set by states for non-attorney advocates. This advanced level of training distinguishes the support provided by non-attorney advocates assisting parents to access FAPE. See Figure 2.



Figure 2. **SEAT—Level III Advanced Special Education Advocacy Training**

Defining Competencies of Special Education Advocates. Early in the project, it became clear that a set of measurable competencies which underlie and define the practice of special education advocates was needed in order to develop a uniform teaching curriculum. A review of literature from comparable fields, i.e, paralegals, special education attorneys (to define the line between non-attorney special education advocate practice and the unauthorized practice of law), and through a rigorous process of soliciting expert opinion and verification by stakeholder groups, 47 competencies were identified as core to special education practice. *See Attachment 1 for a copy of the SEAT Core Competencies.*

Defining SEAT Voluntary Special Education Advocate Professional Ethics and Standards of Practice. During the field-testing of the curriculum, it became evident that the field could benefit from a Voluntary Code of Professional Ethics and Standards of Practice to guide Special Education Advocacy practice. Again building on ethics defined by other related fields and soliciting expert opinion from the field of special education advocacy, the SEAT Project created a core set of voluntary principles of ethical and professional conduct for Special Education Advocates. Like all professional fields, these principles are embedded in the SEAT curriculum, and underlies the teaching and acquisition of SEAT Core Competencies. These principles fall under five domains: (1) Professional competence, (2) Client and Family Relations, (3) Transparent, forthright, truthful communication, (4) Developing and cultivating multiple relationships which benefit the client and disclosing conflicts of interest, and (5) Ethical Business Practices. *See Attachment 2 for a copy of the SEAT Voluntary Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.*

The SEAT Project acknowledges that because Special Education Advocacy is currently an unregulated field, compliance with this code of ethics is *voluntary*. Statutes, regulations, and case history/precedence within each jurisdiction must be taken into consideration when interpreting and applying the SEAT code of ethics.

2. DEVELOPING THE SEAT CURRICULUM—230 HRS OF COURSEWORK AND PRACTICUM

Curriculum development proved to be a herculean task. The first necessity, given that the field of special education advocacy was heretofore undefined, was to come to consensus regarding the level of material and the slant of the training. The project was at times caught on a seesaw between the importance of legal understanding (content) and advocacy techniques (process), and was challenged to include a combination of both approaches while attempting to ensure that current best practice and challenges in the field were interwoven as well.

Over the course of the three year project the curriculum writing process was informed through a rigorous process involving site instructors, national advisory board input, feedback from outside expert reviewers, and feedback from the 200+ participants in the pilot sites. .

The 230 hour SEAT Curriculum has two components: **115 hrs of classroom instruction and 115 hrs of practicum/field experience** under the supervision of an experienced special education attorney and/or special education advocate.

Classroom Instruction. Representing the best thoughts and practices in the field, the SEAT training program provides systematic training to students on a variety of topics in the following six (6) areas:

1. Introduction to Special Education Advocacy and Practicing Advocacy with Ethics and Integrity
2. Legal Foundation of Rights to Special Education
3. The Structure of FAPE under the IDEA
4. Basic Skills of a Special Education Advocate
5. Conflict Resolution in Special Education
6. The Business of Advocacy

The coursework is divided into **thirty-eight (38) 3-hr modules**, across the 6 broad domains listed above. The SEAT curriculum consists of:

- (1) a **SEAT Reader**, which is a compilation of information Special Education Advocates must know in order to meet the core competencies identified for this program. The SEAT reader is used as a “textbook” for students and instructor, in addition to other recommended books, web materials, and handouts.
- (2) an **Instructor’s Guide** which contains an outline of the learning objectives for each of the 76 3-hr modules, reading assignments, classroom activities, homework assignments,
- (3) **Powerpoint presentations** for each chapter, and
- (4) **Exams** for each chapter to document student mastery of content and skills taught.

The recommended SEAT Instructional Team consisted of 3 members: (1) an experienced special education advocate, (2) an experienced special education attorney, and (3) an experienced parent to parent support professional. Typically, the special education attorney or the special education advocate was the lead for the site.

Issues for Consideration:

1. Despite clear articulation of the preferred model of instruction, pilot sites were uneven in assuring delivery according to the guidelines that specify a team teaching approach. Not every site taught in this manner and many pilot sites did not locate a parent to be part of the Instructional Team. Many of the site instructors were parents of children with IEPs, but they were also advocates or attorneys. The concept, and therefore desirability of hiring a parent who is a specialist in parent to parent support to help teach SEAT appeared to be unfamiliar concept. Consideration should be given to stronger requirement that sites identify the instructional team prior to being approved as a site.
2. The Project utilized the expertise of special education attorneys, long-time special education advocates (some of whom went to law school but did not take the bar) in developing much of the SEAT curriculum. There was always a slight tension between what a special education attorney felt an advocate should know and do vs. how special education advocates defined requisite knowledge base and skills for advocates. This is

