



Special Needs Advisory Committee

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

Annual Report

2012-2013

A Message from the Chairperson

The Special Needs Advisory Committee (SNAC) had another very busy year. We hosted a successful Annual General Assembly which resulted in a number of new parent members joining the committee.

SNAC members worked diligently to complete a comprehensive IEP Resource Folder, to provide parents with tips for achieving successful and collaborative IEP meetings. We are very pleased to provide one printed kit to every family of a student with Special Needs throughout the entire LBPSB territory.

SNAC hosted a free parent seminar in the LBPSB Boardroom on October 24 entitled “Educating Students with Special Needs in Quebec” by Dr. Cindy Finn, which was well attended with parents from 20 of our schools. A feedback questionnaire provided insight into the concerns and preoccupations of our families.

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

In addition to providing responses to various LBPSB Consultations, SNAC prepared a detailed response to the School Board's proposed new Special Needs Policy: “*Students with Special Needs: Policy on the Organization of Services*”. We invite you to read more about this Response on our Website.

SNAC's website has grown throughout the year, and we have made much progress in providing pertinent information of interest to our community. We are very pleased with the site's increasing popularity, with over 600 visits per month.

SNAC has also increased our lobbying efforts by sending a letter to MELs regarding budget concerns specific to special needs, and have reached out to our partners to lend their support to this important issue.

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 community.

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 parent 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

Sandra Buckingham
Chairperson, Special Needs Advisory Committee, 2012-2013
Lester B. Pearson School Board
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**(I) Special Needs Advisory Committee Members
2012-2013**

Administrative Liaison: Cindy Finn, Director of Student Services

Parent Members

Sandra Buckingham
Jennifer DiMarco
Laurie Fox (From December to May)
Diana Gerardi (From Sept. to November)
Kiley Philp
Donnalynn Rainey (From May)
Barbara Schnider
Jonathan Zimmerman (From Sept. to April)

Alternate Parent Members

Hirut Eyob
Laurie Fox (from September to November)
Donnalynn Rainey (From September to April)
Pamela Rainone

PASA (School Administrators)

Jane Fullerton-Kelly
Carmela Di Iorio

PTU (Pearson Teacher's Union)

Shauna Beauchamps

IASS (Independent Association Support Staff)

Allison Provost

Student Services

Christopher Fuzessy
Marie-Eve Claude

Student Services Professionals

Kerry Payette

Commissioners

Daniel Olivenstein
Linton Garner

Community Representative (WIAIH)

Franca Kesic

Recording Secretary: Andrew Graham (from November to December)
Angela Berryman (from January to May)

Meeting Dates:

September 19
October 3
October 24
November 28
January 30
February 27 (cancelled due to snow)
March 13 (to replace February 27 meeting)
March 27
April 24
May 29

Executive:

| | |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Sandra Buckingham | Chairperson |
| Barbara Schnider | Vice-Chair |
| Jonathan Zimmerman | Treasurer (until January) |
| Laurie Fox | Secretary (as of November) |

External Committee Representatives:

Central Parents' Committee: Sandra Buckingham; Donnalynn Rainey (alternate)
Education Committee: Barbara Schnider
Council: Jennifer DiMarco; Pamela Rainone (alternate)

SNAC Website and Emails: Jennifer DiMarco

Resignation of parent members, appointment of Alternate members

At two points throughout the year, a parent holding a two-year term, and a parent holding a one-year had to resign due to personal issues. As per the SNAC Constitution, the alternate parent members were then asked if they would be interested in filling the positions. Two parents accepted the nomination and were acclaimed as the replacements.

Appointment and Approval of replacement for Treasurer Position

The position of Treasurer was vacated and a replacement was required. A replacement was nominated and acclaimed to the position.

(II) ITEMS ADDRESSED DURING OUR REGULAR MONTHLY MEETINGS:

Death of Commissioner Conny Held

Condolences were expressed to the family of Conny Held, LBPSB Commissioner and SNAC member who passed away on August 22nd, 2012. He will be remembered for his contributions through the years and his commitment to the special needs community. A new Commissioner was selected on September 22, 2012.

