

Minutes of the meeting of the Special Education Advisory Committee held in the Board Room, J.W. Singleton Centre, Burlington Ontario, on April 5th, 2011

Present: Judy Shiels (VOICE for Hearing Impaired Children); Sherry Foster (Association for Bright Children); Veerle Ryckewaert (Autism Ontario-Halton Chapter); Amy McKenzie: **Chair** (Halton Council of Home and School Associations); Paulyne Lack (Tourette Syndrome Association of Ontario); Lisa Reid (Halton Down Syndrome Association); Diane Vandebossche (Learning Disabilities Association of Halton); Lori Kafato (Alternate- Association for Bright Children); Patrice Shennette (Alternate-Autism Ontario-Halton Chapter); Lori Aker (Alternate-Halton Down Syndrome Association); Heather Holden (Alternate-Learning Disabilities Association of Halton); Lynn Trevisan: **Vice-Chair** (Member at Large); Jackie Bevers (Member at Large); Jason Bartlett (Member at Large); Kristen Lochhead (Trustee); Karen Poole-Lawrence (Easter Seals Society); Jennifer Hlusko (Trustee)

Board Liaison and Resource Personnel:

David Board (Superintendent); Sue Roszell (Principal of Special Education); Pamela Cooley (Assistant); Nigel Scott (HSPA); Lisa Griffiths (PSSP); Lynne Gurzi (HDEAA); Julie Armstrong (HEPA)

Regrets: Maureen Smithers (Alternate-Halton Council of Home and School Associations); Kathryn Bateman-Olmstead (Alternate-Trustee)

Absent: Patricia Molnar (PSSP); Heather Thompson (Canadian Mental Health Association); Dianna Bower (Alternate-Trustee)

Agenda Item 1- Opening

1.1 Welcome and Call to Order

A. McKenzie called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm

1.2 Approval of Agenda

P. Lack/ V. Ryckewaert

#13-11

“THAT the Agenda be approved.”

CARRIED

Agenda Item 2 - Presentations

2.1 Special Education Budget- Lucy Veerman

L. Veerman discussed how funding works within the province. She provided SEAC with a handout describing the funding breakdown for the HDSB. She discussed different grants that Boards receive, and spoke in depth particularly about the grants that are associated with Special Education. She also discussed how enrolment significantly affects how funding is provided to the Board.

SEAC members asked questions regarding some of the numbers within the budget.

Some of the topics that were discussed include funding for EA's, professionals and paraprofessionals. Particularly, how much of these staff members' salary comes out of special education dollars when they don't spend 100% of their time with special education students.

J. Hlukso mentioned that she has been trying to bring attention to this issue for years now. It isn't fair for professional services staff to have their entire salary come from special education dollars, when they don't spend 100% of their time with special education students.

D. Boag mentioned that this issue is problematic since it is difficult to track how all the time is spent.

Discussion also took place regarding the High Needs Amount grant, and the Measure of Variability.

H. Holden mentioned that the past 3 budget documents do not have consistent numbers, which needs to be resolved.

SEAC was in agreement that they need a further breakdown of budget lines to get a greater understanding. L. Veerman will provide more data to SEAC and will also come back to the May meeting.

Agenda Item 3- Call for Notices of Motion/Reports to the Board

None

Agenda Item 4 - Action

4.1 Approval of the Minutes

P. Lack/J. Shields

#14-11

“THAT the minutes of the March 1st 2011 meeting be approved.”

CARRIED

4.2. Special Education Plan Revision Process

Data from the Community Consultation evenings was handed out to members. 2 major issues that seem to be consistent are communication and Speech/Language services.

It was agreed by SEAC that messaging to the system as a whole is a communication process that needs to be addressed. They also had some discussion on the idea of an electronic survey. D. Boag said SEAC should start thinking about this for next year, and that Research needs to be involved.

There also needs to be better communication to the schools because there are staff that aren't aware of proper policies and procedures. Parents are being misinformed because of this.

V. De Mone mentioned that she couldn't even find the news release for the community consultation evenings on the Board website, which is a huge issue. Most parents don't even go to the website. So it is no wonder that there wasn't a large turnout to these evenings.

D. Boag made a note of this and mentioned that he hopes to have upcoming events remain on the main page of the website.

A. McKenzie asked for any other input on priorities to be sent to her so they can be discussed at the working group meeting on April 17th.

4.3. Assessment Wait Time Input

D. Boag mentioned that additional assessments will be conducted over the summer by HDSB staff and also by contracting out to a local agency. The number of assessments that can be done in the summer depends on the availability of staff. The Senior Managers of Professional Services are working with psychology staff to try and streamline assessment processes.

P. Lack suggested working with University students where they could do a sort of practicum to come and provide support.

D. Boag said this was a great idea.

SEAC would like to see a break down of how psychological staff spend their time.

