



Special Needs Advisory Committee

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

Annual Report

2014-2015

A Message from the SNAC Chairperson

The Special Needs Advisory Committee (SNAC) had another very busy year. We hosted a successful Annual General Meeting which resulted in a number of new parent members joining the committee. In addition, a new position was made available within the school board's Council of Commissioners for a Special Needs Parent Commissioner to represent all issues related to students with special needs throughout the board. This new position was also included on the executive committee of SNAC.

SNAC members worked diligently to promote and respond to issues related to special needs across the board. In addition to participating in various LBPSB consultations, SNAC prepared a brief for the Major School Change consultation that highlighted special considerations that should be made for students with special needs in the event that any programs or school buildings should change as a result of this process.

In an effort to protect students with special needs in the public education system, SNAC sent a letter to MEESR to protest the ongoing budget cuts to education. SNAC expressed concerns about the direct and negative impact that Quebec government budget cuts would have upon the special needs population and the programs geared to their success.

SNAC hosted a free parent seminar on January 15, 2015 entitled "Individual Education Plans – Helping Students Achieve Success", facilitated by SSD special needs consultants. This event was well attended by 74 parents; with 15 elementary schools and 3 high schools represented. It was also webcast and archived to the SNAC website for parents who were unable to attend. A feedback questionnaire provided insight into the concerns and preoccupations of our families.

In an effort to increase the representation of parents of students with special needs throughout the school board, SNAC made recommendations to reserve a parent position on each school's Governing Board for a parent with a student who has an IEP. Working with the Central Parents Committee (CPC), this recommendation will be made via the AGA kits which are provided to each school prior to governing board elections. While it will be up to each individual school to implement the suggestion, it is the hope of SNAC members that representation will begin to increase over time.

SNAC members approved a letter of endorsement of QESEC, a group of Special Needs Parent Commissioners and the Executives of the Special Needs Advisory Committees of the Quebec English School Boards, who have united to present a unified voice to MEESR and share best practices among the Special Needs parent communities. SNAC supports QESEC's efforts to work in the spirit of collaboration to support our most vulnerable students.

Due to the popularity of the SNAC IEP Resource Kits, 500 additional kits were printed for distribution to new students with IEPs who will be attending LBPSB schools in the 2015-2016 school year. We are grateful to LBPSB Administration for providing the additional funding that was required to complete this project.

SNAC has continued its efforts to communicate more and more with our community, and inform them of SNAC's role within the School Board. One idea that we continue to pursue is to share information about the committee with the IEPs that are sent with the report cards 3 times throughout the school year.

SNAC's website has grown throughout the past few years, 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 as there are more visits to the site each month and many viewings of the webcasts featuring some of the workshops that SNAC has hosted in the past. Moreover, EPCA has requested to link to some of our material to use in the Special Needs section of the EPCA website.

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 Meeting on September 16, 2015. 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,

Brett Hillgartner
Chairperson, Special Needs Advisory Committee, 2014-2015
Lester B. Pearson School Board
Email: snac@lbpearson.ca [PLEASE NOTE: NEW email address]
Website: <http://snac.lbpsb.qc.ca>

(I) SPECIAL NEEDS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS 2014-2015:

Parent Members

Sandra Buckingham
Jennifer DiMarco
Donnalynn Rainey
Brett Hillgartner
Kiley Philp
Christine Mclean
Barbara Schnider

Administrative Liaison

Cindy Finn (Director of Student Services)

PASA (School Administrators)

Diana Martire

PTU (Pearson Teacher's Union)

Carolynn Jones

IASS (Independent Assoc. Support Staff)

Robert Gilmartin

Alternate Parent Members

Caroline LeBrun
Maria Colavita
Camelia Burlec
Romina Constantini

Student Services

Christopher Fuzessy
Marie-Eve Claude

Student Services Professionals

Maureen Hunt

Commissioners

Noel Burke
Mary Anne Davis

Community Representative (WIAIH)

Franca Kesic

Executive:

Brett Hillgartner	Chairperson
Barbara Schnider	Vice-Chair
Sandra Buckingham	Special Needs Parent Commissioner
Donnalynn Rainey	Secretary
Sandra Buckingham	Treasurer

External Committee Representatives:

Central Parents' Committee:	Donnalynn Rainey, Sandra Buckingham (alternate)
Education Committee:	Barbara Schnider
Council:	Sandra Buckingham
QESEC:	Sandra Buckingham

SNAC Website and Emails: Jennifer DiMarco, Maria Colavita (assistant)

Recording Secretary: Laurie Kathleen Fox

Meeting Dates 2014-2015:

September 17, 2014
October 1, 2014
October 22, 2014
November 19, 2014
January 21, 2015
February meeting cancelled
March 18, 2015
April 15, 2015
May 20, 20145
June 2, 2015 (special meeting)

SNAC members agreed that it would be in the best interests of the committee to hold an additional meeting during the first week of June, to prepare SNAC's brief for the MSC. Additionally our February meeting was cancelled due to the unavailability of members.