Meeting Dates 2012-2013 and 2013-2014

SNAC decided that it would be in the best interests of the committee to hold an additional meeting during the first week of October (aside from those already confirmed and scheduled the last Wednesday of every month) to begin work on projects earlier in the year. It was agreed to recommend the same approach for next year. However, it was suggested that the regular meeting date should be changed to the third Wednesday of the month, as this is a better fit with the schedule of external committee meetings.

SNAC Recording Secretary

There was an initial discussion about allocating funds to hire a third party to take SNAC meeting minutes. However, due to concerns that SNAC would have insufficient funds to complete its project plans, it was proposed that SNAC members take turns so that the responsibility does not fall with one person. This was the case with regards to the September and the two sets of October minutes. However, it became clear that the parent taking the minutes was not able to fully participate in the meeting discussion, so a motion to hire a Recording Secretary carried. Unfortunately in January, SNAC's third-party recording secretary was no longer available for service. As a result, a motion was carried in January to appoint an external parent volunteer as recording secretary for the remainder of the 2012-2013 school year at no cost to the committee. SNAC would like to extend our sincere thanks to Angela Berryman for her volunteer service in this capacity. It was recommended that SNAC continue to employ a third party for taking minutes next year.

Minutes are listed on the SNAC website under the "*Minutes of Meetings*" tab.

SNAC Priority Projects

SNAC began the year with a brainstorming session to discuss several potential projects for the year. Some of the projects discussed included:

- The IEP Folder Project
- SNAC Advertising and Awareness Project
- Communications Projects: AGM Posters
- Host a Parent Seminar to inform and support parents, as well as encourage networking.
- Participate in the CPC Parent Conference

Written Reports

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

Monthly summary reports of every SNAC meeting were provided to the Central Parents' Committee and Education Committees, and are listed on the SNAC website under the "***External Reports***" tab.

SNAC Website Updates

The SNAC website which was established only two years ago was expanded to include additional tabs to provide more information to parents of Special Needs students, including "***External Reports***", "***Newsletter***", "***IEP Documents***" and "***Webcasts***". The SNAC website is now equipped to provide webcasts of special presentations, including that given by Dr. Cindy Finn, "***Educating Students with Special Needs in Quebec.***"

With the inclusion of a link to the SNAC website placed on many school's websites, the visibility of the committee has increased tremendously and has resulted in a substantial amount of traffic on the website. The number of visitors to the SNAC Homepage averaged over 600 hits per month.

SNAC Advertising and Awareness Campaign

With the objective of increasing awareness amongst parents of children with Special Needs about the role of SNAC and the services we offer, a new SNAC Advertising and Awareness campaign was introduced.

The first edition of "SNAC CHAT", a Newsletter featuring compact news items for the Special Needs Community, was introduced in June. The first edition included a description of the role of the SNAC group, and announced the new SNAC IEP Resource Kit, and the SNAC AGM date. A new tab has been added to the SNAC website ("***Newsletter***"). The newsletter will be sent to Pearson News, and Regional Directors will be asked to forward the information to school Administrators so that they may include the information in their school's monthly newsletter. SNAC's goal for the 2013-2014 year is to have three SNAC Chat news items ready for the beginning of next year until the new SNAC group is established and can take over the project.

SNAC – AGM Posters and Promotion

The flyer to promote the SNAC Annual General Meeting on September 18, 2013 was updated, and new posters were printed and distributed to all schools. Promotion of the event will be further emphasized via the LBPSB and SNAC websites, and it will be requested that school Principals distribute the flyer via school emails and/or school websites in order to encourage parent participation.

SNAC – IEP Resource Kit

The SNAC IEP Resource Kit was finalized, and distribution of the kit was discussed. SNAC’s goal to distribute one IEP Resource Kit to the parents of every student with special needs in the school board will be achieved as they will be distributed at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year. The IEP Resource Kit is a folder that parents can use to organize their IEP documents. 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. The folder contains a SNAC *pamphlet* outlining Special Needs Policy information, and several other informative documents, including:

“How Can an IEP Help My Child”: This document aims to help parents understand their role in the IEP process, and plan for collaborative and successful IEP meetings. The last page ***“Options that will help your child Succeed”*** lists a variety of optional support measures to consider that may be helpful to meet your child’s specific needs.

