



Special Needs Advisory Committee

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

Annual Report

2013-2014

A Message from the SNAC 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 last year, and printed Kits were distributed to every family of a student with Special Needs throughout the entire LBPSB territory in September and October 2013. Over 3000 kits were distributed, and provided parents with tips for achieving successful and collaborative IEP meetings. We were very pleased to receive excellent feedback from parents, resource teachers, support staff and professionals regarding the high quality and helpfulness of these kits.

In addition to participating in various LBPSB Consultations, SNAC prepared a detailed response to the School Board Budget Consultation Policy, outlining suggested priorities for students with special needs.

The SNAC Chairperson was also invited to attend a Caucus meeting of the Council of Commissioners, to discuss the importance of end-of-year school transition meetings for our students with special needs.

A special request was made to the School Board Administration and Council of Commissioners to increase SNAC's funding, in order to enable the committee to continue to pursue special projects that benefit LBPSB parents, and attend workshops of interest to the community. This request was unfortunately denied for the 2013-2014 school year, but we hope to see an increase for 2014-2015.

SNAC has continued its efforts to communicate more and more with our community, and inform them of SNAC's role within the School Board. 4 SNAC CHAT newsletters were distributed throughout the year.

SNAC hosted a free parent seminar on February 23, 2014 entitled "Kids that Jiggle and Wiggle", facilitated by SSD Special Needs Consultants. This event was well attended with parents from 21 of our schools. A feedback questionnaire provided insight into the concerns and preoccupations of our families.

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. In addition, the number of emails from parents with comments and questions continues to grow steadily, with at least 10 per month. SNAC was thrilled to be chosen by EPCA as a "model" website for other English School Boards to emulate.

SNAC members were very pleased to greet parent visitors to all but one of the SNAC meetings that took place this year. We welcome input and questions from our parent population, and every meeting has a specific Q&A period for this express purpose.

I would like to thank all members 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 in 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 wish everyone a successful school year.

Sincerely,

Sandra Buckingham

Sandra Buckingham
Chairperson, Special Needs Advisory Committee, 2013-2014
Lester B. Pearson School Board
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Table of Contents

(I)	Committee Members.....	4
(II)	Items Addressed During SNAC Monthly Meetings	6
(III)	Special Events Hosted by SNAC.....	9
(IV)	Presentations to SNAC.....	9
(V)	Consultations Discussed and Responded To	10
(VI)	Additional SNAC Feedback on Current Issues.....	11
(VII)	Recommendations for the 2014-2015 SNAC Committee.....	12

**(I) Special Needs Advisory Committee Members
2013-2014**

Administrative Liaison: Cindy Finn, Director of Student Services

Parent Members

Sandra Buckingham
Jennifer DiMarco
Laurie Fox (From Sept to November)
Brett Hillgartner (From Nov to May)
Kiley Philp
Donnalynn Rainey
Barbara Schnider

PASA (School Administrators)

Stephanie Herault
Douglas Stewart

PTU (Pearson Teacher's Union)

Carolynn Jones

IASS (Independent Association Support Staff)

Allison Provost (from Sept to March)
Robert Gilmartin (April-May)

Alternate Parent Members

Brett Hillgartner (Sept-Oct)
Robin Keough
Christine McLean
David Scabo

Student Services

Christopher Fuzessy
Marie-Eve Claude

Student Services Professionals

Ruth Schwarcz
Carrie Gross

Commissioners

Daniel Olivenstein
Linton Garner

Community Representative (WIAIH)

Franca Kesic

Recording Secretary: Andrew Graham (Sept-March)
Brett Hillgartner – Volunteer (April-May)

Executive:

Sandra Buckingham	Chairperson
Barbara Schnider	Vice-Chair
David Szabo	Treasurer
Laurie Fox/Brett Hillgartner	Secretary

External Committee Representatives:

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

SNAC Website and Emails: Jennifer DiMarco

Meeting Dates:

September 18, 2013
October 2, 2013
October 23, 2013
November 20, 2013
January 22, 2014
February 19, 2014
March 19, 2014
April 23, 2014
May 19, 2014

Resignation of parent member/Secretary, appointment of Alternate member

A parent holding a one-year mandate had to resign for personal reasons. As per the SNAC Constitution, the alternate parent members were then asked if they would be interested in filling the positions. One parent accepted the nomination and was acclaimed as the replacement.

SNAC Constitution Review:

The SNAC Constitution was reviewed and updated in consideration of the upcoming November 2nd, 2014 school board elections where there will be a new position introduced: Special Needs Parent Commissioner, and the term for parent commissioners will increase from 1 year to 2 years. The SNAC members approved an increase in its parent membership from 6 to 7, to compensate for the fact that the new SNAC Parent Commissioner will be very busy and may not be able to actively participate in all SNAC projects. In addition, the section of the Constitution that outlines SNAC's "Powers and Responsibilities" was updated to clarify SNAC's role as per the Education Act.