Chairperson:

SNAC's chair from the previous year stepped aside to be able to pursue other positions within the school board. A motion to nominate Brett Hillgartner for the position was put forward, with no opposition the motion was carried and Brett Hillgartner became the new SNAC chair for 2014-2015

Special Needs Parent Commissioner:

A new position was made available within the school board's Council of Commissioners for a Special Needs Parent Commissioner to represent all issues related to students with Special Needs throughout the board. Sandra Buckingham was nominated and elected into the position of Special Needs Parent Commissioner 2014-2016 by SNAC parent members.

(II) ITEMS ADDRESSED DURING OUR MONTHLY MEETINGS:

SNAC Recording Secretary

Last year's recording secretary was unable to continue his role; this was resolved with the addition of a SNAC former member, Laurie Kathleen Fox, who agreed to step in to the role of volunteer recording secretary. Minutes are listed on the SNAC website under the "*Minutes of Meetings*" tab.

SNAC Priority Projects

As ever SNAC's first meeting started with a brainstorming session to identify priority projects for the year. Some our priorities this year included;

- Increasing SNACs awareness and visibility.
- Creating a letter to be included in students IEP's to increase parental knowledge of SNAC.
- Following up on the success of the IEP kits and hosting an IEP workshop.

- Meeting with other SNAC groups from neighboring school boards in an effort to share ideas and best practices.
- Protest financial cuts to education at the provincial level to ensure that services for students with special needs are maintained.
- Increase the representation for parents of special needs students throughout the school board.

SNAC Treasurer's Annual Report

Last year SNAC submitted a request via the Budget Consultation for additional funding which was approved. This increased SNACs budget to \$1500 for the year. Due to parent members providing snacks and drinks and very little spending on SNAC's part, by the end of the year the budget sat at \$1299. A vote was taken to use these funds to print 500 more of our IEP kits for distribution. This plus the printing of AGM posters put us over budget to a sum of \$568.76. A request was made to LBPSB Administration for the extra funding to be able to complete the printing which was approved.

SNAC Awareness

Several ideas were put forward this year to continue to increase SNACs visibility within the parent community. Although we have continued to grow we still are looking for ways to get SNACs name out. Ideas included;

- Draft a letter to be sent out with student's IEPs.
- Occasional access for SNAC announcements via the ERMS system.
- Letters sent to all resource teachers with SNAC pamphlets for hand-outs to parents.
- Establish a position for a special needs parent representative on each school's Governing Board.
- Utilizing the QFSHA to spread awareness.
- Supporting the initiatives of the newly formed QESEC group (Quebec English Special Education Commissioners)

Increasing Representation for Parents of Special Needs Students within LBPSB

Using CPC as a starting point, SNAC brought forward an idea to increase special needs representation at the school level, via each schools' governing board. It was suggested that governing boards be encouraged to have one of the parent positions on the board set aside for a parent of a child with an IEP so that they could represent the interests of students with special needs and their parents at the school level. SNAC's recommendation was also brought forward to the Council of Commissioners. Following several months of discussion, it was decided that it would be best if the recommendation came via CPC in the AGA kits that are provided to each school prior to governing board elections. While not every school's governing board will implement this suggestion in the 2015-2016 school year, it is the hope of SNAC members that representation will begin to increase over time.

SNAC's Letter to the Government of Quebec to Protest Budget Cuts

With various budget cuts being put forward by the provincial government, SNAC drafted and sent a letter to MEESSR to protest the cuts to public education. This letter was prompted by a similar letter that QESEC also sent to MEESSR. SNAC expressed concerns about the direct and negative impact cuts would have upon the special needs population and their education. The letter was unanimously supported by all SNAC members and Administration provided translation support.

Additional IEP Resource Kits

Due to the popularity of the SNAC IEP Resource Kits, 500 additional kits were printed in May 2015 for distribution to new students with IEPs who will be attending LBPSB schools in the 2015-2016 school year. The kits have been sent to each school's resource department for distribution.

EPCA and the SNAC Website

EPCA continued to uphold its opinion that SNAC's website provided a valuable resource for parents and encouraged its model for other SNAC Committees. As such, they requested to be able to share resources from the SNAC website on the EPCA website, including archived video presentations. After some discussion, along with a permission request from the presenters featured on the videos, it was agreed that SNAC would share its online resources, as long as the links drive traffic back to SNAC's website.

SNAC AGM Posters and Promotion

The flyer to promote the SNAC Annual General Meeting on September 16, 2015 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 administrators distribute the flyer via school emails and/or school websites in order to encourage parent participation.

Presentations to SNAC

This year SNAC was fortunate enough to have several presentations made to them during their meetings. Those included;

- Dr Cindy Finn: Educating students with special needs in Quebec
- Barbara Vuk Freeston: Pearson Education Foundation
- Carol Heffernan: School board financing.
- John Donnelly: Pearson Teachers Union.

