

SEAC CIRCULAR

June 2006

Greetings SEAC representatives, and thank you for all your hard work over the academic year. This is an exciting time, with the release of the report of the Working Group on Special Education and the accompanying announcements by Minister Papatello. Some of the recommendations of the report, *Special Education Transformation*, make specific reference to SEACs.

This SEAC Circular will be outlining these and some recent Ministry announcements. As usual, action items will be underlined and summarized at the end. Wording in *italics* is quoted directly from Ministry documents.

Feel free to share any of this information or the attachments with other SEAC members. As always, when you are planning to introduce a motion for the consideration of SEAC, it is particularly important that you share all related background items with your fellow SEAC reps.

Topics covered by this SEAC Circular:

1. Report of the Working Table on Special Education
2. Special Education Funding for 2006-07
3. Funding for assessments
4. CODE Professional Development Projects
5. Student Performance Bill (Bill 78)
6. Transition planning for high school
7. Provincial/Demonstration Schools Strategic Planning
8. Assistive Technology Symposium

List of attachments:

1. Summary of Working Table Recommendations to the Ministry
2. Ministry announcement on Special Education reforms
3. LDAO Press Release
4. Student Performance Bill passes

5. LDAO Response to Bill 78
6. Ministry announcement on transition to high school
7. Provincial/Demonstration Schools Strategic Planning Priorities

1. Report of the Working Table on Special Education

On June 8th, the final report of the Working Table on Special Education, called *Special Education Transformation*, was released by its co-chairs Kathleen Wynne, MPP and Dr. Sheila Bennett, and announced by Minister Papatello. The full report can be found at: www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/speced/transformation/transformation.pdf, and a summary of the recommendations is attached. The Ministry made announcements on special education reform the same day (attachment 2) and LDAO issued a press release congratulating the co-chairs and the members of the Working Table (attachment 3).

You will notice that there is a requirement for parent input in many recommendations of the Working Table, and SEAC is specifically mentioned, as follows:

Parent Collaboration

- *Require school boards to develop, with input from their Special Education Advisory Committees (SEAC), informal dispute resolution processes for issues related to programs and services for students with special education needs. A mandatory dispute resolution process should also be developed for use when all school and district attempts to resolve issues have been exhausted. School boards and parents would have access to trained and culturally sensitive mediators.*

The Ministry's response to this recommendation was announced in the press release the same day (see attachment 3), which said that a resource guide is being developed to provide parents and school boards with recommended approaches on working together to arrive at a shared solution.

SEACs should make sure they are consulted on development of dispute resolution processes in their boards.

Accountability and Reporting

- *Develop a provincial framework for conducting cyclical reviews of school boards with respect to their special education practices. Elicit information related to parent, SEAC, and community satisfaction with the delivery of programs and services. Track resource allocation, program delivery, outcomes for students and integrated service delivery at both the elementary and secondary levels.*

This will be an area to watch for future developments.

Identification and Support Options

The recommendations and subsequent ministry announcement to do with IPRCs are cause for some concern. As we had been hearing informally, the ministry is now discouraging school boards from initiating IPRCs for students who will be in regular class placements: *The ministry is now encouraging boards to consider the necessity of using the IPRC process when both the school and the parents agree*

that the student should be placed in a regular classroom. Parents will retain the right to initiate the IPRC process for any reason and a IPRC meeting would also be held when the parent or school principal desires a special class placement.
LDAO SEAC reps need to advocate for effective communication to parents of their right to ask for an IPRC. For example, Parent Guides that explain this option should be available in local schools to parents who are considering getting help for their children.

2. Special Education Funding for 2006-07

The question of changes to special education funding was not fully addressed in the report of the Working Table, although there were indications that a system similar to the current one would continue until a research/review process is developed to confirm or track changes in the current rates of students with high needs.