- most likely reflective of a larger un-resolved tension within the field of special education advocacy that was outside the scope of SEAT curriculum to resolve.
3. In the initial pilot sites there was initially great resistance to “testing” SEAT trainees using formal written, closed book tests. This becomes a critical discussion as we attempt to define futures uses for the curriculum. Testing is one of the few concrete ways the instructor is able to determine competence and most certainly is an important component of laying the groundwork towards the possible concept of “certifying” and “monitoring” practicing special education advocates.
 4. In the process of responding to a variety of feedback and input we acknowledge that the final version of the curriculum likely serves as a standardized model, offering more suggestions and guidelines than instructors of the project sites can possibly use. This provides the teacher with a range of options within each of the components of the model curriculum. Several assumptions and beliefs about curriculum development are inherent in this approach. Experienced teachers who are able to inspire trainees to explore a discipline have a genuine interest or passion in the discipline themselves. These teachers have gathered stories, regalia, and documents to make the curriculum authentic, and they employ strategies to effectively engage learners in the process of inquiry, based upon the unique needs of the learners in each course session. We strived to generate learning that consists of investigative activities and the development of creative products in which students assume roles as firsthand explorers, writers, and practicing professionals.
 5. The curriculum as a standardized model is appropriate, however, the original expectation of uniform delivery is likely unrealistic.
 - a. Even with the presence and oversight of project management during the pilot phase individual sites included or excluded information at will based upon such factors as time, perception of students needs, or instructor familiarity or level of comfort with subject matter or technique. Without a clearly identified oversight body there is no way to regulate or determine the uniformity of application.
 - b. Special education advocacy occurs under a variety of conditions, settings, oversight, state and local regulations, etc. Aspects of an advocates responsibilities or expected knowledge that may relevant in one state or setting may be irrelevant in others.

Practicum Experience. In designing the curriculum there was agreement from all interested stakeholders to include a practicum in the requirements. The purpose of so doing is to broaden the scope of the experience beyond classroom teaching.

The required practicum is a structured experience with a knowledgeable special education attorney or experienced advocate, and is designed to provide the SEAT student with supervised opportunities to apply and/or practice what they learned in the classroom with an actual client -- for example, opportunities to interact directly with clients, assist in preparing cases, participate in IEP meetings, mediations, resolution sessions, and other aspects of advocacy services as time and case timelines allowed. No compensation was provided to participating Practicum Supervisors who precepted SEAT trainees.

The 115 hours of practicum was typically met over a three to four-month period, averaging 7-10 hours per week. Actual days and times for the practicum varied and were arranged with the

assigned practicum supervisor. When possible trainees were not placed in a practicum site where they were currently employed. At the end of the practicum experience, the practicum supervisors were asked to verify the hours worked and evaluate the student on the following SEAT Core Competencies:

- Knows how to find information
- Grasp between federal and state law and when to use one or the other
- Analytical skills
- Student knows when to hand to attorney – UPL
- Negotiating skills
- Awareness of ethical issues
- Communication skills Oral
- Communication skills Written
- Identifies issues
- Addresses parent concerns
- Professionalism

Issues for Consideration:

1. Matching trainees to practicum sites is a labor intensive process. In some communities, there were limited numbers of qualified practicum supervisors. These included both communities that are under-represented; where the SEAT training was most needed, as well as communities that have ample numbers of practicing special education advocates and attorneys. Requiring existing capacity to build capacity seems self-defeating. Alternative models should likely be considered.
2. Practicum supervisors had uneven expectations of trainees, some expecting that SEAT trainees would be adequately prepared to work in their practice without intensive supervision. There was not standardized expectation or structure regarding responsibilities, expected levels supervision, or graduated levels of independent task completion/common understanding of what constituted excessive requirements for supervision. The process of gathering quality and complete practicum evaluations for individual trainees was tedious and at times difficult. Relying on completion of practicum experience is likely a poor quality indicator of competence due to the wide variety of experiences during practicum, variance in supervision, etc. In addition we were unable to study the extent to which the practicum experiences were complementary to the classroom portion of the training.
3. There were multiple approaches to provision of practicum experiences across sites. The majority of programs placed students in practicum after completion of the coursework. One site in Cohort 3 exposed trainees to practical aspects of practicum experience correspondent with the coursework, for example when learning how to brief a case and conduct research trainees would work on an actual case within the law center involving that skill. To be uniform the project should define appropriate models of delivery and minimum demonstrated skills and experiences.
4. Many trainees in private practice were unwilling or unable to devote the necessary hours away from paying clients to complete the practicum in an environment outside of their current employment.

5. Some practicum supervisors asked whether labor law would require that SEAT trainees be paid for services provided within a practice, parallel to pay provided to law interns.
6. Questions regarding insurance coverage for trainees arose; including the extent to which, if any, coverage they had while working in practicum placements.

3. FIELD-TESTING THE SEAT TRAINING PROGRAM

Table 1. Number of SEAT students participating in the field-test, by cohort and geographic location.	
Cohort/ Site	Total # of students admitted
Cohort 1	
Bay Area	16
LA	23
NYC	19
Philadelphia	19
Total	77
Cohort 2	
LA	24
NYC	20
Total	44
Cohort 3	
LA	17
Boston	15
Total	32
GRAND TOTAL	153

The SEAT Curriculum was revised and field-tested 3 times. See Table 1 for a summary of the location of sites for each cohort and the # of students enrolled and who completed the SEAT program.