(II) ITEMS ADDRESSED DURING OUR REGULAR MONTHLY MEETINGS:

Meeting Dates 2013-2014 and 2014-2015

SNAC members agreed 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 third Wednesday of every month) to begin work on projects earlier in the year. It was agreed to recommend the same approach for next year.

SNAC Recording Secretary

After attempts in previous years for SNAC parent members to take minutes resulted in much difficulty, it was decided that SNAC revert back to employing a third party Recording Secretary, in order to enable the full participation of all members in committee discussions.

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:

- Follow-up on the IEP Folder Project: ensure proper distribution, request feedback
- SNAC Advertising and Awareness Project
- Host a Parent Seminar to inform and support parents, as well as encourage networking.
- Communications Projects: AGM Posters

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:

- November 2013: “Current Trends in Autism”: Conference, with presentations by Temple Grandin and other experts in the field
- March 2014: “Advancing with Autism” Conference

Workshop reports, as well as minutes/reports of every SNAC meeting were provided to the Central Parents’ Committee and Education Committees, and may be found on the SNAC website under the “*External Reports*” tab.

SNAC – Treasurer’s Annual Report

The members of SNAC voted to approve the Treasurer’s Annual Report for 2013-2014. 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 for 2 months, 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 \$15.97. 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 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 SNAC Advertising and Awareness campaign was introduced.

“SNAC CHAT”, a Newsletter featuring compact news items for the Special Needs Community, was delivered 4 times in 2013-2014. 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 were asked to forward the information to school Administrators so that they may include the information in their school’s monthly newsletter.

In addition, the SNAC PASA representatives were requested to remind all in-school Administrators to include a link to the SNAC website on every school website.

SNAC Website Updates

The SNAC website which was established only three years ago continues to grow, and provide more valuable information to parents of Special Needs students, including “*External Reports*”, “*Newsletter*”, “*IEP Documents*” and “*Webcasts*”.

The SNAC website now provides webcasts of 2 special presentations, including that given by Dr. Cindy Finn, “*Educating Students with Special Needs in Quebec*” as well as a discussion on strategies for students with challenging behavior “*Kids that Jiggle and Wiggle*”.

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, and we receive in excess of 10 emails per month from parents.

EPCA and the SNAC Website

SNAC was very pleased to learn that the provincial-level English Parents Committee Association (EPCA) has singled out the LBPSB SNAC website as a great example, with content that is very helpful to the Special Needs Community. As such, EPCA requested permission to link to the LBPSB SNAC website so that other English school board SNACs throughout Quebec could emulate our website. SNAC unanimously and enthusiastically approved the request.

SNAC – AGM Posters and Promotion

The flyer to promote the SNAC Annual General Meeting on September 17, 2014 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 distribution of the SNAC IEP Resource 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 was achieved, as over 3000 kits were 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.

Moving forward, new parents who join LBPSB will be able to access a PDF version of the IEP Resource Kit on the SNAC website under the ***“IEP Documents”*** tab.

SNAC – Discussion regarding Dealing with Flight Risk Concerns for Students with Special Needs

A question from the public during a regular SNAC meeting advised the committee of a recent incident at an elementary school wherein a non-verbal student with Special Needs went missing for a period of time after exiting the school via an Emergency door. SNAC discussed the topic of flight risks and wandering and how our schools may improve preventative measures. SNAC was informed by Administration that the Regional Directors have been alerted to the concern and that verification of alarm doors is taking place at certain schools.

SNAC sent a letter to the Facilities and Security Committee sub-committee that was recently established to review the school board's "Emergency Preparedness Policy" requesting that the standard fire-drill policy in all LBPSB schools be modified to include verification that alarms on exit doors are set and functioning at all times, so that staff will be alerted if a student attempts to exit during school hours. No response was received.

(III) SPECIAL EVENTS HOSTED BY SNAC:

Parent Information Night: “Kids that Jiggle and Wiggle: Strategies for Students with Challenging Behaviour and AD/HD

SNAC was proud to host this informative presentation by LBPSB Special Needs Consultants Pamela Normandin, Celina Berube and Sue-Anne Ross. The presentation was very well attended, with 46 families from 21 LBPSB 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. 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.

(IV) PRESENTATIONS GIVEN TO THE SNAC COMMITTEE:

“The LBPSB Budget Process”: Assistant Director General, Carol Heffernan

Carol Heffernan spoke to SNAC about the school board budgeting process, with a particular emphasis on funding for students with special needs. The school board receives its funding from MELS: \$4,000 for a regular student, \$10,000 for a mildly handicapped student and \$16,000 for a severely handicapped student. However, a significant challenge is the “Recurring Negative Adjustments” from MELS: the school board budget has been cut by approximately \$8.5 million since 1998. The school board significantly supplements the amounts received from MELS for Students with Special Needs every year, in order to provide the current level of service that is offered in LBPSB schools.

