



Special Needs Advisory Committee

**of the
Lester B. Pearson School Board**

Annual Report

2011-2012

A Message from the Chairperson

The Special Needs Advisory Committee (SNAC) had a very busy year. We had a successful Annual General Assembly which resulted in a number of new parent members joining the committee. Parent members were assigned as SNAC representatives to the Central Parents' Committee, Education Committee and Council meetings.

We began the year by canvassing our members to establish a list of priority projects that we felt would be of most benefit to the special needs community within the Lester B. Pearson School Board. We established subcommittees to work on making those projects a reality, and I am very pleased by what this team has accomplished. To name a few, a new SNAC logo was developed, a SNAC banner was printed for use at large events, and a new SNAC pamphlet was designed and printed to provide general information about the special needs services available at LBPSB. We continue to work on an IEP Resource Folder, to provide parents with tips for achieving successful and collaborative IEP meetings.

SNAC was pleased to participate in the Central Parents' Committee parent conference via a shared kiosk, where the new SNAC pamphlet was distributed both at the kiosk and at the workshops relating to special needs. SNAC looks forward to continued participation next year.

SNAC hosted a free parent seminar in the LBPSB Boardroom on May 23, 2012 entitled: "Advocating for the Child in the School System, A Toolbox for Parents", which was well attended, with parents of special needs students from 20 of our schools. A feedback questionnaire provided insight into the concerns and preoccupations of our families.

In addition to providing responses to various LBPSB Consultations, SNAC was invited to make a presentation to the Special Needs Policy Review Subcommittee to express the suggestions and concerns of the SNAC committee with respect to this very important Policy which is in the process of being reviewed and updated.

SNAC is proud to have established a partnership agreement with our peers in the SEAC group at the Sir Wilfred Laurier School Board, which provides for the exchange of documentation and participation in each other's special events.

I would like to thank all members, both parents and non-parents, of the Special Needs Advisory Committee for their dedication, participation and hard work this year. Your time is valuable and giving up so much of it for our students and parents shows your commitment to our school board. A special thank you to Cindy Finn, our Administrative Liaison and Director of Student Services, for her guidance, patience and support in enabling SNAC to proceed with many activities this year to benefit all parents of students with special needs throughout LBPSB.

In closing, I would like to encourage all parents of students with special needs to attend the SNAC Annual General Assembly next September. Whether you would like to nominate yourself to join as a member, or vote for a representative, I encourage you to exercise that right. On behalf of the Special Needs Advisory Committee, I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a wonderful summer, and a successful next school year.

Sincerely,

Sandra Buckingham
Chairperson, Special Needs Advisory Committee, 2011-2012
Lester B. Pearson School Board
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Table of Contents

Committee Members.....	4
Consultations Discussed and Responded To	5
Items Addressed During SNAC Monthly Meetings	5
Special Events	7
Recommendations for 2012/2013 SNAC Committee.....	8

Special Needs Advisory Committee Members 2011-2012

Administrative Liaison: Cindy Finn, Director of Student Services

Parent Members

Angela Berryman
Sandra Buckingham
Jennifer DiMarco
Kiley Philp
Barbara Schnider
Chantal Robichaud

Alternate Parent Members

Irene Bilaj
Aisha Ghauri

Commissioners

Daniel Olivenstein
Conny Held

PTU (Pearson Teacher's Union)

Shauna Beauchamps

Recording Secretary: Andrew Graham

Meeting Dates:

October 26
November 30
January 25

February 29
March 28
April 25
May 30

Executive: Sandra Buckingham Chairperson
Barbara Schnider Vice-Chair
Aisha Ghauri Treasurer
Angela Berryman Secretary

External Committee Representatives:

Central Parents' Committee: Sandra Buckingham; Angela Berryman (alternate)
Education Committee: Barbara Schnider; Kiley Philp (alternate)
Council: Barbara Schnider; Irene Bilaj (alternate)

SNAC Website and Emails: Jennifer DiMarco; Angela Berryman (alternate)

PASA (School Administrators)

Jane Fullerton-Kelly
Michelle Harper

Student Services

Christopher Fuzessy
Marie-Eve Claude

Student Services Professionals

Pam Normandin

IASS (Independent Association Support Staff)

Margo Edwards (Sept-Feb)
Allison Provost (March-June)

Community Representative (WIAIH)

Cherry Marshall (Sept-April)
Franca Kesic (May-June)