Cohort 1: The first field-test included four sites selected to evaluate the impact of state law on teaching SEAT. These sites were: Bay Area, CA; Los Angeles, CA; New York, NY; and Philadelphia, PA. Each site's instructional team consisted of a Special Education Advocate, Special Education Attorney, and a Parent (where possible). All of the site instructors were COPAA members who were actively involved in writing the original curriculum. Each site received ~\$11,000 to cover the costs associated with Instructor time and operating the training program. Students were charged a fee to participate (\$200) to assure a commitment. But since this was a demonstration project, \$175 of the original \$200 fee was returned if

the student finished the program and complied with the evaluation¹.

Cohort 2: The Instructional Teams in the Bay Area and Philadelphia did not wish to participate in the second field-testing of the SEAT curriculum--ostensibly due to the labor intensiveness of the training program. Instructional Teams for Los Angeles and New York City continued with a second cohort of students. As can be seen in Table 2, an additional 44 students were admitted to the SEAT program across both sites. Each site was given \$13,000 to cover the costs of operating the training program. Students were charged a fee of \$300 to participate, with an agreement for \$200 return of fees for compliance with the evaluation of the project².

As can be seen in Table 1, the SEAT curriculum was field-tested on a total of 153 students (77 students in Cohort 1 across four sites; 44 students in Cohort 2 across two sites; and 32 students across two sites in Cohort 3.

¹ A decision was made to return fees to all students regardless of the outcome of their participation.

² A decision was made to return fees to all students regardless of the outcome of their participation

Cohort 3. A no-cost extension was requested to allow the project to field-test the curriculum a third time, in an effort to evaluate the feasibility of implementing the SEAT program through fees charged to students and to examine how SEAT could be implemented by two different venues: (a) a Public Interest Law Center (Learning Rights Law Center in LA), and (b) a Parent Training and Information Center (Federation for Children and Families in Boston). Both entities had excellent track record in special education advocacy and working with parents. Each site was given \$6,000 and were allowed to charge tuition to students and keep this fee to cover their costs. Fees were not given to students in Cohort 3

GOAL II. To explore the feasibility of replicating the SEAT model throughout the U.S.

Over the course of the three pilot years we learned much about the potential models available to provide training.

Cohorts were taught in a) Public Interest Law Centers (PILCOP and Learning Rights); b) national civil rights law and policy center (DREDF); c) Parent Information and Training Center (The Federation for Children with Special Needs) d) in the facilities of and under supervision of the UCEDD at CHLA, and e) through private practice.

Criteria for effective sites to implement SEAT appear to have less to do with the type of organization hosting the training than with the attributes or characteristics of the host site.

We recommend that host sites demonstrate evidence of the following requirements to successfully complete delivery of the entire SEAT curriculum:

1. Must have demonstrated experience in special education law and/or advocacy practice.
2. Must be an agency with sufficient infrastructure to deliver the curriculum in a controlled fashion.
3. Documented experience teaching a long-term “course.” “Long-term” is defined as: the teaching of multiple topics over a pre-set period of time—as you would take a course in college. The SEAT curriculum is designed in 3-hr modules, sequenced in a certain order, and requires regular scheduled teaching over a 3-5 month period, depending on how the modules are scheduled for teaching. The following are possible models to teach the course in a reasonable time frame:
 - 2-3 ½ hr classes a week
 - 1 Saturday a week
 - one weekend every 3 weeks
4. Access to qualified instructors who have documented experience in special education law and/or advocacy practice. Specifically, at least 3-5 years as a licensed attorney or experienced advocate. The model uses a team teaching approach with a special education advocate as the lead for the course, a special ed attorney as co-instructor for some topics, and a parent professional for some topics. Not all instructors must be present for every class, but team teaching is encouraged as it allows students to hear about a topic from different perspectives.
5. Access to an appropriate learning environment conducive to teaching 12-20 students. For example,

- a. classroom for +/-20 people
 - b. access to powerpoint/chalkboard/whiteboard/poster paper
 - c. tables or desks for students
 - d. access to a computer lab or a set of computers for research assignment purposes— preferred, not required
 - e. access to restrooms, restaurants, or a kitchen
 - f. access to a copy machine and equipment to reproduce materials for the classes.
6. Capacity to recruit, select, and notify students of acceptance into the program using project criteria.
 7. Documented experience with and sufficient administrative support to meet grant/contract requirements, e.g., data collection, uniform implementation of the curriculum as written, provision of feedback to the project related to evaluation of the curriculum and its components on a regular basis, report writing (minimal).
 8. Ability to either provide opportunities internally for supervised practicum's or identify and recruit experienced special education attorneys and/or advocates to provide practicum experience to students. Match students to practicum supervisors and provide oversight until the practicum is completed. Facilitate the collection of practicum evaluation data.

Another critical issue affecting feasibility of replication is the **cost** of delivering the program. **Absent grant funding** the host site will need to charge an amount to each participant to cover the cost of the training. **Estimates range from \$800-1,200.00.** While this amount certainly is prohibitive for some, it is not unusually high for a 230 hour experience.

There remains concern that without ongoing grant funding or support to reduce costs that under-represented communities will remain unable to access training. Special Education Advocacy is a skilled profession that requires both initial and ongoing training and information.