D. Boag said he can bring back this information. He said they spend about roughly 50% of their time doing assessments. Some time involves travel, specifically to the north.

L. Trevisan mentioned that it is likely that parents would be willing to bring their kids down from the north to the staff if that would increase efficiency and allow more time.

There will be more information on this at the May meeting.

4.4. Response to OCT for Special Education Training Review

There is a need to get more responses for the review. A. McKenzie mentioned she received input from HDSA and LDAH. She will share the input received via email. The deadline is April 30th so there is still some time to get more input in.

4.5. Halton Accessibility Showcase

The Showcase is at the Halton Region Building on April 28th from 11:00 am – 6:00 pm. There is a need for volunteers to cover the SEAC table.

4.6. SEAC Awards

The nomination deadline is April 29th. Nomination forms are on the website. Members are asked to pass SEAC awards information on to their associations. Volunteers will be needed to help deliver the awards to schools some time in June.

4.7. Monthly Reports

4.7.1. Bullying (Safe School Action Teams Advisory Group)

The in-service in February went really well. The group is now working to organize a conference in October and they are also working on a DVD featuring students talking about bullying.

4.7.2. Protocol/Communications Committee

J. Bartlett mentioned that the focus of this committee lately has been on the consultation nights. One of the big advantages to those consultation evenings was being able to speak directly with parents, but next year SEAC should really look at having an electronic way to gather responses from parents. The committee is focusing on better ways of communicating SEAC information to parents.

4.7.3. Early Learning Program

The 19 schools for 2012-2013 school year have been posted on the website. The Ministry has requested for May 6th that Superintendents submit year 4 and 5 schools, which will cover the roll out until the finish. Flyers are available for members.

A. McKenzie called for a Motion to extend the meeting.

P. Lack/H. Holden #15-11

“THAT the meeting be extended.”

CARRIED

4.7.4. Accessibility Committee

The committee met on March 3rd. J. Oxley reviewed the process for the integrated accessibility standards. The next meeting is May 30th.

4.7.5. Equity and Inclusion Committee

None

4.7.6. PIC

P. Shennette mentioned the PIC meeting was well attended. There will be regional meetings on April 28th which will be held at 4 locations. They are also preparing for the AGM which will be the 3rd weekend of October. Flyers are available to SEAC members.

Agenda Item 5 – Communication to SEAC and Current Successes

A. McKenzie received a carbon copy of a letter from Durham District School Board to the Minister regarding the MOV statistical prediction model. There is also a letter from the Peterborough Catholic District School Board regarding Special Education Survey for Caregivers. Both letters will be passed on to members.

5.1 Superintendent's Report

D. Boag explained a suggested change around how Assistive Technology is handled in the schools. The department is suggesting ordering computers in advance of next year and providing an allocation to each school. Schools have migrated to a shared approach to AT in their building. It is making it more accessible to more students who need it, and also allows for trial opportunities.

For students with a standard image laptop, which is the majority of students, these laptops can be allocated to the school rather than the particular student and the students that need them can share them as needed. Students that have specialty software will still have their own machine.

This will not create a shortage in laptops for students who need a laptop with a standard image, it would allow laptops to be placed in the hands of kids who need them quicker than assigning them to the student first and then delivering it to the school.

Also, IT is helping to try and re-coup any machines that are sitting on a shelf in schools right now and make sure they go to kids who need them.

D. Boag clarified that the laptops that would be shared, would only be shared with students that have a prescription for a laptop with a standard image and not any extra specialty software. He also explained how the SEA process worked in the past compared to how it has changed this year.

Some concerns were expressed with this process, and also around teacher training and how that affects how the student will use the computer.

D. Boag also mentioned the SMART inclusion project that is occurring right now. Marian Thorpe from Student Services can provide updates on this to SEAC. The department is also trying to incorporate newer technology into learning such as iPads.

Discussion followed on the Assistive Technology process suggestion and included concerns from SEAC members.

A. McKenzie called for a Motion to extend the meeting.

H. Holden/ J. Bartlett

#16-11

“THAT the meeting be extended.”

CARRIED

D. Boag mentioned that it would be beneficial to ask Marian Thorpe come to SEAC to speak about the suggested changes.

D. Boag spoke about the change from 6 hour days to 7 hours for EA's. The EA job description is currently being reviewed.

Student Services has started to consider budget priorities for next year. There are some details on this in the Superintendent's report. D. Boag briefly discussed the Primary Life skills pilot. He mentioned that Program Services should come and speak to SEAC in the future regarding early literacy support across the system.

Some concerns were expressed by HDSA regarding the Primary Life Skills program, specifically, the inability to support these students and the lack of inclusion they should be receiving as identified in the special education plan and the human rights code.

D. Boag said the inclusion piece is something that will be looked at and members can have more conversations about this at the working group meeting.

There was a request for the "Establishment of a New SEAC" process to be added to the agenda for next month. Comments and questions can also be sent to the protocol/communications committee.

