December 15, 2013

The Honourable Liz Sandals
Minister of Education
900 Bay Street
22nd Floor, Mowat Block
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2

Dear Minister Sandals,

RE: Annual Report of the Minister’s Advisory Council on Special Education

Please accept this Annual Report on the activities of the Minister’s Advisory Council on Special Education (Council) for the fiscal year 2012/2013. Council has valued the opportunity to meet with yourself and ministry staff about successful and promising practices related to students with special education needs. The Special Education Policy and Programs Branch continues to be a tremendous support to Council and has assisted Council in providing timely and informed advice.

For 2012/13, Council identified the following priorities: the Accepting Schools Act and accountability and student achievement. The contents of this report provide additional details regarding Council’s specific contributions in these areas.

For 2013/14, Council identified the following priorities: providing feedback on the discussion paper released by the Ministry of Education entitled Building the Next Phase in Ontario’s Education Strategy and also providing recommendations on the special education funding formula.

We welcome the opportunity to meet with you at our next face-to-face meeting, scheduled for February 2014, to continue to discuss ways in which Council can continue to support your ministry’s efforts in meeting the needs of students with special education needs in Ontario.

Yours sincerely,

John Wilhelm
Chair
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Mandate and structure of the council

The Advisory Committee on Special Education was established in 1974, and has been renewed continually from that date. Its name was later changed to the Minister’s Advisory Council on Special Education. The following describes the mandate and structure of the Council, as it existed during the 2012/2013 year.

The Council advises the Minister of Education on any matter related to the establishment and provision of special education programs and services for exceptional students, including the identification and provision of early intervention programs for students with special education needs.

According to the Order-in-Council, the Council:
- responds to proposals or positions of the Ministry of Education or other Ministries, as submitted to the Council, from time to time;
- identifies concerns in the delivery of special education programs and services for exceptional pupils and provides information, advice and recommendations for ministry consideration;
- submits an annual report and recommendations to the Minister; and
- meets up to three times a year for a maximum of 4 ½ days per year.

Council has the following representation:
- one seat for each of nine exceptionalities;
- one seat for each of nine educator and professional categories;
- one seat for a student member;
- one seat for Aboriginal Communities;
- one non-voting seat for the Ministry of Community and Social Services;
- one non-voting seat for the Ministry of Children and Youth Services;
- one non-voting seat for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care;
- one non-voting seat for the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities; and
- two representatives each for the Francophone and Roman Catholic Communities, appointed from among the members above.

Council members are appointed for up to two terms of three years each. The Ministry sends a ‘Call for Applications’ letter to organizations with an interest in Special Education in the areas related to the upcoming vacancies. Potential candidates are requested to apply directly to the Public Appointment Secretariat where the applications are gathered and transmitted to the Minister’s Office. The applications are then assessed and submitted for Minister’s decision.
Changes to MACSE Membership

Over 2012/13, the following members retired from Council:

- Christian McClary, representing Students

The following new members joined Council:

- Suzanne Bonneville, representing students with Learning Disabilities
- Marion MacDonald, representing the Aboriginal Community

Please see Appendix 1 for membership list.

2012/2013 Achievements

The mandate of the Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education is to advise the Minister of Education on matters related to the establishment and provision of special education programs and services for students with special education needs.

Council’s voice is often heard through its representation on various ministry working groups and other stakeholder advisory bodies. Council members participated in ad-hoc teleconferences and continued to provide feedback through written reports. Members also documented successful practices and challenges that are evident in the special education communities which are reported back to Council.

During the course of the 2012/13 year, Council had the opportunity to offer advice and participate in discussions related to a number of areas that affect students with special education needs, including:

- Guidelines for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Blind and Low Vision and Learning Disabilities;
- Revised PPM 8: Identification of and Program Planning for Students with Learning Disabilities;
- Draft Guidelines developed by the Learning Disabilities Working Group
- Mental Health;
- Individual Education Plans;
- Transitions;
- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Reference Group;
- Special Education in Ontario, K-12;
- Accepting Schools Legislation;
- Four Year Secondary School Program;
- Ontario College of Teachers – review of Additional Qualification Guidelines;
- Assessing Achievement in Alternative Areas;
- Special Education Advisory Committees;
- Individual Pathways Program;
• Board Improvement Planning for Student Achievement; and
• Special Education Funding.

As part of their roles and responsibilities, Council members are required to consult and collaborate with their constituency groups regarding issues related to special education. Council members reach out to community groups before and after meetings. A summary of key themes for 2012-13 can be found in Appendix 2.

**Recommendations to The Minister 2012-13**

Council identified the priorities of accountability and student achievement along with the Accepting Schools Act for the 2012/13 fiscal year. At each of the three meetings held this year, time was set aside for the working groups to spend time discussing the focus of their advice and recommendations for the coming year.

**Accepting Schools Act**

Council heard presentations from the Ministry of Education on the Accepting Schools Comprehensive Action Plan which includes Bill 13, Accepting Schools Act. Council identified areas of concern including: cyber-bullying, special education and bullying, suspensions and expulsions within the various special education exceptionalities.

