Minister’s Advisory Council On Special Education

Annual Report To The Minister

For The Fiscal Year 2014/2015

Period: October 2014 and February 2015
October 15, 2015

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 2014/2015. 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 it in providing timely and informed advice.

For 2014/15, council identified the following priorities: Full Day Kindergarten and Early Intervention and Special Education Exceptionalities, Guidelines and Interventions. The contents of this report provide additional details regarding Council’s specific contributions in these areas.

For 2015/16, council identified the following priorities: student achievement and well-being, Aboriginal Education.

We welcome the opportunity to meet with you at our next face-to-face meeting, scheduled for February 18-19 2016, to continue to discuss ways in which council can continue to support the ministry’s efforts in meeting the special education needs of students in Ontario.

Yours sincerely,

Joe Trovato
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 (MACSE). The following describes the mandate and structure of the Council, as it existed during the 2014/2015 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 2014/15, the following members retired from council:

- Catherine Luetke, representing Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing
- David Mason, representing Gifted
- Dr. Arlette LeFebvre representing Medical
- Robert Savage representing Emotional/Behavioural Disorder

The following appointments and new members joined council:

- Joe Trovato appointed as new chair
- Robert Savage appointed as new vice-chair
- Brian Rivait representing Principals
- Joanne Jones representing Medical
- Denise Maisonneuve, representing Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing
- Sue Ball representing Psychologists

Please see Appendix 1 for membership list.

2014/2015 Achievements

MACSE’s mandate 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 2014/15 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:

- Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario
- Mental Health including Phase 2 of the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy being led by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care;
- Individual Education Plans;
- Implementation of Policy and Program Memorandum (PPM 156): Supporting Transitions for All Students with Special Education Needs;
- Ontario College of Teachers on the enhanced program changes to the teacher education program
- Autism
• Early Years Policy and Program Division;
• Moving on Mental Health, the transformation on mental health agencies for children and youth
  [http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/specialneeds/mentalhealth/momh.aspx](http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/specialneeds/mentalhealth/momh.aspx)
• Ontario’s Special Needs Strategy being led by MCYS
  [http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/specialneeds/strategy/index.aspx](http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/specialneeds/strategy/index.aspx)
• Proposed revisions to the exceptionality definitions for Giftedness, Intellectual Disability (formerly separate Mild Intellectual Disability and Developmental Disability definitions), and Behaviour.

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 2014-15 can be found in Appendix 2.

**Recommendations to the Minister 2014-15**

For 2014/15, council identified the following priorities: Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK) and Early Intervention and Special Education: Exceptionalities, Guidelines, and Interventions. Working groups were established to provide specific input and advice on these two areas moving forward. The leads of the working groups also participate on the Council’s executive leadership team.

The working group on Special Education: Exceptionalities, Guidelines, and Interventions provided feedback on the proposed revised definitions for Giftedness, Intellectual (formerly separate Mild Intellectual Disability and Developmental Disability definitions), and Behaviour. Some of their recommendations included:

- guidelines must be released within one school year from the time the definitions are released
- a communication plan regarding these changes should be released prior to the release of the definitions themselves
- continue to gather sector input on the proposed definitions
- MACSE members continue to be included in the writing process of the new exceptionalities guidelines (Gifted, Intellectual Disability and Behaviour).

The working group on Full Day Kindergarten and Early Intervention provided input and comments on the implementation of the full day kindergarten program specifically in relation to students with special education needs. Some of their recommendations included:

- Special Education and Early Years teams should work together to communicate a clear message to FDK educators to ensure they know they can modify and individualize an inquiry-based program to meet the needs of all students,
especially those with special education needs.

- FDK educators should be encouraged to differentiate instruction according to individual needs in keeping with the principles of Learning for All.
- Children with special education needs should be encouraged to attend FDK and should be included in attendance programs.
- Early identification, including but not limited to the use of checklists to guide observations should be encouraged in FDK programs to identify students “at risk” of language, learning and social difficulties.