GOAL III: Evaluate the effectiveness of the SEAT curriculum and training program.

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES OF SEAT TRAINING:

Table 2. SEAT Completion Rate -- Cohorts 1, 2, 3				
Cohort/ Site	Total # of Students Admitted	Total # Completed Course	Total # (%) SEAT Certificates	Total # (%) dropped, refused practicum, didn't finish practicum, didn't pass practicum, lost to follow-up
Cohort 1				
Bay Area	18	13 72%	12 67%	6 33%
LA	23	18 78%	16 70%	7 30%
NYC	19	18 95%	15 79%	4 21%
Philadelphia	18	18 100%	9 50%	9 50%
Sub-Total	77	68 88%	52 68%	25 32%
Cohort 2				
LA	24	17 71%	14 58%	10 42%
NYC	20	16 80%	12 60%	8 40%
Sub-Total	44	38 86%	26 59%	18 41%
Cohort 3				
LA	17	15	?	?
Boston	15	15	?	?
Sub-Total	32	30		
GRAND TOTAL	153	136	64%	36%

As can be seen in Table 2, **64 %** of students admitted to the SEAT program in Cohorts 1 and 2, successfully completed the SEAT coursework and their practicum, leading to receipt of the SEAT Certificate of Completion. **36%** did not complete the program because they either dropped early in their coursework, did not start and/or complete their practicum; or were lost to

follow-up. **These data suggest that future work must examine better entry level criteria for this advanced level training.**

CHARACTERISTICS OF SEAT TRAINEES:

Screening Criteria: The SEAT Project developed the following screening criteria for admission into the pilot:



- **Three (3)** felony convictions (cannot be placed in a law practice for their practicum)



- **No** Law Students; **Three (3) students** admitted to the bar but not currently practicing.

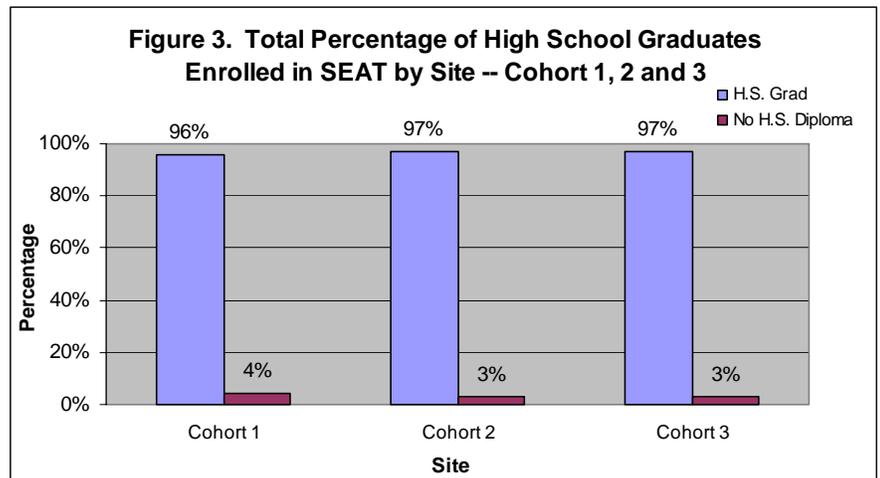


- **Two(2)** LEA/SEA employees; **One (1)** School Board member (who was also a parent)—this student was never placed in a practicum.



Educational Level:

Most SEAT Trainees were HS Graduates. 96% of SEAT students across all 3 cohorts reported they were High School Graduates. Five students (4%) reported they did not have a HS diploma. See Figure 3



Ethnicity of SEAT Trainees:

As can be seen in Figure 4, across all 3 cohorts of students, Latino and African American trainees were somewhat representative of the US census. Asians and Caucasians were under-represented. It should be noted that 40% of SEAT trainees did not provide ethnicity data.