“Educational Technology within LBPSB”, Director of Education Services, Michael Chechile

Michael Chechile presented information about educational technology within LBPSB. Since 2011, a variety of technology device trials have taken place in a growing number of LBPSB schools, including MACBooks, IPADs, Chromebook, Samsung Android and BYOD (Bring Your Own Device). Each approach provides its own pros and cons, but flexibility of device is seen as a key requirement. A MELS grant began last year to allow each school to purchase educational software (\$2.5K for each Elementary, \$5K for each High School). The ESD department provides equipment on loan to schools who would like to “try before they buy”. ESD provides ongoing professional development to teachers on the subject of technology and every school has a Digital Citizenship Representative.

“Educational Technology for Students with Special Needs”, Assistant Director of Student Services, C. Fuzessy, and SSD Coordinator M.E. Claude:

Chris Fuzessy presented information about education technology for students with special needs. It was noted that the MELS provides an annual grant of \$150K to purchase technology (hardware and software) for students with Special Needs. A subcommittee of 20 SSD professionals meets every 6 weeks to review and prioritize requests, and purchase accordingly. Technology discussions are also a standing item on local school Resource Team meeting agendas. In 2012-2013, the grant enabled the purchase of 150 iPADs, 120 laptops, 150 assistive software licenses and 600 additional software programs.

(V) CONSULTATIONS DISCUSSED AND RESPONDED TO:

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

- Consultation on Enrollment Criteria 2014-2015
- “Art & Culture in Education” Consultation
- 2014-2015 Budget Consultation
- “Student Transportation” Consultation
- Emergency Preparedness Policy [as per discussion regarding Flight Risks, see page 8]

Consultation on Enrollment Criteria 2014-2015: SNAC submitted a response suggesting that an additional clause be added to the Question & Answer document of the Policy to address the potential concern that special consideration be given to a student with Special Needs if a school with a Bilingual program has reached capacity, since that program may be more conducive to the student’s success.

“Art & Culture in Education” Consultation: SNAC members were generally in favor of the policy, however some recommendations were made to ensure that the special needs community is fully represented. In the “Objectives” and “Roles and Responsibilities” sections it was requested by SNAC that students with special needs are included to the fullest extent possible in Art and Culture related activities, including extracurricular activities and field trips, and that their needs are taken into consideration by school staff and the Governing Board when planning for such activities (i.e. aide resources or special busing). It was also recommended to include a parent representative in the formation of the ESD Arts and Culture Committee to provide the parents’ perspective, perhaps a member from the Central Parent’s Committee.

“Budget” Consultation: SNAC reviewed and approved a response for the 2014/2015 Budget Consultation. It was decided that the recommendations from previous years’ Budget Consultations remain valid. There were, however, additions to this year’s Budget Consultation document which include the following points:

- Better communication with parents of students with special needs prior to periods of transition such as high school, as well as establishing a meeting with the classroom teacher and Resource team prior to the start of every school year.
- Provide detailed information on the appropriate student profiles for access to special programs such as REACH, LIFE and WOTP (Work Oriented Training Path) on the LBPSB website.
- Increase the number of special needs professionals (i.e. Speech Therapists and Occupational Therapists) to meet the ever-growing needs and decrease the current wait-list times for evaluations.
- Increase the SNAC’s yearly operating budget from \$1000 to \$3500 so that SNAC is better positioned to service our parent community with tools to help them to cope with daily challenges (workshops, improved communications, etc.), as well as enable members of the committee to attend local events and workshops of importance to the special needs community.
- Have the Ombudsman report to SNAC on an annual basis all the concerns that have been brought to the Ombudsman’s attention relating to students with special needs so that SNAC is made aware of all concerns of the special needs community and can better fulfill its mandate as an Advisory body.

“Student Transportation” Consultation: SNAC reviewed and approved a response for the “Student Transportation” Consultation. The new proposed transportation policy made no mention of students with Special Needs, so many suggestions were made in the SNAC response to the consultation. It was agreed by the committee that the Policy needs to provide some high level guidelines and criteria for eligibility to transportation services for students with special needs. Some of the provisions that SNAC is asking to be included in the new policy are as follows:

- Students with Special Needs (the description of these students are more detailed in the consultation response) are eligible for transportation, notwithstanding the distance between the home and the student’s school.
- Students with Special Needs are eligible for one of a number of transportation options at no cost to the student, including wheelchair-accessible buses, smaller busses with less students or an individual minivan, depending on the need of the individual student.
- Transportation to school (as described in the points above) must be provided for Special Needs students participating in a WOTP (work-oriented training pathways) program, notwithstanding the distance between the home and the student’s school.
- Students with Special Needs will be provided with transportation services so they can attend field trips and cultural excursions.