“Parent Concerns/Visions”: is a questionnaire that may help parents to organize their thoughts and concerns to better describe the needs of your child.

“All about Me”: is a questionnaire that may help students who are able to participate in the IEP process to describe their own thoughts, feelings and dreams for the future.

“The Right Start”: is a checklist to help parents prepare for the start of the school year.

An announcement regarding the IEP Resource Kits has been posted on the SNAC website under the ***“IEP Documents”*** tab, as are the documents for parents who wish to view them online immediately. SNAC is extremely grateful to the students in the three Life Skills programs at Lindsay Place High School, Beaconsfield High School and St Thomas High School for their tremendous contributions in compiling the IEP Kits. Certificates of appreciation were distributed by SNAC to the students in all 3 programs.

SNAC – Treasurer’s Annual Report

The members of SNAC voted to approve the Treasurer’s Annual Report for 2012-2013. It was noted that due to the generosity of parent members who have donated coffee and snacks for every meeting, as well as a much appreciated volunteer Recording Secretary, SNAC’s operational costs have been nil this year, so that all of our funds have been applied solely to our projects.

Almost all funds were spent on various projects throughout the year, with a final balance of \$8.17. SNAC requested additional funds for next year via the Budget Consultation, to enable this group to continue to engage in projects to aid the special needs community throughout LBPSB.

SNAC – Discussion regarding Grouped Classrooms

A question from the public advised SNAC of a pilot project that was started this year at Pierre Elliott Trudeau Elementary School, wherein 12 boys on IEPs for behavioural difficulties were grouped together in one classroom. This raised some concerns from parents about the school board’s future direction with respect to the integration of special needs children with mainstream students in regular classrooms. While it is understood that in certain exceptional cases, grouping of students is the best option to further that student’s progress, SNAC members discussed that integration in a regular classroom setting is the most effective model for the majority of students with special needs.

Concerns were raised regarding the ability of individual schools to make grouping decisions, and the extent to which school board professionals and parents are, or are not, consulted on these decisions. It was also discussed whether SNAC should be informed of special projects such as these, in order to share results and best practices throughout the school board, and also to act as a point of communications with parents who may have concerns. It was also discussed whether the Student Services Department should be directly involved in all grouping decisions, as SSD professionals and special needs consultants have professional experience with various types of special needs, and they also have a broad view of best practices that have been successful throughout the school board. This, and other considerations related to “grouping” of students with special needs were discussed at length and documented in SNAC’s Special Needs Policy Consultation Response.

(III) SPECIAL EVENTS:

Parent Information Night: “Educating Students with Special Needs in Quebec” by Dr. Cindy Finn

SNAC was proud to present this informative 45 minute presentation by Dr. Cindy Finn, Director of Student Services. The presentation was very well attended, with 44 families from 4 LBPSB high schools and 16 Elementary schools. Those in attendance were asked to respond to a survey to provide their feedback on the presentation, present their ideas for other events that would be of interest to them, and provide general comments to SNAC. SNAC is thrilled to announce that for the first time, the presentation was videotaped, and is archived to the SNAC website [under the “*Webcast*” tab] so that it may be viewed by parents who were unable to attend in person.

Presentation topics included coding; services; IEPs; transition programs and partnership programs. Dr. Finn discussed the sources of funding from MELS for Special Needs students, including specific Code generated funding and “At Risk” funding (based on a historical percentage of students in need of support). The discussion also described the various complementary educational services within the LBPSB. A short question and answer period followed.

CPC Parent Conference

SNAC was pleased to participate once again in the Central Parents’ Committee Parent Conference. The SNAC formed a subcommittee this year to suggest presentation topics and to contact third parties who might be interested in participating via a kiosk at the parents’ conference. Four organizations related to Special Needs offered information kiosks, and four workshops relating to various Special Needs topics took place. SNAC was represented at the conference via a table identified by the SNAC Banner which was printed last year. SNAC Pamphlets were on hand for distribution to parents, and SNAC parent volunteers were also on hand to respond to questions.