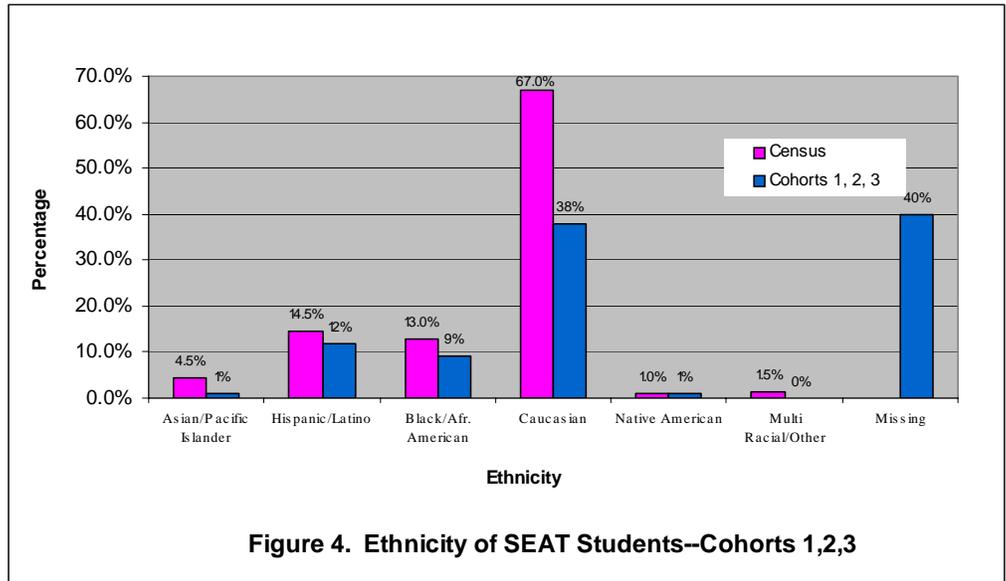


Figure 4. Ethnicity of SEAT Students--Cohorts 1,2,3

Majority of SEAT Trainees were Parents

As can be seen in Figure 5, the overwhelming majority of SEAT trainees were parents of children with IEPs (80%). Three percent (3%) identified as individuals with a disability; 9 % did not report this information.

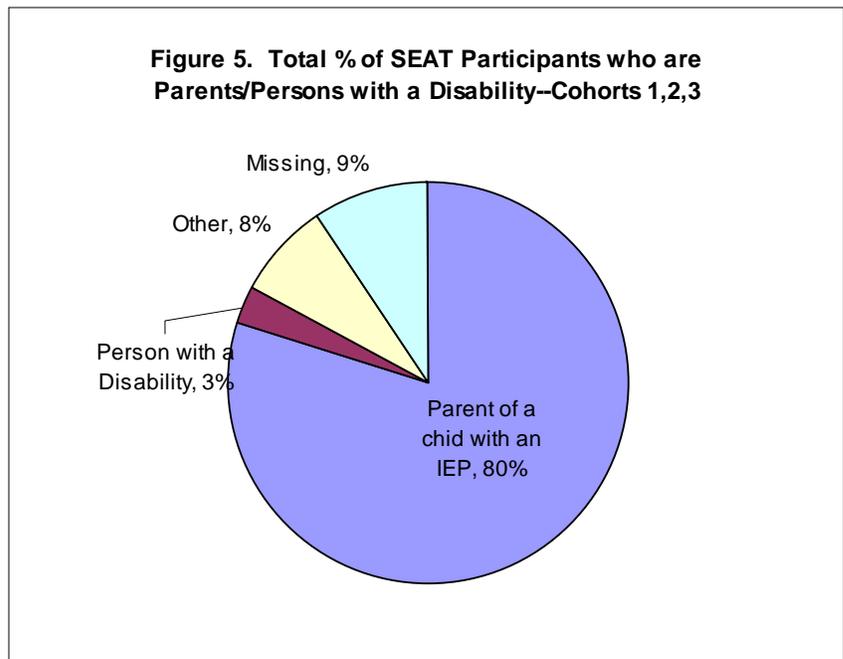


Figure 5. Total % of SEAT Participants who are Parents/Persons with a Disability--Cohorts 1,2,3

ONE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP OF SEAT TRAINEES:

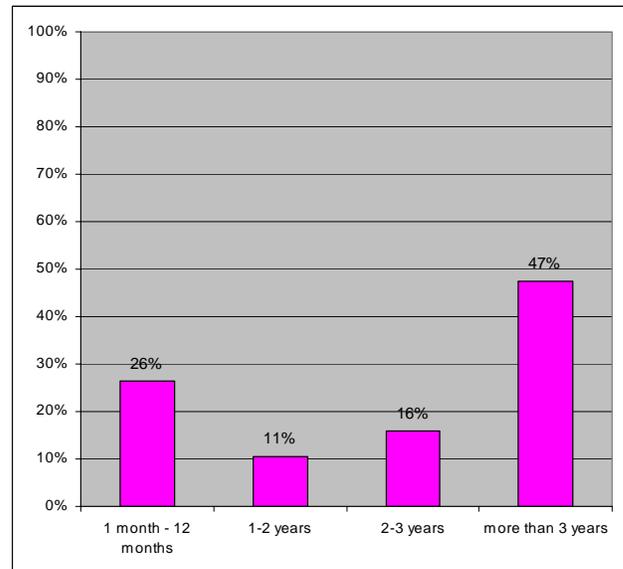
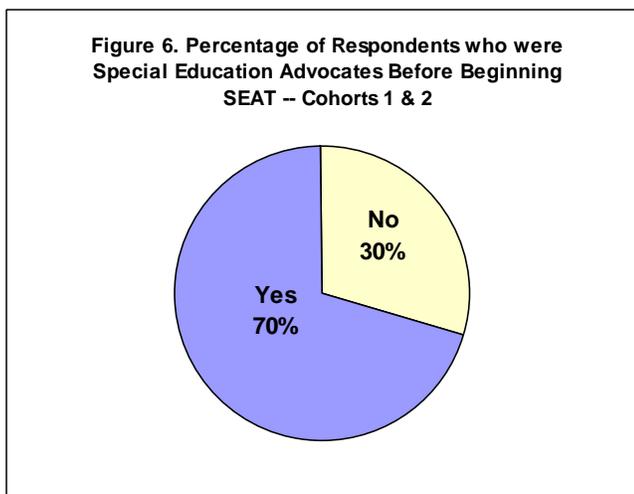
Characteristics of the Follow-Up Sample:

A follow-up survey was sent to all trainees in Cohorts 1 and 2 approximately one-year after they completed their practicum. The survey asked questions related to whether they were practicing special education advocacy, how much time, whether paid or unpaid, where they were working, and what their salary and benefits were. We have complete data on 50 respondents. Table 3 shows the distribution of survey responses by site. As can be seen more than half of the SEAT trainees from the Bay Area and LA completed the follow-up survey. Approximately one-third (1/3) of participants in NY and Philadelphia completed the survey.