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 2015/2016**

For 2015/16, council identified the following priorities: student achievement and well-being, and Aboriginal education. Working groups are established to provide specific input and advice on these two areas moving forward. The leads 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, 2014 - March 31, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exceptionalities/Sectors Represented</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Expiry Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Council Chair</td>
<td>Joe Trovato</td>
<td>March 31, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exceptionalities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Disabilities</td>
<td>Suzanne Bonneville</td>
<td>May 8, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pervasive Developmental Disorders / Autism</td>
<td>Janette Seymour</td>
<td>March 31, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing</td>
<td>Denise Maisonneuve</td>
<td>November 5, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted</td>
<td>Stacey Manzerolle</td>
<td>May 27, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Disability</td>
<td>Laura LaChance</td>
<td>October 1, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blind and Low-Vision</td>
<td>Dawn Clelland</td>
<td>March 31, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Disability</td>
<td>Katie Muirhead</td>
<td>May 27, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Exceptionalities</td>
<td>Lucille Norman</td>
<td>October 1, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional / Behavioural Disorder</td>
<td>Daphne Korczak</td>
<td>May 27, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educators</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisory Officers</td>
<td>Peggy Blair</td>
<td>May 27, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustees</td>
<td>Cheryl Lovell</td>
<td>December 2, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>Brian Rivait</td>
<td>March 31, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Shelly Durance</td>
<td>October 1, 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educational Assistants</td>
<td>Marcia Brown</td>
<td>March 31, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professionals</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>Joanne Jones</td>
<td>February 12, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychologists</td>
<td>Dr. Sue Ball</td>
<td>November 5, 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Workers</td>
<td>Jim Van Buskirk</td>
<td>October 1, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech and Language Pathologists</td>
<td>Sharon McWhirter</td>
<td>October 1, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students / Youth</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Students / Youth</td>
<td>Braxton Hartman</td>
<td>October 1, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aboriginal Community</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice Chair / Aboriginal Community</td>
<td>Marion Macdonald</td>
<td>May 8, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisor</td>
<td>Lynn Ziraldo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past Chair/Advisor</td>
<td>John Wilhelm</td>
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Appendix 2
Community Collaboration – Focus Areas for 2014-15

Council continued its focus from the previous year on the following areas:

Transitions
- Alignment of language around transition planning especially between the new Individual Pathways Program (IPP) and the Individual Education Plan (IEP) is important to avoid confusion.
- The importance of student voice in the transition process continues to be a key area. The IPP could play a role in encouraging student voice and support students during the IEP process.
- The creation of transition tip sheets for parents has been a successful practice.
- Some school boards are having students create self-advocacy cards from their IEPs that makes them aware of their strengths and needs.
- Transition planning is effective when transition plans are treated as living documents allowing full participation of parents and students.
- Transitions from secondary to post-secondary for students with special education needs continue to be an issue.
- Teaching students self-advocacy skills is important to aid in the transition process.
- Ongoing collaboration and communication between school boards and community agencies is essential.

Mental Health
- Partnerships between school boards and community agencies are important to help support students with mental health issues.
- As the transformation of the children and youth mental health system evolves under Moving on Mental: A system that makes sense for children and youth health, led by MCYS, it will be important for ministries to work collaboratively to ensure alignment. Further information on the transformation of the children and youth mental health system can be found at: http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/specialneeds/mentalhealth/momh.aspx
- Mental health support services continue to remain insufficient among French-Language schools in Ontario. Some francophone students are being referred to English-speaking services. For Francophone school boards and perhaps some rural boards establishing community partnerships is a priority, however, they struggle with the number of partnerships across their vast territories.
- Council indicated that Supporting Minds, An Educator’s Guide to Promoting Students’ Mental Health and Well-being continues to be well received.
- Some of the mental health challenges in the education sector continue to include: identification of students’ issues/problems, navigating the complex network of
community supports, understanding at the school level how to support students with mental health needs.

**Exceptionalities**

- Categories of exceptionalities need to be updated since concepts and terminologies are old. The creation of a task force to undertake the work would be a good first step.
- There needs to be a repository of effective practices in dealing with students with special education needs.
- The establishment of the working group on learning disabilities, and those for supporting students with giftedness, intellectual or behavior needs was well received by council. Establishing working groups for all exceptionalities would be a great next step to help bring consistency in identification across the education sector.
- Council appreciated providing feedback on the revisions to the exceptionality definitions around Giftedness, Intellectual and Behaviour needs. Some of the council members participated on the working groups.
- There continues to be an increase in the number of students who have special education needs and mental health issues.
- Students with complex needs remain a challenge for school boards.