Discussion took place regarding the questions from the public. Answers to the public questions are incorporated into the Minutes of the following month, and also noted in the Superintendent's report. The Minutes are a public document and are available for viewing on the Board website. The Superintendent's report isn't technically classified as a public document; however it is currently listed on the website as well attached to the monthly minutes.

L. Aker expressed some concern with the answer to question #2 last month and noted that their association did not vote in favour of the special education plan. However, SEAC as a whole did pass the plan.

A. McKenzie called for a motion to extend the meeting.

H. Holden/ No Seconder

Motion Declined

A. McKenzie adjourned the meeting.

5.2 Association Reports

Not discussed.

5.3 Trustee Reports

Not discussed.

Agenda Item 6 – Questions from the Public

Answers to questions from March 1st SEAC:

1) We've just heard from the ABC representative that many gifted students have multiple exceptionalities. How then is the gifted screening going to be useful to these students? It may get them into the primary program, but it may well fail to identify their other exceptionalities. As they won't be entitled to further assessments, I see that this could be detrimental to these students.

Students with learning challenges can always be referred to a School Resource Team meeting for additional problem solving. We would expect that any student in a regular class or a self-contained class would be referred to the SRT if there were ongoing concerns, questions or difficulties. This would include students who have already had assessments or identifications. Should a gifted student who is struggling require further problem solving, the student can be referred to School Resource Team. A recommendation from SRT could include further formal assessment.

2) The new gifted primary program being implemented in September has been perceived by many as preferential/ or exception based delivery of service for a given group. Considering assessment backlog time and lack of services for other special education exceptionalities, I would like to know if SEAC participated and recommended this and now what changes for assessment testing and delivery of service and self-contained classes would you now suggest for all other special education children.

The issue of early identification of highly able learners has been discussed at SEAC several times in the past number of years. Last year, this topic was discussed at 6 different SEAC meetings with specific plans about the primary pilot discussed at 4 different meetings including the sharing of the Board Reports on this topic. SEAC voted to endorse the Special Education Plan, which included details of the Primary Gifted pilot underway this year. We are currently reviewing our plan of early intervention for all students and will be bringing a report back to the Board.

3) The primary gifted program which was rolled out in the fall had attached to it a 4-year commitment. Firstly, was the \$800,000 cost representative of each year's costs, each centre's cost, or what? When did this get approved by SEAC?

The cost of \$800,000 represented an annual cost including additional staff, cost of assessments and transportation to run the program after it has been fully implemented. Approval of the gifted pilot with the intent to expand the program in subsequent years was approved in July, 2010 when the Special Education Plan was approved.

4) There were two questions that were both student specific asking how a parent resolves an issue with the school when the school staff and parents can not come to an agreement on a solution to the issue.

When a parent has a concern at the school, we ask that the parent work with the school staff to try and resolve the problem. This often includes conversations that begin with the classroom teacher, followed by the Principal of the school. If the problem has not been resolved, we ask

that parents contact the Family of Schools Superintendent, followed by the Director if the situation has not been resolved satisfactorily. The following excerpt from our Board website might be helpful as well:

PROCESS FOR PUBLIC CONCERNS – for parents

It is the practice of the Halton District School Board that public concerns and questions should be dealt with at the level closest to the issue. Therefore, the following guidelines have been set out to help members of the public, staff and trustees expeditiously deal with questions and/or concerns.

Parents/Guardians should follow the following guidelines for addressing questions or concerns.

Where a member of the public has a concern about a school or a Board related matter, and the issue is addressed with the local trustee, the trustee will redirect questions accordingly, depending on the nature of the issue, and may choose to follow-up on the issue with the member of the public.

Where a parent/guardian has a concern about his/her child's classroom or program, the issue should be addressed with the teacher.

Should the parent/guardian not be satisfied by the teacher's response, then the parent/guardian should address the concern to the school principal.

Should the parent/guardian not be satisfied with the principal's response, then the parent/guardian should address the concern to the Superintendent responsible for the school. If the Superintendent is unable to satisfactorily resolve the matter, the parent/guardian should address the concern to the Director of Education.

If the Director of Education is unable to resolve the issue, then the parent/guardian may ask his/her trustee to meet with the Director of Education to attempt to bring closure to the matter.

2 questions from the public were submitted this meeting. Answers to these questions will appear in the May SEAC minutes.

- 1) If the self-contained allocation has increased year over year since 2005, how come this didn't go down as this Board closed 20 self-contained (LD and BRC) classes about 3 years ago?
- 2) Where does the money from the paraprofessional's collective agreement get included in the special education budget? I believe it is around \$750,000.00 this year? Is it specifically for assessments?

Agenda Item 7 – SEAC Discussion/Question Period

Not discussed

Agenda Item 8-Adjournment

A. McKenzie adjourned the meeting at 10:30 pm