



MSC Consultation 2015

Brief of the Special Needs Advisory Committee

The Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB) has a long-standing history of providing quality education to its student population, including students with special needs. It is the hope of the Special Needs Advisory Committee (SNAC) that through the MSC process, special consideration will be made for students with special needs and the programs and strategies that are in place to ensure their academic and social success.

Transition Plans Following the MSC Outcome

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 recommends that additional support be provided by the school board in order to help students with special needs with any transition issues.

School Philosophy and Culture: In the event that two schools from different neighbourhoods merge, or two schools with many diverse cultures and philosophies merge, special attention should be given to help both school communities understand each other's backgrounds. There are some schools where the philosophy of inclusiveness is a day to day reality, whereas, there exist other schools where the population of students with special needs is significantly lower, therefore they may not be accustomed to having so many students with different needs in their school. Every effort should be made to enhance a school culture where ALL students feel motivated, safe, protected and accepted.

Safe and Caring Environment: It is recommended that special attention be paid to the potential for bullying of students with special needs, if they are moved into a new school, new environment, with new people. Potentially, "student ambassadors"/ "mentors" in the senior grades can be trained to help make the incoming students feel more comfortable in their new surroundings and serve as a "buddy".

New Environment / Transitions: Through the process of MSC, if a student with special needs must attend a new school, all efforts should be made to give those who may require it as many opportunities as possible to visit their new school. This will not only reduce their level of anxiety, but will contribute to their feeling of acceptance. This may include several tours of the school, introduction to the principal, Resource teacher, classroom teacher and integration aide whenever possible. In addition, activities planned in advance between two merging schools will help to foster a sense of community, compassion and acceptance between school populations.

Transportation: In the event of a move to a school that is further away, it will be important to consider the specific transportation requirements of students with special needs, such as smaller buses or wheelchair-accessible buses. In addition, it should be kept in mind that many students with special needs may have difficulty remaining on the bus for extended periods of time. All efforts should be made to ensure that if a student with special needs, for example, gets on the bus first in the morning, it should be taken into consideration that whenever possible, they should not be the last off of the bus.

Support Team: In the event of a school and/or program change, it may be necessary to provide additional support services to a student with special needs, to help that student deal with new challenges. For example, a student may require additional support time from a Resource Teacher if he is moved into an Immersion program from a Bilingual program.

Plan of Action: SNAC strongly encourages the school board to take on the responsibility of creating a plan of action to meet the needs of students with special needs during the transition period after the MSC decision. It is imperative that a comprehensive a plan for students with special needs be developed in partnership with the parents, school support staff and if possible, the student. This plan of action would take into account all of the suggestions outlined above (i.e. visits to new school, “buddy” program, etc.) that will play a role in the student’s academic and social success. Having a written plan of action in place will serve to prepare the students to manage the transition better, and also help to inform staff of how to manage these changes that can be particularly difficult for students with special needs.

Priority Issues Pertaining to Students with Special Needs

Below are the priority issues for SNAC that 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.

Inclusion:

- The LBPSB has an effective model of inclusion for students with special needs.
- We recognize that this inclusion model requires a certain amount of resources to be effective; most importantly those of integration aides, resource teachers, professionals and consultants.
- SNAC strongly urges the school board not to cut financial support to these resources and make efforts to maintain the procedures and programs that help to ensure the success of the current inclusion model.

Support Services:

- Students with special needs often require additional support in the classroom to achieve academic and social success.
- Investment in mandatory and adequate training for aides and teachers on current best-practices in special education, as well as proper communication and sensory sensitive techniques, can improve classroom conditions and cost the school board less resources in the long term.
- SNAC would like to encourage teachers to continue to collaborate with parents in thinking of creative ways to foster student success.
- Support must be provided to students with special needs so they can participate in special events, extracurricular activities and field trips. This may require advance planning of additional aide resources and/or funding allocation for special provisions, such as special bussing, by Governing Boards and Administration.

Community Schools & Language of Instruction:

- SNAC would like to encourage the school board to renew its commitment to inclusion of students with special needs within the “community school” whenever possible, except in exceptional circumstances.
- There are many students with special needs who have specifically chosen LBPSB bilingual schools because of their language delays and difficulties in communication. SNAC would like for parents and students to continue to have a choice in what type of program is best suited to their unique needs and learning styles.
- SNAC recommends , wherever possible, that the Bilingual Program be maintained, or in school populations where numbers warrant it, that a Dual Track system (i.e. A Bilingual as well as an Immersion stream running side by side in the same building) be put into place to meet the needs of ALL students.

Special Needs Programs/Alternative Models:

- Although inclusion in a regular classroom setting is the most effective model for the majority of students with special needs, it is understood that in certain exceptional cases there is a need for alternative models that are better suited to meet the individual needs of some students.
- The LBPSB has a variety of such unique programs that support students with special needs. Some of the programs offered include, but are not limited to: REACH, LIFE, WOTP, Transitions, etc.
- Many of these unique programs combine academic instruction with independent living skills, and an entrepreneurial focus to help students with special needs foster skills that go beyond the limits of mainstream education.
- SNAC does not have specific data regarding the costs of offering these programs, but nevertheless urges the school board to maintain these important programs, even in the event that the location of these points of service changes due to the result of the MSC.
- In some instances grouped classrooms are created to meet the academic needs of a group of students. A grouped classroom could be established for a certain subject (i.e. special math class or reading groups) or as a solution for students who would benefit from a smaller student : teacher ratio and the ability to move through the curriculum at a more individualized pace.
- If grouped classrooms are considered in certain circumstances with the MSC process, SNAC urges that LBPSB emphasize the importance of collaboration with parents when making grouping decisions (this should not be done without consultation with the parents and, when possible, the students themselves).
- SNAC recommends that grouped students with special needs spend “non-academic” time with other students (gym, art, music, lunch, recess, etc.) to the fullest extent possible, with the goal of reinforcing positive behavior, as well as encourage social inclusion.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Special Needs Advisory Committee (2014-2015).

Brett Hillgartner, SNAC Chairperson (2014-2015)

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