



PAAC on SEAC 2020 Survey of SEAC Members

Executive Summary and Action Items

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. In order to promote effective practices in SEACs across Ontario, PAAC on SEAC has conducted three surveys distributed to SEAC members. In 2009 and 2014 surveys were sent to all English and French language school boards in Ontario, with the help of funding from a Parents Reaching Out (PRO) Grant. Without this funding, PAAC on SEAC was still able to distribute a new version of the survey, with comparable questions, to all English language school boards in the Fall/Winter of 2019/2020, to find out what has changed and whether there are new issues or challenges.

PAAC on SEAC extends thanks to all the survey participants and in particular, we are grateful for the many comments which have permitted us to discern trends in terms of where our SEACs function well and where there is need for improvement. There were 178 participants, the same number as in 2014. At least 30 school boards and 18 different local associations or community agencies were represented, although the numbers may not be complete since all of these questions were optional.

SEAC members continue to be engaged in their SEAC and for the most part feel their contributions are valued. Over 90% said that their SEAC encourages input and discussion from members on all presentations and that members of SEAC talk to each other and discuss different points of view respectfully (always or most of the time). However, there were other areas where concerns raised in the past surveys continue, and some areas where results have shown a decline when compared to previous surveys.

Based on the 2020 survey results and comments from participants, we have identified some common themes and areas of opportunity for improvement. At the end of this summary, you will find our action items for SEACs, Ministry of Education, and PAAC on SEAC.

SEAC Meaningful Participation

An area of interest in the 2020 results involves SEACs participation in annual board procedures especially in the areas of key responsibilities, such as the Special Education Plan and Budget. Effective practices of SEACs to promote authentic engagement and suggestions for meeting structure and content include the use of an annual calendar and the sharing of information for discussion. Many of the results and comments reflect these practices; however there is a marked decline in several areas from the results of the 2014 survey.

Several questions cover information that is annually shared with SEACs and responses to these questions identify some areas for improvement. Some relevant comments include:

“We keep a running list of future topics for discussion or presentation that arise from current topics. We try to work with staff about proactively ensuring they are actually scheduled at a follow-up meeting.”

“I was not aware of an annual plan for topics to be covered”

“Information is brought to SEAC by Special Education Dept. regularly; additional details are provided when committee members want further info.”

“We have budget specific presentations at 1-3 SEAC meetings between May and June. We always schedule 2 May meetings to allow ample opportunity for this, We usually get a budget update at one other meeting, at least, mid-year.”

“Again we are asked to approve what has already been submitted or approved by the Board.”

In considering these results, PAAC on SEAC continues to share many effective practices for promoting authentic engagement, including sharing information in advance for meetings and establishing an annual calendar which allows the committee to discuss trends and accomplishments as well as identifying areas for improvement.

The [PAAC on SEAC Effective Practices Handbook for SEAC Members](#) (PAAC on SEAC Effective Practices Handbook) identifies many effective practices including that SEAC members have input to the agendas and that agendas are circulated at least 5 days in advance of the meeting so that members are prepared for discussions.

Finally it is apparent that two-way communication with the Board (of Trustees) and SEACs is important; and feedback from the Board on minutes and responses to motions and minority reports is necessary to the ongoing work of SEAC.

SEAC Engagement with Community

Respondents point to inconsistencies in information available for the public about SEAC meetings, membership and roles. 74% of respondents say information is always available on board websites which is consistent to 2014 results, however only 40% indicate that their board has a SEAC brochure, which is a significant decrease from 2014.

Respondents indicate that SEACs are able to recruit & retain membership with 75% indicating always/usually, however there is a discrepancy in respondents between large boards where there is competition for vacancies, and smaller boards who have issues on recruitment.

While retention of SEAC members ranks about middle on effectiveness scale, providing information about SEAC available to parents was one of the least effective aspects of SEAC according to respondents.

Several questions cover what information is available to the public about SEAC and how SEACs engage with the community for their membership. Some relevant comments include:

“The brochure is available on the website, but special education items need to be searched. If you don’t know what you’re looking for, it’s challenging.”

“There are some changes from time to time but this SEAC has maintained a core group of association members/agencies who work closely with the system.”

“It has been difficult to recruit new members.”

“Not a lot of local associations, way too many community partners (paid employees - not parents)”

“It would be nice to see meeting minutes online and I am not exactly sure where they post to meeting schedule (assume the main board events feed).”

PAAC on SEAC continues to recommend SEACs use the *PAAC on SEAC Effective Practices Handbook* for information on public access and consultation, membership nomination and recruitment ideas and other areas on raising SEAC awareness in the school communities. Effective practices include making sure Board websites contain all pertinent current information on SEAC including meeting dates and times, meeting minutes, and information for the public about becoming a SEAC member. This information could then be regularly shared with school communities, and the broader public through board communication avenues including websites, social media feeds, and targeted messaging. Member recruitment should happen at regular intervals with direct messaging to local associations asking for nominations of qualified individuals.

SEAC Recruitment, Orientation and Training

From the 2020 survey results almost 90% of respondents reported being very familiar (32.96%) or somewhat familiar (59.66%) with [Education Act Ontario Regulation 464/97 Special Education Advisory Committees](#) (Regulation 464/97). This is the key regulation that defines the membership, roles and responsibilities of SEAC and the result is encouraging.

The main place for finding information about SEAC, their roles and responsibilities is school board websites, although several respondents reported that SEAC information was hard to find on the board website.

“Board website is difficult to navigate. Information is hard to find.”

Almost 78% of respondents responded that their SEAC was able to recruit new members “usually or always”, several respondents noted it is a challenge to recruit local association members.