Site	# of Survey Responses	% of Site Participants Completing the Survey
Bay Area (n=16)	9	56%
Los Angeles (n=37) (Cohorts 1 & 2)	21	57%
NYC (n=37) (Cohorts 1 & 2)	13	35%
Philadelphia (n=19)	7	37%
Grand Total	50	

Length of time Respondents had been Special Ed. Advocates before joining SEAT:

As can be seen in Figure 6, our follow-up sample is biased towards more experienced Special Education Advocates. Seventy percent (70%) of SEAT graduates who responded to the follow-up survey reported they were special ed. advocates before beginning SEAT. Of these, almost half had been special ed. advocates for more than 3 years. Another 27% had been advocates for 1-3 years, and about 1/5 of respondents were relatively new to advocacy.



WHAT ARE SEAT GRADUATES DOING WITH THEIR TRAINING?

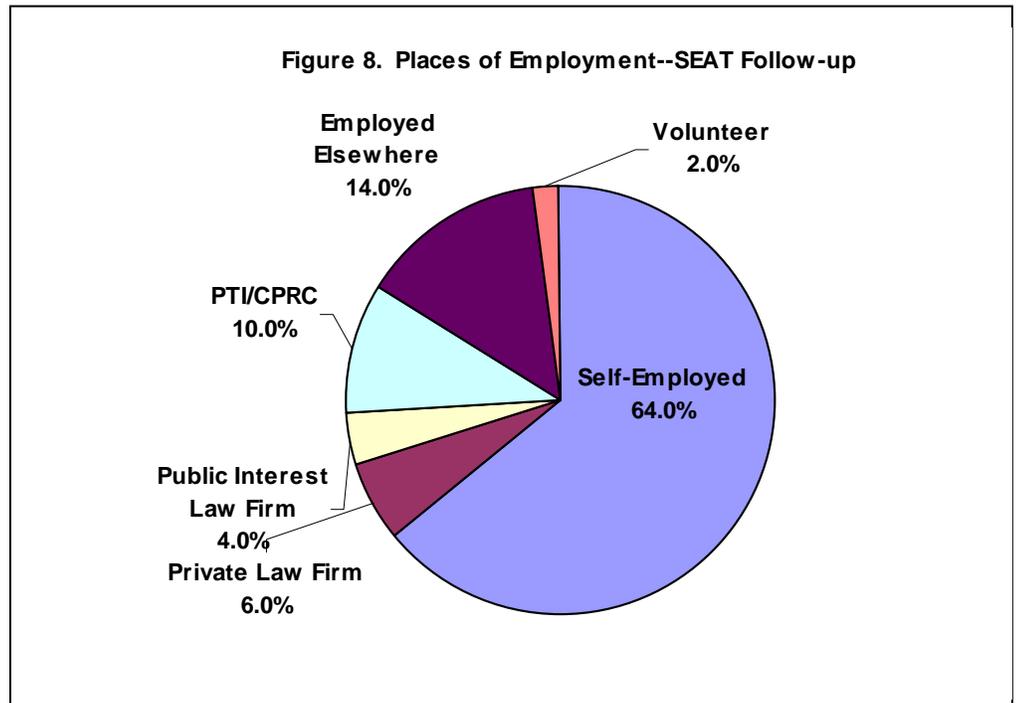
Employment History Post-SEAT:

All 50 respondents stated they were currently involved in special education advocacy, approximately one-quarter (1/4) stated they had had more than one position, and the remaining 72% stating they had had one position since leaving SEAT. Two percent (2%) were providing voluntary advocacy services, and the remaining 98% were receiving payment for their services.

Where are SEAT Graduates Employed?

Figure 8 shows that the majority of the SEAT graduates (64%) in our follow-up sample reported they are self-employed.

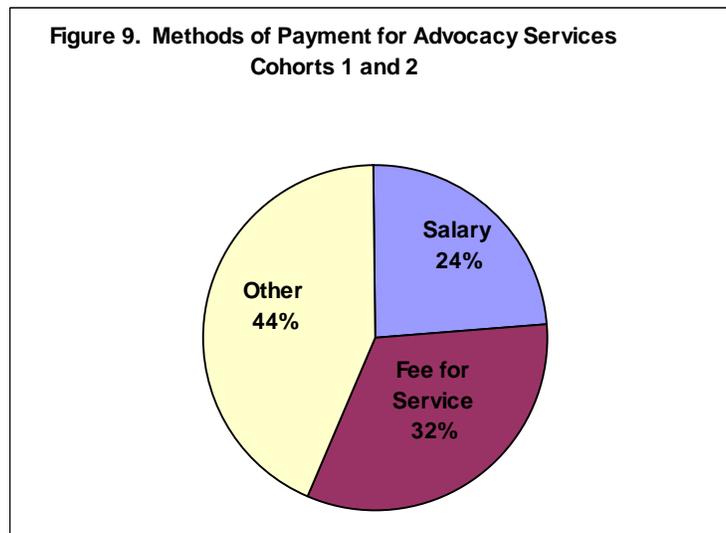
Approximately 10% were “working” at a Public Interest or Private Law Firms; another 10% reported working at a Parent Training and Information Centers (PTI) or Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRC), and about 14% reported working elsewhere. It is not clear how many are volunteers vs. paid in these settings.

