



March 19, 2014

Claude Lallemand
Director, Financial Services
Lester B. Pearson School Board
1925 Brookdale Avenue
Dorval, QC
H9P 2Y7

Subject: 2014/2015 Budget Consultation

Dear Mr. Lallemand,

On behalf of the Special Needs Advisory Committee please find below our comments and/or suggestions regarding the 2014/2015 Budget Consultation.

Please note that SNAC's recommendations from previous years' Budget Consultation Responses remain valid, however additions have been made in sections 1b), 1d), 1f), 2f), 3b), 4b) and 4c).

Question 1: Please list additional services or orientations you would like to see offered by the school board

- a) Communication with parents of students with special needs during the registration process regarding the services available to them, to help them learn how to navigate the system; [pamphlet, information sessions].
- b) Communication with parents of students with special needs well in advance of periods of transition [e.g.: Elementary to High School], so that parents are aware of the support options available and differences between each potential school/program, in order to aid with the selection process.
 - In particular, it is requested that written documentation be provided on the LBPSB website that describes the appropriate student profiles for the REACH, LIFE, and other special programs, including the WOTP (Work Oriented Training Path).
 - In addition, when planning High School Open Houses, it is recommended that the Resource Room(s) be included on the school map, and be part of the official school tour, with access to Resource team members to respond to questions.
- c) Provide services to identify and support students with special needs earlier in the process: at the pre-K level.
- d) Create partnerships with the appropriate unions (teachers, support staff) and governmental agencies to express the importance of the following:
 - Allocation of integration aides earlier in the year, once enrollment is known in the Spring, so that they are already in place when the school starts in the Fall;

- Schedule meetings between parents/student/resource team/classroom teacher in the late Summer, before school begins in the Fall, to ensure that the support staff is informed of the student's development over the summer.
 - Ensure continuity of services for students by minimizing changes in the support staff who are working with the student.
 - Create a mechanism to ensure continuity of services for students as they migrate from preschool to elementary to secondary to Cegep. Ensure that information regarding all aspects of the student's condition be forwarded in a timely manner, including transfer of medical information (with consent form), IEP and complementary service requirements.
 - Initiate discussions with PTU to arrive at a solution for "oversized class compensation" due to weighting rules for students with special needs, as well as other factors, which currently costs the school board approximately 1 Million dollars annually. These funds could be better used to put support services in place that would be of benefit to teachers and students alike.
- e) Initiate discussions with MELS regarding the need for the timelines for the allocation of special needs resource teachers and support staff to be better aligned with the start of the school year. The goal is for resource teachers and aides/technicians to be assigned to their students at the end of the current school year, so that they can become familiar with the dossier, and are able to begin providing support as of the very first school day of the next school year. MELS must take the school year timeline into consideration when negotiating agreements with Teacher's Unions and Support Staff Associations.
 - f) Increase the number of special needs professionals and para-professionals: Integration Aides, Special Ed Technicians, Occupational Therapists, Speech Therapists, etc...to meet the ever growing needs, and reduce waiting list times for evaluation.
 - g) Providing additional opportunities for specialized training for both teachers and support staff who work with Special Needs students to keep up to date with the latest methods and practices, as well as assistive technology tools. We suggest the inclusion of role plays and practice sessions as part of this ongoing training.
 - h) Create a mentoring program for Integration Aides/Technicians, whereby experience with particular challenges can be shared with others.
 - i) Create partnerships with Special Ed University Programs – students in their final year to do field work in the schools to gain more experience and help to implement new programs.
 - j) Implement a Peer Mentoring Program or Buddy System whereby students with Special Needs are paired up with a senior student who can provide guidance.
 - k) Provide schools with funding specifically for homework support for students with learning disabilities and special needs.

Question 2: Do you have any suggestions to reallocate resources, increase revenues or decrease expenses or services?

- a) As per the provincial budget of March 17, 2011: "\$240 million would be invested as of the start of the 2011 school year to equip schools with new digital teaching tools, such as touch screens, educational software and laptop computers.... teachers will be trained so that they can take full advantage of the possibilities afforded by these tools." Can we re-allocate board/school finances originally earmarked for that purpose to digital teaching tools and teacher training specific to special needs students?
- b) As per the provincial budget of March 17, 2011: "The government will allocate \$13 million over three years to a new program to support sports teams in Québec's public secondary schools." Can we use a portion of these new funds to adapt sports programs

and extracurricular activities, including social activities, to promote inclusion between special needs and mainstream students?

- c) Provide additional funding for Teacher IEP Release Days.
- d) Provide additional funding to help at-risk students who are struggling but who may not yet have a diagnosis.
- e) Share best practices and programs throughout the board, and with other school boards: communicate successful special needs programs implemented in one school with all schools, to reduce overlaps in spending and make the most use of the finances in play.
- f) Allow SNAC to carry forward any unused funds to next year, and provide additional funds to SNAC: \$3500 annually versus \$1000. We would like to emphasize that SNAC has a strong reputation of not spending its budget frivolously, and that parent volunteers have donated a coffee machine, coffee pods and snacks for every meeting, such that the committee's monthly operational costs are NIL. Some of our completed projects include an information pamphlet and documents to help parents prepare for the start of the school year, as well as to prepare for collaborative IEP meetings. These additional funds would enable SNAC to operate with a third party Recording Secretary, as well as to continue to service our parent community with tools to help them to cope with daily challenges, including workshops, communications, and more. As well, additional funding is required to enable members of the committee to attend local events and workshops of importance to the Special Needs community.

Question 3: Do you have any suggestions regarding objectives, principles or criteria used to govern the allocation of funds?

- a) Increase the priority of the integration of the growing number of special needs students throughout the board, and allocate more funds accordingly.
- b) Consult SNAC prior to making any changes with regards to allocation of special needs resources.

Question 4: With regard to communication and presentation of financial results, do you have any suggestions?

- a) More clearly communicate how the funding for special needs students flows from MELS to the board level to individual schools and programs.
- b) In addition to including the Ombudsman report as part of the Annual Report, also provide a copy under the "Ombudsman" section of the LBPSB website, as was done in the past.
- c) Report to SNAC on an Annual basis all concerns that have been brought to the Ombudsman's attention relating to students with Special Needs (with names removed for confidentiality purposes), so that the SNAC is made aware of all concerns of the Special Needs community, and can better fulfill its mandate as an Advisory body.

Thank-you for the opportunity to participate in this consultation.

Respectfully,

Sandra Buckingham
Chairperson, LBPSB Special Needs Advisory Committee, 2013-2014

CC: Special Needs Advisory Committee, LBPSB
Central Parents' Committee, LBPSB
C. Heffernan, S. Balleine – Assistant Directors General, LBPSB
Suanne Stein Day – Chairman, LBPSB Council of Commissioners