(III) SPECIAL EVENTS & MEETINGS:

IEP Workshop "Individual Education Plans – Helping Students Achieve Success"

SNAC once again hosted a very successful workshop on January 15th, 2015. This time we focused on IEP's, how they are used to help students achieve success, and what they mean to parents. Celina Bérubé and Ruth Schwarcz were our very capable hosts for the evening and answered many questions from parents including the difference between modified and adapted IEPs. The workshop was attended by 74 people, with 15 elementary schools and 3 high schools represented. It was also webcast and archived to the SNAC website for parents who were unable to attend.

Inter-board SNAC meeting and the Establishment of QESEC

EPCA facilitated meetings between all Chairs, Vice-chairs and Special Needs Parent Commissioners of all English Quebec School Boards. In attendance were representatives from LBPSB, SWLSB, EMSB, Western Quebec, Riverside and Eastern Township school boards. Representing LBPSB's SNAC were Sandra Buckingham, Brett Hillgartner and Barbara Schnider. The Special Needs parent Commissioners came together and formed the Quebec English Special Education Commissioners (QESEC) in order to provide a common and united voice for MELS/MEESR. Sandra Buckingham was elected as chairperson of QESEC. SNAC members approved a letter of endorsement of QESEC, and supports QESEC's efforts to work in the spirit of collaboration to support our most vulnerable students. Throughout the year, QESEC sent 3 letters to MEESR to provide recommendations for School Board Governance, to protest budget cuts, and to provide recommendations regarding the election process and role of the Special Needs Parent Commissioner.

Montreal Autism in Motion Conference 2015

Barbara Schnider and Camelia Burke attended the ever popular Autism in Motion conference as representatives for SNAC and provided reports which are posted on the SNAC website under the "External Reports" tab: <http://snac.lbpsb.qc.ca/eng/ExternalReports/page.asp>.

(IV) CONSULTATIONS:

Consultation Responses are listed on the SNAC website, under the "***External Reports***" tab. This year SNAC provided a consultation response for each of the following:

- Enrolment Criteria
- 2015-2016 Budget Consultation
- Three Year Plan of Allocation and Destination of Immovables
- 2015 Major School Change

Enrollment Criteria:

The committee ratified 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 versus an Immersion program.

"Budget" Consultation:

Pending receipt of more detailed financial information from the school board about the specific breakdown of the allocation of funds for the support of students with Special Needs within LBPSB, the SNAC is limited in the detail that the committee can provide for this consultation. It was decided that SNAC's brief last year was still relevant and appropriate, thus it was resubmitted with only minor changes.

Three Year Plan of Allocation and Destination of Immovables:

Considering that there are many important services and programs for students with special needs that are housed at the different LBPSB schools and centers, and considering that change can be difficult for some students with special needs, SNAC encouraged that special consideration be made to maintain all of the current services and programs in the current locations, with the least amount of disruption or

change for these students as possible. In addition, SNAC encouraged that attention be given to universal accessibility to LBPSB buildings for all.

Major School Change:

The 2014-2015 SNAC provided a brief to the Major School Change (MSC) Consultation that was launched by the school board. The purpose of the brief was to highlight priority issues that SNAC recommends should be considered carefully by the school board and the Council of Commissioners when making decisions during the MSC process about school buildings and programs. Moreover, in the event that the MSC process leads to the mergers or closures of some of our schools and/or changes to programs that affect students, then SNAC recommended that additional support be provided by the school board in order to help students with special needs with any transition issues. The complete SNAC MSC brief is available at the following link: <http://snac.lbpsb.qc.ca/eng/extra/img/SNAC-MSC-2015-Brief.pdf>

(V) RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2015-2016 COMMITTEE:

1. 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.
2. Review SNAC's MSC brief and consider submitting another brief, or an addendum, prior to the October 31st, 2015 deadline.
3. Follow-up with CPC on how the recommendation for the addition of a parent of a student with an IEP representative on governing boards was received and look for ways to improve awareness of this new option for participation.
4. Draft a parent survey to discover how SNAC can better meet the needs of the special needs parent population.
5. Continue to explore ideas on how communicate more effectively with parents of students with special needs.
6. Revisit the idea of sending out information about SNAC with IEPs in the fall.
7. Follow the negotiations for the new Teachers Collective Agreement and suggest any improvements with respect to students with special needs.
8. Host one or two workshops of interest for parents of students with special needs. Ideas for future presentations were put forward after the IEP workshop and the most popular being a workshop to help with the transition of a special needs student from elementary to high school.
9. Request that SNAC is informed of all special needs pilot programs within LBPSB.

10. Collaborate with external parent groups (EPCA) and other school board SNAC/SEAC groups via QESEC to work together on projects with common goals, such as lobbying MEESR to increase school board funding for Special Needs.
11. Request detailed information from Administration regarding the allocation and distribution of special needs resources. Increase SNAC involvement in advising on the LBPSB Special Needs Budgeting process, allocation of priorities, and other responsibilities outlined by the Education Act.

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,

Brett Hillgartner, Chairperson
Donnalynn Rainey, Secretary

LBPSB Special Needs Advisory Committee, 2014-2015