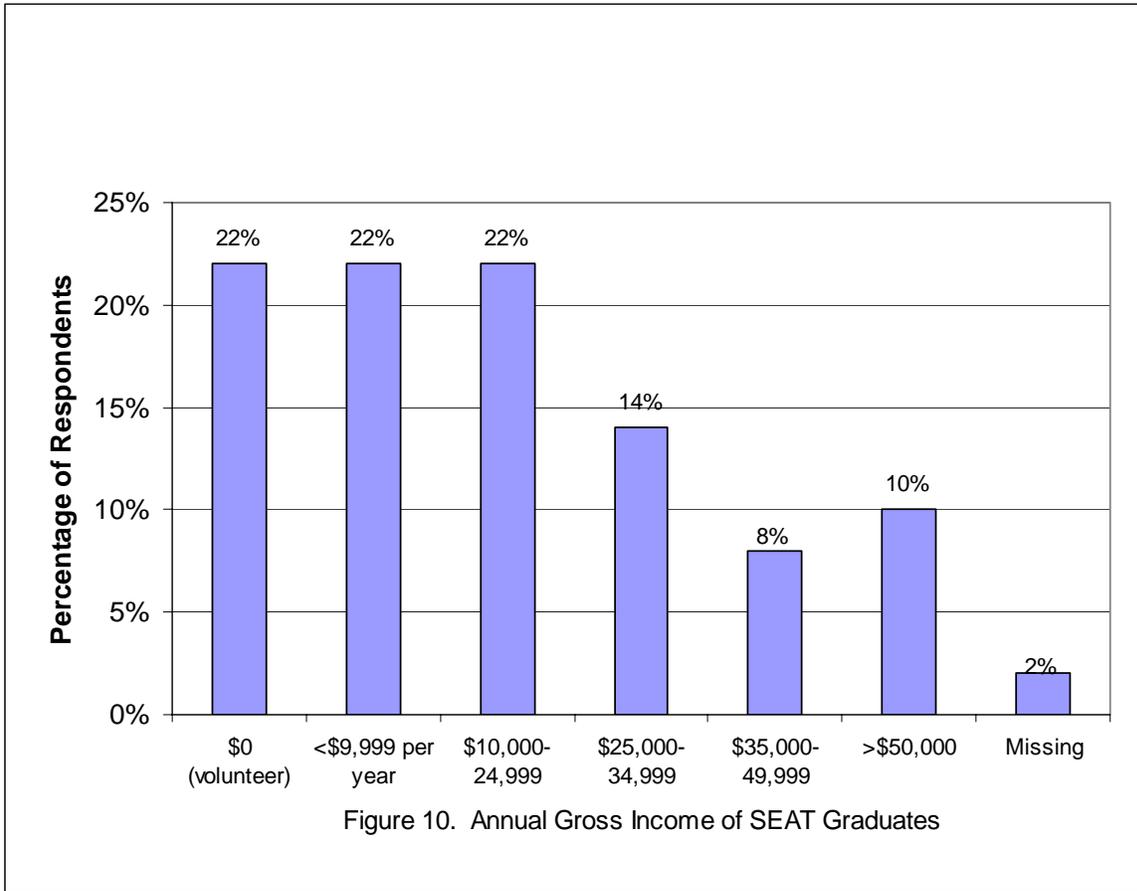


How are SEAT Graduates compensated for their services?

Thirty-two percent (32%) of respondents reported they are paid through “fee for service,” 24% are salary employees; and 44% are paid through other mechanisms.

Figure 10 displays reported ranges of salary in our follow-up sample. Two-thirds (2/3) of the sample reported making less than \$25,000 per year, with 1/5 of the sample reporting they are volunteers and receive no



