

SEAC CIRCULAR

April 2006

Greetings SEAC representatives and welcome to spring!

As I write this SEAC Circular we are saying goodbye to Gerard Kennedy as Minister of Education, and welcoming Sandra Pupatello. Many of the initiatives that we have addressed in previous editions, and will address in this edition of the SEAC Circular, are reflections of Minister Kennedy's commitment to improving the education of all students in Ontario. We look forward to working with Minister Pupatello in continuing to promote success for all students, including those with special education needs.

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. Provincial/Demonstration Schools Strategic Planning
2. Bullying Prevention Initiative
3. Provincial Parent Involvement Initiative
4. Special Education Working Table
5. CODE Professional Development Projects
6. Assistive Technology Symposium

List of attachments:

1. Provincial and Demonstration Schools Survey
2. Memo on Bullying Prevention Strategy Implementation
3. Parent Engagement letter

1. Provincial/Demonstration Schools Strategic Planning

The Provincial Schools Branch of the Ministry of Education operates residential schools and resource services for deaf and hard of hearing students, blind, deaf-blind and visually impaired students, and students with learning disabilities (Trillium Demonstration school, Milton; Sagonaska Demonstration School, Belleville; Amethyst Demonstration School, London). Students with severe learning disabilities can be referred by boards to the residential programs, but boards can also make use of the Resource Services for other students with LDs.

The Provincial Schools Branch is developing a strategic plan for the next five years, and would like input from any interested parties. Unfortunately I have come into the process late, and feedback is needed very soon, so I apologize for the short timelines. Please look at the attached survey and e-mail or fax any comments back to me by Thursday April 20th at dianew@ldao.ca, or 416-929-3905 (fax).

There will also be **Town Hall meetings** in London, Brantford, Milton and Belleville in May, where you can hear preliminary results from surveys and give further feedback. I will send more details as soon as I have them.

2. Bullying Prevention Initiative

A memo dated March 9, 2006 went out to Directors of Education and school principals from Deputy Minister Ben Levin, outlining the implementation process for the provincial Bullying Prevention Strategy (see attachment). Each school is asked to create a school based 'safe schools team', composed of students, teachers, principal and parent representatives, and to conduct a 'school climate' assessment to collect perspectives of students, staff and parents on school safety. Sample surveys are on the Ministry website at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/climate.html.

Each elementary school is receiving \$1500 and each secondary school \$2000, for the purchase or development of bullying prevention programs, training and resources, but money had to be spent in the fiscal year ending March 31, 2006. The Ministry has developed a Bullying Prevention Registry to inform educators and school based teams about which elements of an effective bullying prevention program are present in each resource on the Registry (www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/bullyprevention/).

The elements of an effective bullying program were taken from the report of the Safe Schools Action Team, *Shaping Safer Schools: A Bullying Prevention Action Plan*, and are based on current research. However, only some of the listed resources contain evaluation components, and LDAO is writing to the Ministry to recommend that all school bullying prevention programs include evaluation of effectiveness. The letter will also recommend that sensitivity to the needs of students in special education be included in school based programs and any staff training. SEACs should ask their boards for a report on the Bullying Prevention programs purchased by schools, and ask about plans for evaluation of programs, as well as plans to specifically include special education students.

The Ministry will be setting up a Special Circumstances Fund for schools that “have extraordinary needs in addressing school safety and/or bullying”. SEACs should ask their boards if the extraordinary needs of special education students will be addressed through applications for this funding.

3. Provincial Parent Involvement Initiative

I have attached a copy of LDAO’s letter to Marie-France LeFort, Manager of the Parent Engagement Office, reminding her of the need to involve parents of students with special needs in the initiative.

Below is an example of how SEACs and School Councils can work together, from a school board in Thunder Bay.

Our SEAC has a representative and alternate from our Council of School Council Chairs (CSCC) which represents the councils of all our schools.

We requested time on their agenda, gave them an overview of who SEAC was, how we were involved within the school system and then asked them to sit at our SEAC table. It's proven to be worthwhile and informs school councils of our issues and a really good means of sharing information.

4. Special Education Working Table

No further word here. Presumably the recommendations from the Working Table are on the new minister’s desk.

5. CODE Professional Development Projects

The 85 CODE projects are to be monitored the 2nd and 3rd weeks of May, and the research results will be analyzed in July, looking for evidence of changes among students and teachers. Concerns have been raised about boards’ ability to continue the projects. This issue was raised by the Minister’s Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE), and in an LDAO letter to CODE.

6. Assistive Technology Symposium

Plans are under way for a province-wide symposium in the fall of 2006 for educators to learn how to effectively use assistive technology with students who have special education needs. Invitations will be sent to school boards, and SEACs should then ask who in their boards will be attending. SEACs could also ask for a report on how the knowledge from the symposium will be shared with others in the board, including parents.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Please look at the attached **Provincial and Demonstration Schools Survey** and e-mail or fax any comments back to me by **Thursday April 20th** at dianew@ldao.ca, or 416-929-3905 (fax).
- SEACs should ask their boards for a report on the Bullying Prevention programs purchased by schools, and ask about plans for evaluation of programs, as well as plans to specifically include special education students.
- SEACs should ask their boards if the extraordinary needs of special education students will be addressed through applications for Special Circumstances funding.
- If your SEAC has not yet made connections with School Councils you could consider the Thunder Bay model.
- An update on your board's CODE project should be on the agenda for every meeting.
- When the invitations are issued to boards for the Assistive Technology Symposium, SEACs should ask who in their boards will be attending. SEACs could also ask for a report on how the knowledge from the symposium will be shared with others in the board, including parents.

Any questions?

Contact Diane Wagner at dianew@ldao.ca or 416-929-4311 Ex. 22.