

Memo to: SEAC Members

Memo from: Marilyn Dolmage, Chair of PAAC on SEAC

Date: March 2008

Recently, PAAC on SEAC members, Alison Morse, Provincial Co-ordinator with the Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders (OAFCCD), and Diane Wagner, Coordinator of Public Policy and Client Services for the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO), met with representatives from the Ontario Psychological Association (OPA) Ministry of Education Project, **Student Assessment Project: Kindergarten to Grade 4**.

At the meeting, the importance of parent engagement in the process for professional assessments (psychological, speech and language or occupational therapy assessments) was discussed. Parent engagement is critical, and it is important that parents understand the early intervention and identification processes; the referral and consent process; the testing process; the assessment report; and how the professional assessment will help in the classroom to support student success.

Parent engagement in education is one of the strategic goals of the Ministry of Education. To support the goal the Ministry of Education has made efforts to keep SEAC members informed about initiatives in Special Education and to request their formal inclusion in the planning and monitoring of those initiatives.

Since 2006 school boards have been involved in the **Student Assessment Project: Kindergarten to Grade 4** organized through the Ontario Psychological Association (OPA). SEACs have been involved through presentations at SEAC on the school board OPA projects. SEAC members have a strong interest in the issues related to professional assessments of students and are in a unique position to monitor the impact of the project from a parent perspective.

The Student Assessment Project: Kindergarten to Grade 4 project objectives were for English and French-language district school boards and school authorities in Ontario to:

- (a) reduce current wait times for students in junior kindergarten to grade 4 requiring professional assessments,
- (b) enhance teacher capacity to provide effective programming for students provided with professional assessments,
- (c) improve literacy/numeracy for students provided with professional assessments, and
- (d) sustain these assessment process improvements for the long term.

To support parent engagement in the project and assist SEAC members in their role we are sending you a list of discussion questions that focus on parent engagement. The questions are intended to inform and focus SEAC discussion.

1. Has the board developed any new **communication tools** to inform parents about the process for professional assessments? This may include a written protocol that is recorded in the school board Annual Special Education Plan, a brochure or Information Sheet. Did SEAC members have an opportunity to review the new tools?

2. Has the OPA project resulted in changes to the process or **forms used to obtain parent consent** for professional assessments? Have parents been informed about why that these professional assessments require their informed consent? In what ways was SEAC Involved?
3. Have parents been provided with an opportunity to **comment on the Assessment process** or Assessment reports? This may include parent surveys, parent feedback sheets, anecdotal comments, etc.
4. Have the wait times for professional assessments for students in Kindergarten to Grade 4 been reduced? If yes, has the **reduced waiting times been communicated** to parents?
5. Has the process for **referral for assessment been changed**? How were parents informed about the changes? Have parents had the opportunity to comment on the changes through a survey or other feedback process?
6. Have the criteria or **eligibility for professional assessments** been changed? If yes, how have parents been informed about the changes? Have parents had the opportunity to comment on the changes?
7. Have there been any changes to the **assessment reports** or the way that assessment reports are presented to staff and parents? For example, is the language used clear and easy for parents to understand? Are the recommendations or intervention strategies clear and able to be implemented? Has there been any communication with parents about the changes? Have parents had the opportunity to comment on the new formats or process?

The school board OPA Committee is required to seek input about the projects from SEAC and we encourage each SEAC to provide feedback in writing to their school board OPA project committee. This information can then be included in the results from the school board.

In addition, the OPA Provincial Advisory Committee is collecting information from school boards for a Resource Guide. It is important that SEAC members identify processes and resources (including consent forms, communication tools, assessment templates, or parent feedback surveys, etc.) that are helpful to parents and that can be shared with the provincial committee and may be included in the **Promising Practices** Resource Guide.

If you have any questions about this memo or require additional information, you may contact us by e-mail or by phone:

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