

SEAC CIRCULAR

November 2006

Your SEACs will be having busy agendas with many initiatives going on right now. I have tried to give you an overview.

As usual action items will be underlined, and summarized at the end. 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.

The topics covered by this SEAC Circular:

1. Special Education Transformation Initiatives
 - a) IPRC process
 - b) IEP Review
 - c) Special Education Plans
 - d) Informal dispute resolution process
2. Parents Reaching Out Grants
3. October Reports
4. CODE Professional Development Projects
5. Ministry of Education/OPA partnership for assessments
6. Follow-up on Tools for Learning assistive technology symposium
7. Training

List of attachments:

1. Ministry presentation to MACSE
2. Memo to Directors of Education on Special Education Transformation Initiatives
3. News Release on PRO Grants

1. Special Education Transformation Initiatives:

a) IPRC process

A memorandum went out to Directors of Education on October 12, 2006 (see attachment). In it Ben Levin makes the statement *"The Ministry is now reminding boards that an IPRC is not required when both the school and the parents agree that the student should be placed in a regular classroom. We believe that this reminder should allow a substantial reduction in the number of IPRCs."* Later in the memo Dr. Levin does say *"Parents retain the right to initiate the IPRC process for any reason. Furthermore, it is considered good practice to hold an IPRC when the parents/school/board are considering a placement in a self-contained to partially integrated special education class."*

As SEAC reps you should be asking your boards to ensure that parents are aware of their rights to an IPRC. Communicating this to parents may even be a role for SEACs, through brochures or presentations to parent groups. Not all members of SEAC may be in agreement about the benefits of formal identification through an IPRC, but we should all agree on parents knowing their rights.

Dr. Levin reminds boards that *"Students with special education needs should be offered special education programs and services without undue delay, while waiting for an IPRC meeting or for additional assessments."* Certainly we can all agree on this point, and SEACs should be holding their boards accountable for implementing this. Parents should not be told that their child cannot get any services because of the waiting list for psychological assessments.

b) IEP Review

The October 12th memo to Directors of Education announced a Ministry review of samples of IEPs this fall, in order to *"reinforce the connection between a student's Individual Education Plan, the Ontario curriculum and the provincial report card"*.

School boards were to submit to the Ministry Regional office by November 7th anonymous copies of 5 IEPs from each of the elementary and secondary panels. These were to include at least two schools, a cross-section of exceptionalities, and student(s) who have not been formally identified. Later in the year the Ministry will review IEPs for the same students and June 2006 report cards for these students.

SEAC reps should ask their boards for the sample IEPs that they submitted to the Ministry (the student names and Ontario Education Numbers will have been replaced by an alias or code). It should be noted that the Ministry did not ask for randomly selected IEP samples. This means that boards could chose exemplary IEPs with easily achievable goals.

The memo states that *"the Ministry will use the findings to consider the necessity for a mandatory IEP template, and to determine how the IEP process might be streamlined, particularly for students receiving 'accommodations only'."* LDAO has strong concerns about both these ideas. Any template must not be used for the 'cookie cutter' approach to IEPs that some of the IEP engines have produced. As well, IEPs for students who are

accommodated only have already been streamlined, with no requirement for goals or expectations.

c) Special Education Plans

The October memo states *“To reduce administrative requirements further, school boards’ special education plans will be aligned with other Ministry reporting requirements and transformed so they focus on target setting and improvement planning that is related to students achievement and program effectiveness.”* A focus on target setting and improvement planning is an important goal, as long as outcome measures beyond just EQAO results are used. LDAO believes that board special education plans must be written in such a way that parents can find out what special education programs are available in their board and where they are located, and that role of SEAC in reviewing the plans must be maintained.

d) Informal dispute resolution process

School boards will be receiving information later in the year about developing informal dispute processes for issues regarding special education programs and services, and a resource guide for parents and school boards is being developed by the Ministry. The Ministry is also developing a provincial policy on mediation processes for special education programs and services. SEACs should ask their boards to keep them informed of any information on this topic from the Ministry, and ask to be involved in any board initiatives on dispute resolution processes dealing with special education programs and services

2. Parents Reaching Out Grants

On October 19th Kathleen Wynne released the final Report of the Parent Involvement Advisory Board (www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/parentinvolvement.pdf), and announced application processes for Parent Reaching Out (PRO) Grants for Schools (www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/schools.html) and for Regional or Provincial projects (www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/regional.html). I have attached the News Release for your information.