**Full Day Kindergarten (FDK) and Early Intervention**

- Special Education and Early Years teams should work together to communicate a clear message to FDK educators to ensure they know they can modify and individualize an inquiry-based program to meet the needs of all students, especially those with special education needs.
- FDK educators should be encouraged to differentiate instruction according to individual needs in keeping with the principles of Learning for All.
- Children with special education needs should be encouraged to attend FDK and should be included in attendance programs.
- Early identification, including but not limited to the use of checklists to guide observations should be encouraged in FDK programs to identify students “at risk” of language, learning and social difficulties.
- Training opportunities should be provided for FDK educator teams in early identification of special education needs and the Learning for All principles of universal design and differentiated instruction.
Appendix 3
Summary of Council Meetings, 2014/2015

The council held two meetings October 2014, and in February 2015.

October 2014

- Barry Finlay, Director of the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch (SEPPB) provided an update on the following items:
  - The renewed goals for education include:
    - Achieving excellence
    - Ensuring equity
    - Promoting well-being, and
    - Enhancing public confidence.
  - An overview of special education with a focus on the special education funding policy.
  - Implementation of Policy and Program Memorandum 156 (PPM156) : Supporting Transitions for All Student With Special Education Needs takes effect September 2014. Funds were provided to district school boards to support the implementation.
  - Individual Education Plan samples have been revised and updated to reflect current policies and initiatives. They will soon be posted on the EDU Gains/EDU Source website, along with other resources to support IEPs and Transition Plans.
  - Through a coordinated approach, three working groups are reviewing current definitions of developmental disability, mild intellectual disability, behavior and giftedness.
  - In order to ensure consistency, the guidelines for deaf and hard of hearing, blind and low vision and learning disabilities will be revisited once the definitions for intellectual and behaviour are complete.
  - Phase 2 (“years 4-10”) of the Mental Health Strategy is underway. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) is leading the implementation of Phase 2 with other ministries including the Ministry of Education (EDU). Fourteen lead agencies for the transformation of the delivery of mental health have been identified.
  - EDU continues to implement its initiatives from the first three years by supporting School Mental Health ASSIST as they work closely with the Mental Health Leaders as school boards develop their comprehensive mental health and addictions strategies.
  - SEPPB is currently working on the development of a provincial alternative curriculum framework. During summer 2014, a writing team of educators worked on the front matter for the framework. The curriculum branch is hoping to have it ready by September 2016.
February 2015

- The Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) conference has been approved and is scheduled for May 2nd, 2015.
- Barry Finlay, Director of the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch (SEPPB) provided an update on current special education initiatives and focused on the latest goal promoting well-being.
- Barry also mentioned the minister recently approved the new vision for Care, Treatment, Custody and Correctional (CTCC) Programs:
  - As an integrated part of Ontario’s education system, CTCC programs provide critical support to meet the needs of students unable to attend regular schools and facilitate specific pathways to ensure future educational success.
  - SEPPB will continue to transform CTCC programs so that the programs continue to meet the current needs of students.
  - There is no “one size fits all” program so we’re differentiating between Care and Treatment programs and Youth Justice programs. To respond to growing service pressures in the areas of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), the Francophone communities and rural and remote areas, this year there is up to $2.5M for new “Enhanced Education Treatment (EET) Programs”. To address system changes in youth justice services, we will be able to fund up to $2M for new and existing youth justice programs, “Community Based Youth Justice programs”.
  - It is important to know who the students are in CTCC programs and what their needs are, so we’re creating a separate CTCC student register that will help us to develop a student profile, increase ownership of students in these programs and streamline program administration.
  - It is also important to collect student achievement data so we’re starting our work on this to evaluate and measure student achievement in CTCC programs.
  - We’re continuing to collaborate with boards and work alongside other ministries as the Mental Health strategy evolves and as the Special Needs strategy rolls out to ensure alignment of CTCC programs within these broader systems changes.
- Mental Health Strategy – MCYS is currently reviewing how they deliver services. EDU anticipates that a number of these programs may not continue to provide mental health services and will align based on the adjustments provided by MCYS.
- Staff from MCYS provided an update on Moving on Mental Health, the transformation on mental health agencies for children and youth.
- Dr. Kathy Short and staff from SEPPB provided MACSE members with an update on the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy with a focus on the School Mental Health Assist Strategy.