It has been noted by SNAC that many transportation accommodations are already provided by the School Board to students with Special Needs even though they are not included in the current policy. Ideally, however, including general guidelines in the Policy would benefit the LBPSB Special Needs population.

(VI) ADDITIONAL SNAC COMMITTEE FEEDBACK ON CURRENT TOPICS:

SNAC Recommendations for the “Annual Update to the School Success Plan”: CPC (The Central Parents’ Committee) has initiated a project to offer suggested improvements to Administration regarding the template that is used to document every school’s Annual Update to the Success Plan. A subcommittee has been struck to work on this and is requesting input from all parent groups, including SNAC. SNAC members discussed and approved a document outlining the committee’s suggestions as to what specific information relating to services offered to students with special needs at each school should be included in the Annual Report, so that the parent community can be adequately informed. Some examples include listing specific data about the number of students who are “coded” versus those “at risk”, how many Support Staff and Resource Teachers offer support, as well as a discussion regarding any Alternative Programs and/or Grouped Classrooms at the school.

Presentation to the Council of Commissioners: April 28, 2014:

At the March Council of Commissioners meeting, a formal Request for Reconsideration of a Decision was put forth and put to a vote as to whether June 23rd should be kept as the last day of school. The result of the close (10 to 9) vote was to keep June 23rd as a school day. Only 48 hours prior to this meeting, the SNAC Chairperson was asked by the Chairperson of the Council of Commissioners to speak at the Caucus meeting to present the various types of planning meetings for students with special needs that take place at the end of the school year to plan for next year’s student needs. Following the presentation, the Chairperson also spoke of SNACs disappointment regarding the April 25th PTU Memo which stated that parents are not supportive of LBPSB teachers. It was clarified that parents of children with Special Needs have the utmost respect for their children’s teachers and rely on a positive relationship between parent and teacher to ensure the success of their children’s education.

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

1. Follow-up with request to Council to increase SNAC funding. Additional funds (estimated at \$3500 per year) would enable SNAC to:
 - Hire a third party Recording Secretary, in order to enable the full participation of all members in committee discussions.
 - Fund workshops on topics of interest to the LBPSB parent community.
 - Fund SNAC member attendance to key local conferences/workshops of importance to the Special Needs Community.
 - Fund additional special projects to service the LBPSB Special Needs Community.
 - Offset the cost of refreshments during meetings.
2. Work with LBPSB Administration and Council of Commissioners to establish a clear mandate for the new elected position of Special Needs Parent Commissioner.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. Increase SNAC involvement in advising on the LBPSB Special Needs Budgeting process, allocation of priorities, and other responsibilities outlined by the Education Act.
6. Follow-up on previous request to receive additional information for “Requests for Reconsideration” sent to the Ombudsman for students with special needs (as per the Education Act), so that SNAC may be aware of the concerns of the LBPSB community.
7. Follow-up on the updated School Board Policy “*Students with Special Needs: Policy on the Organization of Services*” which was introduced in September 2013. Work with Administration to establish a means for measuring the effectiveness of the new Policy, and consider creating a Parent Survey to solicit parent feedback, suggestions, and ideas.
8. Follow the negotiations for the new Teachers Collective Agreement, and suggest any improvements with respect to students with special needs.
9. Market and promote SNAC to attract new parent members, and increase awareness of the work that the committee does to support parents. Continue to update the SNAC website.
10. Brainstorm ways to establish consistent and regular communications with parents in ALL schools (such as by working with CPC to create a monthly Parent’s Newsletter that is emailed to all parents, and/or the SNAC CHAT Newsletter)
11. Encourage continued distribution of the SNAC IEP Resource Kit, either via new funding to print hard copies for new families in the system, or referral to the SNAC Website
12. Discuss early in the school year the possibility of establishing a SNAC/SSD presence at the K Open Houses in Jan 2015. Consider partnership with the MELS-MESS committee.
13. Begin planning early in the school year what presentations would be helpful to SNAC members (eg: “Navigating the System”, Overview of “TEVA”, Overview of “LEARN”, etc) and plan to invite speakers as appropriate.
14. Begin planning early in the school year to offer 1-2 workshops for LBPSB parents within the 2014-2015 school year. Consider offering live webinars, and archiving presentations.
15. Consider facilitating and encouraging schools to offer a “Sensory Breaks” program [Brain Gym, yoga, stationary peddle machines, etc] to benefit both mainstream and S.N students.

We would like to thank all members 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.

Respectfully submitted by,

Sandra Buckingham, Chairperson
Barbara Schnider, Vice Chairperson
Brett Hillgartner, Secretary

LBPSB Special Needs Advisory Committee, 2013-2014