(IV) PRESENTATIONS:

LBPSB Budget Process Presentation: Assistant Director General Carol Heffernan

SNAC invited Assistant Director General Carol Heffernan to make a presentation on the LBPSB Finance budgeting process prior to the annual Budget Consultation. It was a very informative presentation and SNAC would like to thank Mrs. Heffernan. Prior to the presentation, SNAC members provided a list of specific questions to Mrs. Heffernan, with the objective of learning more about the current processes in place, so as to better meet SNAC's mandate of making recommendations as per the Education Act to "to advise the school board on the allocation of financial resources to the services intended for those students."

It was noted that once again, it is expected that there will be a delay in receiving the detailed information regarding budget rules, allocation and cuts from MELS this year, which creates difficulty in financial planning and allocation of resources at the school board. It was also discussed that the annual "Validation" cycle which must be followed in order for the school board to receive funding for students with special needs is extremely detailed and lengthy, and requires an excessive amount of time and attention of our specialists, whose time would be better spent elsewhere.

A discussion ensued as to whether it might be beneficial for SNAC to work with school board administration to prepare a letter to lobby the government and raise awareness regarding specific problems within the current budgeting process, and suggest solutions.

LBPSB Alternative Placement Programs: Christopher Fuzessy, Assistant Director of Student Services

Christopher Fuzessy, Assistant Director of the Student Services Department gave a very informative presentation outlining the Alternative programs available within LBPSB. These programs include Horizon High School, the Transitions Program, the Life Program, the COOP program, WOTP, and REACH. He went on to explain other programs affiliated with our Board – Dawson Alternative, Bourbonniere School, Portage, and Angrignon School. The Student profile of each program was outlined, as well as referral process and the support services offered.

(V) LETTERS:

A copy of these letters may be found in the “*External Reports*” section of the SNAC website.

Letter of Support: WIAIH (West Island Association for the Intellectually Handicapped)

WIAIH offers services to the Intellectually Handicapped and those with Autism, and would like to expand their current Pat Roberts Center location to create a Community Center in Ste. Genevieve. In order to fund the project, WIAIH is lobbying for financial support from the government, and has thus far obtained the support of local MNAs. SNAC completed and approved a letter of support for WIAIH to aid in this lobbying process.

Letter to MELS

SNAC collaborated with LBPSB Administration to prepare a letter to raise awareness regarding specific problems with the recently announced budget compressions and budgeting process as it applies to students with special needs, and suggest priorities for budget allocations. Specific suggestions include: increased funding to support Inclusive Education; increased funding to hire more professionals and paraprofessionals; increased funding for professional development of paraprofessionals and teachers; increased funding to support parent groups; and a reduction in the bureaucracy/paperwork required to obtain funding.

Copies were sent to EPCA ,QESBA , QFHSA, and other SNAC/SEAC groups at other School Boards to encourage their participation in this lobbying effort.

Letter to the LBPSB Council of Commissioners: Request an Extension to the Consultation Phase of the Policy for Students with Special Needs

SNAC members voted and approved sending a letter, in conjunction with the Central Parents’ Committee, to the LBPSB Council of Commissioners to respectfully request that the Consultation “*Students with Special Needs: Policy on the Organization of Services*” be delayed into the next school year. It is understood that this would effectively delay the implementation of the new policy beyond the start of the next school year, however SNAC did not feel the urgency in implementing the proposed policy in the short term, and advises that a more lengthy consultation process is warranted.

This letter was provided on April 26, 2013, prior to the April 29th Council of Commissioners meeting.

(VI) CONSULTATIONS DISCUSSED AND RESPONDED TO:

Consultation Responses are listed on the SNAC website, under the “*External Reports*” tab.