The Ministry of Education through the collaborative work of the Inclusive Education Branch, Learning Environment Branch and Special Education is working with the Ontario Human Rights Commission to develop a resource to support a bias free approach to student discipline through prevention, early intervention and progressive discipline. The resource, Approaching Student Behaviour from a Human Rights Perspective is designed to support school and system leaders in their work with teachers, staff, students, families and the community to foster and promote student achievement and well-being while addressing inappropriate student behavior. Council provided feedback on an early draft of the document. See reference to Summary of Council Meetings Appendix 3.

**Accountability and Student Achievement**

Council Chair and members also participated on a number of advisory committees and attended meetings with a variety of organizations in order to represent the strengths, needs and concerns of students with special education needs.

**The Council’s Priorities for 2013/2014**

For 2013/14, Council identified two priorities: Special Education Funding and providing feedback on the discussion paper released by the Ministry of Education entitled Building the Next Phase in Ontario’s Education Strategy. Working groups were established to provide specific input and advice on these two areas moving forward. The leads of each of the working groups also participate on the Council’s Executive leadership team.

The Council also responds to ad-hoc requests for feedback and consultation as needed.
Members will continue to work with ministry staff to ensure that the advice provided is aligned with ministry priorities.

In the upcoming year, the Council will continue to respond to areas related to the provision of services for students with special education needs. Consultations will occur during three scheduled meetings throughout the year. As well, members will be involved in teleconference calls as required, will participate in discussions or forums as they arise, and will respond to the ministry’s ongoing requests for advice and feedback.

The Council maintained its practice of a continual assessment of its own effectiveness. Following each meeting, a summary of evaluative feedback from Council members is provided to all members and to ministry staff. As a result of suggestions made by Council members, the ministry continues to build on some changes from previous years which include increasing opportunities for informal dialogue and networking with other Council members and ministry staff. Council also felt the additional time allocated for the working groups during the day’s agenda was an effective use of time.
# Appendix 1

Members of the Minister’s Advisory Council on Special Education  
April 1, 2011 - March 31, 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exceptionality/Community of Interest</th>
<th>Members</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Council Chair</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Exceptionalities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Disabilities / French Language Community</td>
<td>Suzanne Bonneville</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pervasive Developmental Disorders/Autism</td>
<td>Janette Seymour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deaf &amp; Hard-of-Hearing</td>
<td>Catherine Luetke</td>
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<td>Gifted</td>
<td>David Mason</td>
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<td>Developmental Disability</td>
<td>Susan Blekkenhorst</td>
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<td>Blind &amp; Low Vision</td>
<td>Dawn Clelland</td>
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<td>Physical Disability</td>
<td>Kim Pearson</td>
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<td>Multiple Exceptionalities</td>
<td>Tracy Grant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional/Behavioural Disorder</td>
<td>Robert Savage</td>
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<td><strong>Educators</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Council Vice-Chair / Supervisory Officers</td>
<td>Warren Kennedy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trustees / Roman Catholic Community</td>
<td>Cheryl Lovell</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>Marlene Pike</td>
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<td>Teachers / French Language Community</td>
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<td>Educational Assistants</td>
<td>Marcia Brown</td>
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<td><strong>Professionals</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Medical Practitioners</td>
<td>Dr. Arlette LeFebvre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychologists</td>
<td>Joe Trovato</td>
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<td>Social Workers / Roman Catholic Community</td>
<td>Marianne Saade</td>
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<td>Speech and Language Pathologists</td>
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<td><strong>Aboriginal Community</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Marion Macdonald</td>
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<td><strong>Student / Youth</strong></td>
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<td>Christian McLary</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Past Chair/Advisor</strong></td>
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<td>Lynn Ziraldo</td>
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## Transitions
- Alignment of language around transition planning especially between the new Individual Pathways Program and the Individual Education Plan is important to avoid confusion
- Transition planning is effective when transition plans are treated as living documents allowing full participation of parents and students
- One successful practice has been the sharing of the plans with parents and students
- Transition planning continues to not occur for all students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) except from elementary to secondary
- One possible solution would be to delegate one person in the school board as responsible for the development of transition plans. This would ensure consistency of the transition planning process
- Greater attention should be given to providing pathways for those students who are reaching the age of 21 and are no longer eligible to attend school
- Ongoing collaboration and communication between school boards and community agencies is essential

