



Consultation: Education in Ontario

PAAC on SEAC Response

The Provincial Parent Association Advisory Committee on Special Education Advisory Committees (PAAC on SEAC) is the only group in Ontario that brings together provincial parent associations to communicate and co-operate on matters pertaining to Special Education Advisory Committees (SEACs) and special education. We encourage valuable partnerships amongst trustees, educators, voluntary organizations and parents. Through the PAAC on SEAC Effective Practices Handbook for SEAC Members and other materials, PAAC provided tools and resources to help improve SEAC effectiveness and communication, and to assist Ontario's students with special education needs and their families.

PAAC on SEAC is pleased to make a submission to the education consultation and provide a voice for students with special education needs. Students with disabilities and/or special education needs make up almost 20% of students attending elementary and secondary schools. These students need accommodations, modifications to the curriculum and/or alternate programs to be successful. It is vital that these students receive the programs and services they need to become employed and participating citizens in the future.

The rights of students with disabilities are protected under the Ontario Human Rights Code and the rights of all students with special education needs to programs and services are mandated under the Education Act.

The following questions have been answered from the perspective of students with disabilities an/or special education needs.

To support the success of students with special education needs, it is critical that teachers receive pre-service and professional development on Universal Design for Learning, Differentiated Instruction and accommodating the individual special education needs of students. In addition, teachers must have the access to resources that support the learning of students with special education needs in the relevant program areas and course specialties.

How should we improve student performance in the disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)?

- Provide pre-service and in-service professional development in STEM subjects for all elementary teacher candidates and teachers to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to support the success of students with special education needs.

- Ensure that students with special education needs are provided with the accommodations required to successfully complete STEM subjects in elementary school and STEM courses in secondary school. Find ways around perceived safety issues.
- Ensure the provision of manipulatives, assistive technology and accessible course materials for students with special education needs. In Technology courses ensure the availability of support from special education personnel with training in technology.
- Students with special education needs benefit from learning the practical applications of mathematics, science and technology and all students should understand the link between what they are learning and real world application.
- Ensure that students on a modified or alternative skills curriculum have access to STEM subjects, and that all students with special education needs are encouraged to take STEM courses.
- Ensure math programs from the early grades link to the practical skills that students will need as adults – budgeting, banking, building, graphing, project costing, cooking, fitness, career goals.
- While promoting STEM subjects, make sure that Arts programs and courses are available to students studying STEM subjects, as the humanities and the arts provide critical skills for effective participation and analysis.
- Ensure that students with special education needs who attend STEM clubs and after school programs have the accommodations and supports they need to participate successfully, including support personnel and transportation.
- Ensure that secondary school Learning Strategies teachers have the skills and knowledge to support students with special education needs in STEM subjects.
- Employers have identified that they are looking for employees who have strong number sense, data management and problem solving skills. It is vital that students develop these skills at school.

How should our schools prepare students with needed job skills, such as skilled trades and coding?

Unemployment rates for people with disabilities are extremely high and many people with disabilities are under-employed. Research on the employment of people with disabilities has found that people with disabilities can be high performing employees with low rates of absenteeism and few workplace safety issues. Preparing students with disabilities and/or special education needs for future employment success is vital to the economy of Ontario.

- Promote role models for students with disabilities by providing learning materials that show the diversity of Ontario's workforce, that includes people with disabilities.

- Encourage mentorship and other programs that bring individuals with disabilities from a variety of employment fields into schools.

The Conference Board of Canada has identified the following employment skills as critical for economic success:

- Fundamental Skills – Communicate, Manage Information, Use Numbers, Think and Solve Problems
- Personal Management Skills – Demonstrate positive attitude and behaviours, Be Responsible, Be Adaptable, Learn Continuously, Work safely
- Teamwork Skills – Work with Others, Participate in Projects and Tasks
- Ensure that the Ontario curriculum and schools provide all students with the opportunities to develop and use these skills throughout their school career. Students with special education needs should be provided with the necessary accommodations and supports to develop and use these skills.
- Support students with disabilities to learn and work alongside and in cooperation with their peers who do not have disabilities, since sustainable friendships are essential to the development of necessary social networking skills and future non-working and working relationships.
- Create curriculum expectations and content that includes application of learning to careers and the work world.
- Promote the participation of students with special education needs in school and community experiential programs, and in cooperative education programs that will support the development of employment skills.
- Ensure that students with special education needs have the accommodations and supports, including transportation, which they require to participate in co-op placements and experiential learning in the community.
- Promote the participation of students with special education needs in youth apprenticeship programs and ensure they are provided the required accommodations.
- Introduce courses in Coding, as part of the curriculum, from early grades and ensure that students with special education needs have the accommodations and supports they need.
- Ensure that students with special education needs have the opportunity to develop workplace skills, including WHIMIS, Food Safety and First Aid, in the classroom and practice the skills in experiential learning and co-operative education placements.

What measures can be taken to improve provincial standardized testing?

- Provincial standardized testing processes have long recognized that the test content and process is not suitable for all students and some students are exempted as deemed appropriate by the school Principal. Students with special education needs, including

mental health challenges, should be evaluated individually to determine if participation in standardized testing is in their best interests, based on their individual needs.