A subsequent *Memorandum to Directors of Education* on Education Funding for 2006-07 announced that the 2005-06 High Needs Amount, based on ISA Cycle 5 and 2005-06 Net New Needs, would be converted to a per pupil amount, to be adjusted for changes in total board enrollment. This will eliminate in the future the process of claiming new high needs students. You can find the details on page 13-14 of the following document: http://bmemos.edu.gov.on.ca/Memos/B2006/B_08.pdf.

3. Funding for assessments

On July 8th, when Minister Papatello spoke about the Report on the Working Table on Special Education, she also announced three new funding initiatives (see attachment 3). One of these was \$20 million for psychological assessments:

The Ontario Psychological Association will be working with school boards to reduce current waiting times for students who require assessments and to enhance the capacity of teachers to provide effective programs for students. The focus will be students in Junior Kindergarten to Grade 4 who require differentiated learning experiences as a result of significant learning or behavioural needs.

SEACs should ask for a presentation on the implementation of this partnership in their boards. It would be helpful to ask for the number of students currently on the waiting list for assessment, as a baseline, and the number of assessments that take place through this project.

While the current project focuses on the early grades, dealing with the backlog of assessments should allow boards to assess students in later grades in a more timely fashion.

4. CODE Professional Development Projects

The July 8th Ministry funding announcement included \$25 million to the Council of Directors of Education (CODE) for special education professional development. Your SEAC should be getting an update on your board's current CODE project, and a report on the outcomes of the evaluation process, when it is available. The results of the research will help determine future funding priorities.

5. Student Performance Bill (Bill 78)

Bill 78 was passed into law on June 1st. Sections of the bill that are most important for our purposes include:

- *Ability to set clear provincial education outcomes, after consultation with school boards and other stakeholders, and the ability for the ministry to require school boards to meet those outcomes*
- *Formal on-the-job learning, including mentoring, as part of the New Teacher Induction Program - the second step in new teachers' professional development*
- *Ability to add additional professional activity days for teacher training*
- *Authorizing e-learning as a recognized instructional method*
- *Requirements for public reporting:*

The act gives the ministry the ability to require school boards to publish reports respecting their compliance with specific operational requirements that will be set out in regulation.

LDAO sent a response to Bill 78 to Minister Papatello, and Peter Chaban of the LDAO Board presented at a Standing Committee of the Legislature after second reading of the bill. A copy of LDAO's submission and the Ministry announcement of the passing of the bill are attached for your information.

6. Transition planning for high school

As part of its Student Success and Learning to 18 initiatives, The Ministry of Education announced programs to facilitate transition from Grade 8 to Grade 9. SEACs should ask their boards to report on ways that students with special education needs are being included in these plans.

With the September 2005 SEAC Circular we attached an example from the Rainbow District School Board of transition planning for their special education students. I can resend that on request.

7. Provincial/Demonstration Schools Strategic Planning

Thank you to all of you who sent in survey responses or attended a town hall meeting for the Provincial/Demonstration Schools Strategic Planning. The priorities have been garnered from the information gathered, and development teams will be working on each area in the fall. The list of priorities is attached.

8. Assistive Technology Symposium

Just a reminder about the Assistive Technology Symposium which will take place on September 26th and 27th. Boards can send representative(s) from SEAC, and you can enquire if someone from your SEAC will be invited. Perhaps SEACs could nominate someone.

ACTION ITEMS

- SEACs should make sure they are consulted on development of dispute resolution processes in their boards.
- LDAO SEAC reps need to advocate for effective communication to parents of their right to ask for an IPRC.
- SEACs should ask for a presentation on the implementation of the partnership with OPA in their boards. It would be helpful to ask for the number of students currently on the waiting list for assessment, as a baseline, and the number of assessments that take place through this project.
- SEACs should be getting an update on their board's current CODE project, and a report on the outcomes of the evaluation process, when it is available.
- SEACs should ask their boards to report on ways that students with special education needs are being included in plans to facilitate transition to high school.
- Find out if your board is sending a SEAC rep to the Assistive Technology Symposium.

HAVE A GREAT SUMMER!

Questions?

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