- Policy on Employment and Assignment of Relatives
- 2013-2014 Budget Consultation
- Policy on Safe and Caring Schools
- Students with Special Needs: Policy on the Organization of Services

LBPSB “Safe and Caring Schools” Consultation:

SNAC members expressed concern that students with special needs have an increased risk for bullying. Specific concerns within the school setting, within the context of the new guidelines, were discussed, and were summarized in the group’s consultation response. SNAC included two sections in the response. The first section provided recommendations for adjustments to the policy. The second section will include a more general discussion of concerns that may not fit into the context of a broad school board policy, but are recommendations for schools/GB/administrators to consider at the school level.

LBPSB Special Needs Policy Review:

“Students with Special Needs: Policy on the Organization of Services”

The LBPSB began a lengthy process of reviewing the existing Special Needs Policy last year, with the aim of updating the policy by September 2013. Although SNAC was given the opportunity to provide a list of suggestions prior to the commencement of the policy review, SNAC expressed concern that there was a lack of parental involvement during the development phase of the draft Policy this year.

SNAC’s request that a SNAC parent member be included on the Subcommittee was denied, as was SNAC’s request that the committee receive intermediate draft copies of the Policy. Thus, the group’s only opportunity to provide comments or feedback was during the three month Consultation phase. SNAC expressed via a joint letter with the Central Parents’ Committee (CPC) dated April 25, 2013 that we feel the timeline for this Consultation phase is too short. Three months is a very short period of time for parents of students’ with special needs, whose daily commitments are considerable, and did not provide for sufficient time for careful consideration and input regarding these issues. In addition, scheduling this Policy consultation at the same time as the “Safe and Caring Schools” Policy was particularly problematic. And finally, scheduling an important Policy Consultation at the end of the school year is difficult for all parents due to projects and exams, but is especially difficult for special needs families who are undergoing planning meetings and end-of-year exams that require additional preparation for special needs students.

In addition, SNAC's request for the School Board to email all parents, or at least parents of children with special needs, to inform them that this Policy Consultation was taking place was also refused. It is our opinion that the majority of parents of students with special needs were unaware that this Consultation was taking place, and that insufficient attempts were made to contact parents and request their input.

Nonetheless, SNAC members reviewed and discussed the draft policy in depth, and prepared a comprehensive document outlining our suggestions for improvement. Due to the restricted timeline, we feel that the Response is incomplete, however the main points commented on included: groupings of students with special needs, IEPs, training and sensitization of staff and other students, earlier allocation of services, and a recommendation to establish a means to measure the effectiveness of this Policy on a regular, ongoing basis, such as via a Parent Survey.

(VII) RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2013-2014 SNAC COMMITTEE:

- Hire a third party Recording Secretary, in order to enable the full participation of all members in committee discussions.
- Adjust the schedule of the SNAC regular monthly meeting dates to the third Wednesday of the month (versus the last Wednesday of the month), as this is a better fit with the schedule of external committee meetings.
- 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.
- Examine the survey/feedback forms from the SNAC Parent Information Night Seminar, to consider additional events, activities that are of interest or concern to our parent population, as well as any supports required.
- Continue to update the SNAC website pertinent information for parents.
- Market and promote SNAC to attract new parent members.
- Establish a regular means for communicating with parents, with some options including the SNAC Chat Newsletter, Opt-in Mailing list, or by working with CPC to create a monthly Parent's Newsletter.
- 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.
- Increase SNAC involvement in advising on the LBPSB Special Needs Budgeting process, allocation of priorities, and other responsibilities outlined by the Education Act.
- Collaborate with external parent groups [EPCA] and other school board SNAC/SEAC groups to work together on projects with common goals, such as lobbying MELS to increase school board funding for Special Needs.
- Follow-up on the introduction of the new School Board Policy "*Students with Special Needs: Policy on the Organization of Services*" which is expected to be introduced in September 2013. Work with School Board Administration to establish a means for measuring the effectiveness of the new Policy, and consider creating a Parent Survey within one year of introduction of the new policy.

Respectfully submitted by,

Sandra Buckingham, Chairperson
Barbara Schnider, Vice Chairperson
Laurie K. Fox, Secretary

LBPSB Special Needs Advisory Committee, 2012-2013