“(SEAC) numbers are still low considering the vast geography that the school board covers. Not familiar with a robust recruitment campaign.”

PAAC on SEAC members have also heard of many SEACs that do not have the full complement of 12 local association members, especially in rural and remote communities.

The responses to the questions about PAAC on SEAC resources including the PAAC on SEAC website, the *PAAC on SEAC Effective Practices Handbook*, and the PAAC on SEAC annual planning calendar indicate many of the respondents were unaware of these resources. All of these resources were developed to help SEAC members understand their roles and responsibilities. The *PAAC on SEAC Effective Practices Handbook for SEAC Members* is especially useful for SEAC orientation and training.

Sample comments include:

“I remember we had a PAAC on SEAC presentation and it was an eye opener.”

“It is circulated electronically so all members are aware of it. If new members have questions they are encouraged to ask individually or as part of the regular meetings.”

SEAC members reported that orientation and ongoing training would assist in understanding and participating confidently in meetings, initiating discussions about emerging or ongoing issues and voting on motions. They seek direction in putting forward recommendations to their Boards.

Sample comments include:

“Better onboarding”

“Confidence built in SEAC reps to have real conversations”

“Training is required so that all members understand their role”

The survey results suggest that while most respondents are aware of their role and responsibilities, more training would be helpful. Increased awareness of PAAC on SEAC resources and their use by SEACs for training would also help members.

PAAC on SEAC Awareness

In 2020, 56% of respondents reported they were offered the *PAAC on SEAC Effective Practices Handbook* always or most of the time, an increase from 46% in 2014. But in 2020, 39% had never seen or were not sure they had seen the Handbook, which is more than the 34% who indicated they had not seen the handbook in 2014.

In 2020, 63% of respondents had used the PAAC on SEAC website at least sometimes, which was unchanged from 2014. However, 40.7% had never heard of the website or were not sure in 2020, an increase from 37% in 2014.

Use of the PAAC on SEAC Annual Calendar for annual planning, at least sometimes, dropped slightly from 44% in 2014 to 37% in 2020, while about 55% continued to say they never used the calendar or were not sure.

Some sample comments include:

“I learned about PAAC from my association not from SEAC.”

“I was unaware there was a handbook”

“I have just now looked at this and it is an invaluable resource. I certainly wish I had known about this sooner!”

“I did not know about PAAC until now”

“We use it as a guide that we are addressing the topics noted.”

“We don't always follow the timeline of the calendar but we do make sure the items on the calendar are included in our annual planning”

The results of the survey questions about PAAC on SEAC indicate that there is still work to be done in increasing awareness of PAAC on SEAC and the resources such as the *PAAC on SEAC Effective Practices Handbook*, PAAC on SEAC website and Annual Calendar. Making sure our website is highlighted in all correspondence to SEACs, and sending regular notices about PAAC on SEAC resources is recommended.

PAAC on SEAC 2020 SURVEY ACTION ITEMS

Action Items for SEACs

1. SEAC chairs to share the Results of the PAAC on SEAC 2020 Survey of SEAC Members report and Executive Summary with SEAC members
2. SEAC chairs to provide a copy, or the link, to the [PAAC on SEAC Effective Practices Handbook for SEAC Members](#), particularly during orientation and training

3. Enhance training for all SEAC members and include awareness around key Ministry documents by providing access to key documents, such as [Special Education in Ontario Kindergarten to Grade 12, Policy and Resource Guide](#) (Draft 2017); [Regulation 306 Special Education Programs and Services](#); and [Regulation 464/97 Special Education Advisory Committees](#)
4. Using the *PAAC on SEAC Effective Practices Handbook* as a resource for orientation and annual training by:
 - Reviewing Handbook sections at SEAC meetings
 - Sharing the PAAC on SEAC PowerPoint regarding the Handbook
5. Establishing an annual calendar that allows SEAC to ensure all activities are planned in advance to provide for effective discussion and advice
6. Ensuring that the School Board website contain all pertinent current information on SEAC including meeting dates and times, meeting minutes, and information for the public about becoming a SEAC member.
7. Develop strategies for the sharing of information about SEAC with families and the general community to increase awareness of the role of SEAC and encourage public participation in annual consultations about the Special Education Plan
8. Circulating the SEAC Agenda and attachments at least 5 days in advance of the meeting
9. Promoting two way communication between SEAC and the Board of Trustees regarding issues related to the Special Education Plan and Budget, as well as special education programs and services

Action Items for Ministry of Education

The following action items are intended to promote a more consistent understanding of SEAC Roles & Responsibilities.

1. Ministry to facilitate SEAC conferences, training sessions or webinars to provide information on SEAC Roles and Responsibilities
2. Ministry to include SEAC in the process for annual feedback on the Special Education Plan – Ministry to direct boards to share with SEAC any communication about special education plans
3. Ministry to copy SEAC chairs on any memos that impact students with special education needs sent to boards
4. Ministry needs to maintain an active directory of all SEAC chair contact information that is updated annually

Action Items for PAAC on SEAC

1. PAAC on SEAC to share the Survey Report with the Ministry of Education, the Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE) and with school boards to share with their SEACs.
2. Members of PAAC on SEAC to share with their SEAC representatives and communities, for example using social media, to promote awareness of PAAC on SEAC and the survey results.
3. Include a link to the [PAAC on SEAC website](http://www.paac-seac.ca/) (http://www.paac-seac.ca/) in every correspondence with SEACs and SEAC members.
4. Review the contents of the [PAAC on SEAC Effective Practices Handbook](#) and enhance existing effective practices related to:
 - Meeting Effectiveness
 - Meaningful Engagement
 - Orientation/Training
 - Recruitment
 - Special Education Plan Roles & Responsibilities