School Councils may submit a project proposal on their own or in partnership with other school councils, parent or community groups. The deadline for these proposals is **November 21, 2006**. Activities can include newsletters in multiple languages or parent workshops, with a possible focus on parents who have recently settled in Canada, have a first language other than English or French, or who face socio-economic or physical challenges.

Regional or provincial projects can be submitted by parent organizations by **December 15, 2006**. Activities must fall under one of:

1. contributing to student success
2. creating a culture in which parents are partners
3. ensuring schools and school boards are welcoming for parents
4. providing parent training and skill-building

The Parent Reaching Out Grants could provide a great opportunity for SEAC members to educate parents, in partnership with school councils or parent organizations in their communities.

3. October Reports

SEACs should be asking now for numbers of exceptional students, placement data, and numbers of suspensions/expulsions from their board's October Report.

4. CODE Professional Development Projects

SEACs should ask for reports at each meeting on their board's 2006-2007 CODE funded professional development projects. In addition, they should ask their boards to share the final research report on the 2005-2006 projects.

5. Ministry of Education/OPA partnership for assessments

Memos have been sent out to Directors of Education on this project. The application form for funding will be released at the end of November. SEACs should ask their boards to share this information. You should have already asked for and received information on the number of students on the waiting list for assessment in your board, and you should be kept informed about the number of assessments carried out through this project.

6. Follow-up on Tools for Learning assistive technology symposium

By all accounts this was a very successful symposium, and there were quite a few SEAC members in attendance. SEACs should ask for a presentation from their board's attendees, and discuss how the information can be shared with parents.

7. Training

LDAO, in partnership with the Ontario Association of Educational Advocates, is offering a comprehensive on-line training program in educational advocacy, the Parent Consultant in Education Training Program. You can find information on registration for new series starting in January on the LDAO website: www.ldao.ca/oaqa/index.php.

LDAO will be offering on-line SEAC training. LDAO SEAC reps and alternates will be able to pilot the workshop, and then it will be offered to other organizations. I will be e-mailing LDAO SEAC reps and alternates at the end of November with details.

ACTION ITEMS

- As SEAC reps you should be asking your boards to ensure that parents are aware of their rights to an IPRC, and working to educate parents about their rights
- SEAC reps should ask their boards for the sample IEPs that they submitted to the Ministry for the IEP review.
- SEACs should ask their boards to keep them informed of any information from the Ministry on the topic of developing informal special education dispute processes, and ask to be involved in any board initiatives on such dispute resolution processes.
- The Parent Reaching Out Grants could provide a great opportunity for SEAC members to educate parents, in partnership with school councils or parent organizations in their communities. You could consider, for example, topics covered in this SEAC Circular such as parental rights in special education, informal dispute mechanisms, technology supports.
- SEACs should be asking now for numbers of exceptional students, placement data, and numbers of suspensions/expulsions from their board's October Report.
- SEACs should ask for reports at each meeting on their board's 2006-2007 CODE funded professional development projects.
- SEACs should ask their boards to share the final research report on the 2005-2006 CODE funded professional development projects.
- SEACs should ask their boards to share any information sent to Directors of Education on the OPA/EDU assessment project, and ask to be kept informed about the number of assessments carried out through this project.
- SEACs should ask for a presentation from their board's attendees to the Tools for Learning symposium, and discuss how the information can be shared with parents.

Questions?

E-mail Diane Wagner at dianew@ldao.ca or call (416) 929-4311 Ex. 22