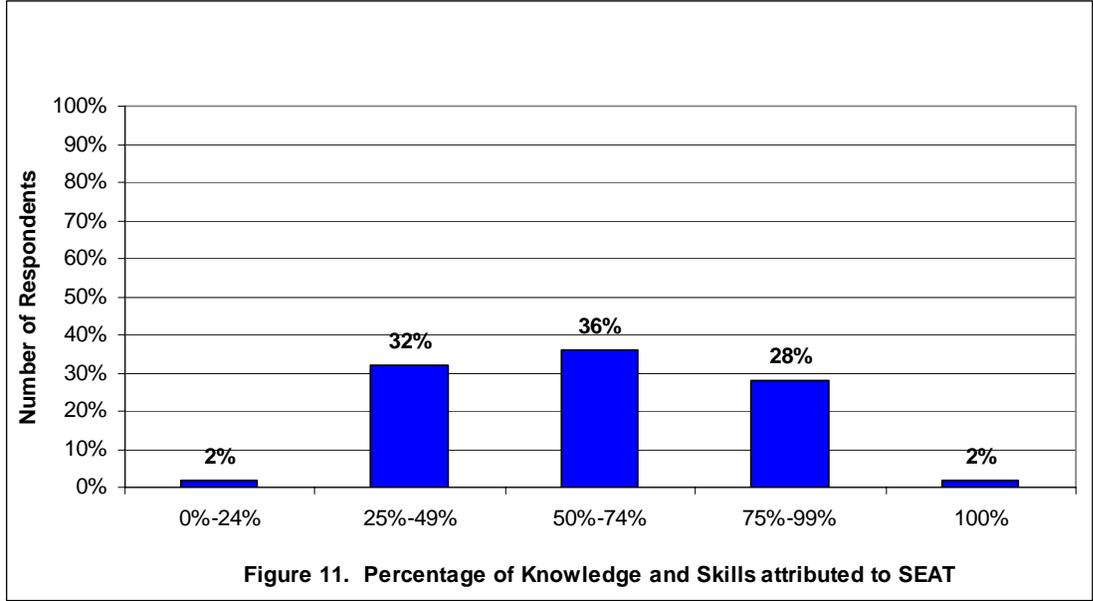


compensation. The remaining one-third (1/3) earn \$25,000 or more, with 10% reporting a salary of \$50,000/year or more.

Benefits. Only eighteen percent (18%) of the sample reported receiving benefits –these are likely those who earn \$35,000/year or more.

Did SEAT Training Contribute to SEAT Graduates Knowledge and Skills?

When asked how much of their current knowledge and skills could be attributed to their SEAT training, almost 2/3 of respondents reported that more than half of their knowledge and skills could be attributed to their SEAT training. Thirty-two percent (32%) reported that 1/4 – 1/2 of their knowledge could be attributed to SEAT. See Figure 11.



FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR SEAT:

1. Explore the potential for designating levels of advocates, with core competencies and skills identified for certain aspects of the profession. For example – accompanying a parent to an IEP meeting and assisting in non-adversarial advocacy is less intensive than assisting in mediation or conflict resolution.
2. Identify characteristics that increase likelihood that trainees satisfactorily complete the SEAT training. How to measure readiness for SEAT?
3. Explore alternative ways to meet the requirement of practicum experience where qualified practicum supervisors are not readily available
 - ◆ What to do when there are few qualified practicum supervisors within a state?
 - Video-conferencing?
 - Group Case Review and Technical Assistance
 - ◆ Models of Delivery
 - Providing some practicum during the course (e.g., LRLC model)
 - Post –Course
4. Building capacity for the continuum of special education advocacy training through collaborations with existing state entities such as P&A's, Parent Information and Training Centers. Are these mechanisms for more formal “Pre-SEAT” training and experience?
5. Model for replicating SEAT Training Nationwide
 - ◆ Sell curriculum as model – no oversight
 - ◆ CHLA and COPAA jointly retain rights to curriculum and approve sites who meet criteria as defined above
 - ◆ College Level Courses
 - Online
 - In person
 - ◆ Other?

Issues: What is a reasonable cost for SEAT training?

6. Fully explore the process required and feasibility of Certification. While we believe this project has contributed significantly to defining the practice of special education advocacy and the core competencies required; the scope of the project was not broad enough to tackle the multitude of issues and considerations required to develop a certification program. Certification and accreditation programs sponsored by a professional trade or membership organization has been articulated by many as desirable for special education advocates, and such a program that is well structured would appear to confer an array of valuable benefits to the applicable industry and the public who utilizes the services of the certified individuals.

At the same time it is important to recognize that implementing such an intensive

standard-setting and certification program is not without risk and effect – potentially significant.

- ◆ There is already a huge gap between those who can afford to pay for lawyers and other professionals to assist them and those who cannot. Those without the ability to pay for basic assistance may be further reduced in understanding and accessing their rights and perhaps victimized by what is clearly an unbalanced educational system..
- ◆ Research demonstrates that the process can take several years (3-5) and hundreds of thousands of dollars. Significant issues need to be addressed including levels of certification; unintended effect of the certification program, on balance, to restrain competition in the relevant market more than it promotes competition and access; and other such factors.
- ◆ Although clearly in the public interest and beneficial to members and others, self-regulation programs such as certification programs may raise risks of legal liability under five principal areas in connection with the operation of certification programs: antitrust, negligence (liability to third parties), due process, defamation, and ADA compliance. Other theories of liability exist as well – such as theories of warranty and enterprise liability – but these five areas make up the majority of claims filed against certification programs.

Certification is only the first step in the process. Significant resources to allow for investigation into complaints and oversight would also need to be provided. Variance by state necessitates investigation into whether a national model would work.

7. Research on the impact of trained Special Education Advocates on Educational Rights and Protections and parent empowerment

- ◆ Impact, if possible to discern, on number of cases that go to Due Process Hearing
- ◆ Resolution before due process
- ◆ Reductions in Cost
- ◆ Increase in quality of parent participation when Special Education Advocates are involved
- ◆ Cultural differences in the utilization of special education advocates
- ◆ Others?