CONSULTATIONS DISCUSSED AND RESPONDED TO:

- Budget Consultation 2012-2013
- 2012-2015 Three-Year Plan for the Allocation and Destination of Immovables
- 2012 Meeting dates of Council and Executive Committees

ITEMS ADDRESSED DURING OUR REGULAR MONTHLY MEETINGS:

Written Reports and Recording Secretary

At the beginning of the year, all SNAC members who represent other committees and groups were requested to provide written reports several days prior to the meetings. All SNAC members have done a tremendous job with this, and as a result all members are very well informed. In addition, SNAC Parent Members who have attended Workshops were requested to provide written reports so that the entire group could benefit from the experience, and four such reports were shared with the team.

A third-party Recording Secretary was hired for taking Minutes, in order to liberate a parent member from this responsibility, and enable maximum parent participating during the SNAC meetings.

SNAC Constitution

Updates to the SNAC Constitution included adding email voting procedures, and increasing the number of Alternate Parent Members from 2 to 4 to enable additional parents to participate in the committee.

SNAC Website Updates

The SNAC website which was established only last year was expanded to include additional tabs to provide more information to parents of Special Needs students, including “Pamphlet”, “Handbook” and “Events”. SNAC had inquired as to whether a link to the SNAC website could be placed on each school’s website. The request was granted and as a result, the visibility of the committee has increased and has resulted in a substantial amount of traffic on the website. A “hit counter” was added to track the number of visitors to the SNAC Homepage, which averages 500 hits per month.

Discussion of Supervisor/S.N. Student Ratio at large outings

An incident occurred at the beginning of the year in which a child with special needs went missing during an outdoor event. A discussion ensued as to what process changes could be suggested to reduce the risk of recurrence in the future. SNAC suggestions included reinforcing the need for discussion of supervision of students with special needs at the Regional Directors and Administrators meetings, as well as with Governing Board Chairs for consideration during the Field Trip approval process.

SNAC – SWLSB SEAC Partnership

SNAC established a partnership with the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) of the Sir Wilfred Laurier School Board. It was discussed and agreed that both teams could benefit by sharing documentation, and extending invitations to each other’s workshops.

SNAC – PEF Fund

SNAC requested that a fund be established with the Pearson Education Foundation in our name to enable future fundraising efforts, which was accepted.

LBPSB Special Needs Policy Review and Update

The LBPSB began a lengthy process of reviewing the existing Special Needs Policy, with the aim of updating the policy by 2013. SNAC requested that a Parent Member be allowed to sit on the Subcommittee that was struck for this purpose, but unfortunately that request was denied. However, SNAC received verbal monthly reports on the activities of the subcommittee. SNAC members reviewed and discussed the policy in depth, and prepared a comprehensive document outlining our suggestions for improvement. The SNAC Chair and Vice-Chair were invited to make a detailed presentation to the Special Needs Policy Review Subcommittee at their April meeting to express the suggestions and concerns of the SNAC committee. Specific references to clauses in the policies of other school boards were provided as examples. The presentation was very well received, and SNAC was advised that every effort would be made to include the suggestions wherever possible. SNAC is expected to be requested to provide additional feedback when the first draft of the new policy has been prepared. Until then, SNAC has also offered itself as a resource for any important points of discussion.

SNAC Priority Projects

SNAC began the year with a brainstorming session to discuss several potential projects for the year. 11 projects were suggested, and prioritized. The top 5 ranking priority projects were:

- Host a Parent Seminar to inform and support parents, as well as encourage networking.
- Create and distribute IEP Preparation Documents, to help parents better prepare for IEP meetings.
- Update the SNAC Pamphlet and “Navigating the System” Handbook, to inform parents of the resources available to them, and the process to follow to get help.
- Participate in the CPC Parent Conference.
- Establish a Sensory Breaks Program at LBPSB, to communicate the benefit of sensory breaks as a “whole class” approach to benefit both special needs and mainstream students, such as the “Brain Gain” program, yoga, ergonomic balls, stationary bikes, treadmills, etc.

SNAC Updated Logo and Banner

A new logo was developed to incorporate both SNAC and LBPSB, and is available in both low-resolution for web and high-resolution for print. A SNAC banner was printed for use at large events.

SNAC Pamphlet

SNAC members worked diligently over several months to produce a pamphlet to provide general information about the LBPSB Special Needs Policy, MELS Special Needs Policy, Coding, IEP and Resources. In addition, information was provided about the role of SNAC, with a link to our website and email address. 5000 copies of the pamphlet were printed with the aim of distribution to all families of students with special needs throughout LBPSB, as well as for distribution at special events.