- Ensure that students with special education needs receive the accommodations that are in their Individual Education Plan (IEP) for participation in provincial standardized testing, including Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) tests.
- Ensure that all test materials and preparation/sample materials are available in accessible formats.
- Ensure that all of the accommodations that a student will require to participate in provincial standardized testing are documented in the student's IEP, and that students have the opportunity to use these accommodations on a regular basis in the classroom before using them in provincial assessments.
- Ensure that an independent complaints/dispute resolution mechanism is provided to address concerns about the provision and access to accommodations in standardized testing.
- Ensure that there is accountability and a follow up process for students with special education needs that are unsuccessful in provincial standardized testing, to identify individual and systemic issues with the testing processes and provision of accommodations.
- Ensure that there continues to be an option for students with special education needs who are unable to pass the Grade 10 literacy test, e.g. a literacy course.

What more can be done to ensure students graduate high school with important life skills, including financial literacy?

- Ensure that the Ontario curriculum and schools provide all students with the opportunities to develop financial literacy skills starting from the early grades.
- Ensure that students with special education needs are provided with the necessary accommodations and supports to develop and use financial literacy skills.
- Ensure that the Ontario curriculum includes learning expectations and course materials to enable all students to develop other important skills such as dietary requirements, food preparation and meal planning, child development and child rearing, social and intimate relationships, housekeeping, health care, and personal fitness.
- Ensure that students with special education needs are provided with the necessary accommodations and supports to develop and use these important skills.
- Team work skills are important to future employers and for success as an engaged citizen and should remain an important focus in schools. All students need multiple opportunities from the early grades to graduation to develop skills that foster team work, including:

- Communication, written and verbal
- Negotiation and conflict resolution
- Personal Management Skills –Positive attitudes and behaviours
- Personal and team member responsibility
- Adaptability and Resiliency

What steps could schools take to ban cell phone use in the classroom?

- Students with special education needs who require personal mobile devices for communication, or as assistive technology to access the curriculum and demonstrate learning, need to have access to their devices in school.
- Recognize that many schools do not have adequate computers for all students (or updated technology) and cell phones can be beneficial for student research and learning; for example, many high school courses encourage students to use their cell phones for research in class. However since this can be an economic equity issue, provisions would need to be made for students who could not afford cell phones.
- Ensure the Ontario curriculum for elementary and secondary schools includes information on the health and safety risks of personal mobile device use.

How can we build a new age-appropriate Health and Physical Education curriculum that includes subjects like mental health, sexual health education and the legalization of cannabis?

Students with disabilities and/or special education needs are especially vulnerable to abuse (emotional, physical, sexual, or financial). It is critical that these students have access to curriculum that will help them to identify and protect themselves from any type of abuse.

- The approach to all curriculum, including health and physical education, should recognize the diversity of people, families and communities in Ontario. It is especially critical that Ontario curriculum recognize the diversity of learners, including those with special education needs.
- Develop curriculum and learning materials for Health and Physical Education programs and courses in consultation with experts who have knowledge of mental health, sexual health education, recreational use of cannabis, child psychology, child developmental stages and disability issues.
- Ensure that Health and Physical Education curriculum is presented in a non-judgmental and balanced approach by teachers and other school staff.

- Ensure that teachers have professional development to obtain the skills and knowledge required to support students with special education needs in accessing health and physical education curriculum.
- Ensure that students with special education needs have the accommodations they require to access the health and physical education curriculum and demonstrate learning.
- Sexuality education is important for students with special education needs – start early, with age appropriate information, use correct anatomical terms, include role playing, safety strategies, relationship skills, school and community resources. Develop appropriate curriculum in consultation with experts who understand the complexities/differences for some students with disabilities.
- Include mental health education in all aspects of the curriculum from the early grade to provide all students with the information and skills they need to protect their own mental health and well-being. This should include: stress management, physical and mental fitness, self-awareness and understanding, relationship skills, school and community resources, online resources.
- Ensure that stress management starts in kindergarten with whole class strategies such as yoga, breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques.
- Ensure that curriculum content on the recreational use of cannabis includes information on the risks associated with usage and especially the potential impact on brain development.
- Since students with special education needs are at high risk for mental health challenges, teachers/schools should be aware of and trained and supported to deal with these specialized health concerns.

What elements should be included in a Ministry of Education Parents' Bill of Rights?

- Parents have rights and responsibilities under the Education Act, including those identified in Regulation 181/98 for the Identification, Placement and Review Committee. These rights need to be acknowledged in a Parents' Bill of Rights.
- Ensure that parents of students with special education needs have the opportunity for meaningful consultation and input into a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP).
- Ensure that parents have the right to be invited to all meetings where the needs, programming and services for a student with special education needs are discussed, and that there is reasonable flexibility to accommodate the parents' schedule.

- Ensure that parents are aware of and have access to a dispute resolution process where conflicts arise, starting at the school level and, where not resolved at the school level, moving on to school board levels, e.g. school board ombudsman's office.
- Consider the development of a Students' Bill of Rights.

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Members: • Association for Bright Children • Community Living Ontario • Down Syndrome Association of Ontario • Easter Seals Ontario • Epilepsy Ontario • Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Ontario Network of Expertise • Integration Action for Inclusion in Education and Community • Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario • Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders • Ontario Brain Injury Association • Parents for Children's Mental Health • VOICE for Hearing Impaired Children

Affiliate members: • Association Francophone de Parents d'Enfants Dyslexiques ou ayant tout autre trouble d'apprentissage • Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy • Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Association of Ontario • Tourette Syndrome Foundation of Canada • VIEWS for the Visually Impaired