## Mental Health
- Partnership building among ministries, district school boards, and community partners to align initiatives is important to support students with special education needs
- MACSE supported the Ministry funding a Mental Health Leader for each school board which will occur in the 2013-14 school year.
- Mental health support services remain insufficient among French-Language schools in Ontario. Some francophone students are being referred to English speaking services.
- Council was interested in the upcoming release of *Supporting Minds, An Educator’s Guide to Promoting Students’ Mental Health and Well-being* and would appreciate an opportunity to provide feedback
- The Ministry should look at the roll-out of *Shared Solutions* as a potential model for implementation
- Professional development should be delivered jointly and include: school boards, educators, and community partners
- The government’s Mental Health and Addictions Strategy has been positively received
- Concerns around the role of the various mental health workers, as part of the Strategy, are being worked out at the local level.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exceptionalities</th>
<th>Partnerships and Collaboration</th>
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<tr>
<td>• There is concern regarding the role of schools in the prevention and identification of vision problems, given that a high percentage of low vision/vision impairment in students is preventable with early detection</td>
<td>• While there has been movement towards greater interministerial collaboration across ministries, there remains a lack of coordination among the different providers with regard to the delivery of services supporting students with special education needs</td>
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<td>• There needs to be a repository of effective practices in dealing with students with learning disabilities. All exceptionalities would benefit from similar resources</td>
<td>• A successful practice has been partnership development with community agencies and parent groups</td>
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<td>• The establishment of the working group on Learning Disabilities was well received Establishing working groups for all exceptionalities would be a great next step to help bring consistency in identification across the education sector</td>
<td>• There continues to be a growing number of students requiring special education services which is increasing workload demands on educational assistants</td>
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<td>• There seems to be an increase in the number of students who have special education needs and mental health issues.</td>
<td>• Parent, and Student engagement are key in the development of IEPs</td>
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<td>• Students with complex needs remain a challenge for school boards</td>
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<td>• Members discussed the importance of including student well-being, in addition to student achievement, in the Board Improvement Planning for Student Achievement Process</td>
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Appendix 3

Summary of Council Meetings, 2012/2013

The Council held three meetings on June 2012, October 2012, and in February 2013.

June 2012

- The Ministry provided an overview of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Blind and Low Vision Guidelines, PPM 8: Identification of and Program Planning for Students with Learning Disabilities, Special Education in Ontario, K-12, Learning for All, K-12, Special Education Advisory Committees, Board Improvement Planning for Student Achievement, Early Learning and Mental Health
- A joint presentation was provided by the Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services on the development of a framework to support transition planning for youth with developmental disabilities. As well, a presentation was provided on the Youth Transitions Project.
- Members of the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Reference Group were invited to the June meeting and were provided with an overview of the Ministry’s progress in implementing the Minister’s ASD Reference Group recommendations and a status update on the province-wide implementation of the Connections for Students model.
- Council was provided with an overview of key directives and requirements related to the Agency Establishment and Accountability Directive (2010) for Classified Agencies and also received an overview of the new Memorandum of Understanding between the Council and the Minister of Education.
- The Ontario College of Teachers presented an outline of their approach to draft revisions to Schedule D: Special Education Part I, II and Specialist Additional Qualification (AQ) course guidelines.

October 2012

- The Ministry provided key updates on various Special Education programs and initiatives, including Learning for All, K-12, Board Improvement Planning for Student Achievement, the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy and Assessing Achievement in Alternative Areas (A4).
- EQAO results were presented which indicated increases in reading and writing for grade 3 and grade 6 students with special education needs.
- The Ministry notified Council that a Learning Disabilities Working Group had been established in June 2011 to review and assess the relevance and currency of PPM 8 on learning disabilities and to provide recommendations to the Ministry as well as to inform the preparation of Guidelines for Programs and Services for Students with learning disabilities.

February 2013

- Council was consulted on the draft resource: Approaching Student Behaviour from a
Human Rights Perspective which the Ministry has been developing jointly with the Ontario Human Rights Commission. The resource is intended to help school and system leaders foster a bias-free approach to student discipline and to support positive behaviour and early intervention processes.

- The Ministries of Children and Youth Services, Health and Long Term Care and Education provided a joint update on the implementation of some of the initiatives under the first three years of Ontario’s Mental Health and Addictions Strategy. The update focused on how services and service coordination are being improved for children, youth and families.

- The Honourable Laurel Broten, Minister of Education attended and expressed her appreciation for the work and commitment of Council members. The Minister provided her thoughts on a number of areas that Council could provide input into including: the need for interministerial connections, accountability and the need to continue to focus on student achievement, and the potential impact of the Accepting Schools legislation on students with special education needs.
Appendix 4
MACSE Resolution – Mental Health

While MACSE submitted a resolution as part of the 2011-12 annual report, the executive felt it was an ongoing need and wanted it highlighted again.

Whereas, the well-being and mental health of students is of paramount importance to all school boards;

Whereas, MACSE supports the three year Mental Health and Addictions Strategy and recognizes the importance of coordination and collaboration of all partners;

Whereas, there is an urgent and essential need for an employee in each school board to lead the development and implementation of a Board Mental Health strategy and coordinate mental health services including recently funded school initiatives from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care;

Whereas, the 15 school boards who have received funding to hire mental health leaders are already reporting positive outcomes;

Whereas, the success of the mental health strategy requires the participation and contribution of every school board;

Be it resolved that all remaining Ontario school boards receive equivalent funding to secure a mental health leader for the 2012-2013 school year.