SNAC – AGM Posters and Promotion

The flyer to promote the SNAC Annual General Meeting on September 19, 2012 was updated, and new posters were printed and distributed to all schools. Promotion of the event will occur via the LBPSB and SNAC websites, school emails, school websites, and posters to encourage parent participation.

SNAC – IEP Resource Kit

Work has begun on an IEP Resource Kit: a folder that parents can use to organize their IEP documents. The Kit will include the SNAC pamphlet, as well as IEP Preparation documents to educate parents about their role in the IEP process. The aim is to help parents to better prepare for IEP meetings, and to provide parents with tips for achieving successful and collaborative IEP meetings. SNAC's goal is to distribute one IEP Resource Kit to the parents of every student with special needs in the school board, currently estimated at 3000.

SNAC – Sensory Breaks

SNAC has discussed the importance of educating and providing specific recommendations to school Administrators and Governing Boards regarding the benefit of Sensory breaks as a 'whole class' approach, such as the "Brain Gains" program, yoga; treadmills; ergonomic balls; stationary bikes, etc. Providing opportunities for all students, both mainstream and special needs, to expend energy on a regular basis can result in greater focus, and reduction of classroom disruption. Moving forward, SNAC has expressed an interest in acting as a central information and communication group for these pilot programs, in order to share that information with all of our schools.

SPECIAL EVENTS:

CPC Parent Conference

SNAC was pleased to participate in the Central Parents' Committee Parent Conference via a shared CPC/SNAC kiosk, where the new SNAC banner was unveiled. Two organizations related to Special Needs offered information kiosks, and four workshops relating to various Special Needs topics took place. SNAC members were on hand to respond to questions from parents, and approximately 120 copies of the new SNAC pamphlet were distributed.

SNAC Parent Seminar: "Advocating for your Child in the School System: A Toolbox for Parents"

A seminar organized by SNAC for parents of students with Special Needs took place on May 23, 2012 in the LBPSB Boardroom. The presentation entitled: "Advocating for Your Child in the School System: A Toolbox for Parents ", was given by Maureen Hunt. An electronic copy of the invitation was provided to school Administrators for distribution, and was also displayed on the SNAC and LBPSB websites, as well as the websites of some schools. Paper copies of the invitation were also sent to Resource Teams at Elementary level schools. The seminar was well attended, with parents present from 20 of our schools. A feedback questionnaire provided insight into the concerns and preoccupations of our special needs community.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2012/2013 SNAC COMMITTEE:

- Review the SNAC Project Priorities List developed this year, and consider embarking on the remaining priority projects, including communicating the benefits of Sensory Breaks Programs, attending Kindergarten Open Houses, planning a seminar to inform pre-Kindergarten parents of students with special needs of the resources available at LBPSB, establishing a directory of services for post-secondary students, and others.
- Continue to participate in school board events involving parents (e.g., CPC conference, fairs) in order to promote the interests of parents of children with special needs.
- Continue to offer and communicate available workshops/lectures for parents.
- Consider offering live webinars, or archiving presentations for future viewing.
- Continued update of the SNAC website with minutes and additional information for parents.
- Market and promote SNAC to attract new parent members.
- SNAC members should be welcome to carry the SNAC banner at public events related to special needs, such as “Autism Walks”.
- Review key issues presented by the IASS survey of LBPSB Integration Aides, expected to be available in September, 2012.
- Examine the survey/feedback forms from the SNAC Seminar, to consider additional events, activities that are of interest or concern to our parent population, as well as any supports required.
- Strive to be a strong voice at the school board to represent the concerns of the special needs community, by ensuring that SNAC parent representation is maintained, or added, on the various board-level committees and key meetings.
- Continue to provide input regarding the update of the LBPSB Special Needs Policy, ideally via a direct SNAC parent member on the Special Needs Policy Review Subcommittee.
- Request a presentation on the Budget parameters, timelines and priority allocations from the school board Finance Department as early as possible in 2012/2013.
- Increase SNAC involvement in advising on the LBPSB Special Needs Budgeting process, allocation of priorities, and other responsibilities outlined by the Education Act.

Respectfully submitted by,

Sandra Buckingham
Chairperson, LBPSB Special Needs Advisory Committee, 2011-2012