

# PAAC ON SEAC Survey 2014

## Executive Summary and PAAC on SEAC Response

PAAC on SEAC extends thanks to all the survey participants. 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. On the whole, there were several improvements to how SEACs are functioning, sharing information and collaborating with local associations based on comparisons from the 2009 and 2014 surveys. We did not observe any major shifts or changes however in either direction of improvement or decline. For the most part, the responses from the 2014 survey are fairly consistent with the responses from the 2009 survey.

We had 50 different school boards participate in the 2014 survey, which was the same number of boards from the 2009 survey, however we saw nearly a 27% increase in respondents compared to the 2009 survey and had a total of 20 different provincial associations participate. The survey was made available in French and there were 13 respondents from the French School Boards. Many participants reported they were happy with the collaboration and relationships with their Board staff. Most also feel engaged in their SEAC and feel their contributions are valued. Students, parents, and boards are fortunate to benefit from the experience and energy of their SEAC volunteers.

Based on this survey, we have identified four areas needing improvement: SEAC participation, Orientation and Training, Parent Engagement, and Member Recruitment.

### **SEAC Participation**

91% of participants felt that their school boards welcomed input and discussion from SEAC members, but many comments suggest that making changes as a result of these conversations were not happening. Nearly one quarter indicated that they were never consulted regarding professional development for teachers while 30% reported never being involved in planning to support students who are not involved in the EQAO process. There were 30 comments from respondents regarding SEAC participation. In particular, respondents expressed concerns over how meetings are conducted, how SEAC members are involved, and the purpose and role of committee. Some specific comments follow:

“Better definition of its role, currently vague and does not compel boards to engage SEAC early for meaningful input”

“While I know people are giving as much time as they can already, I wonder about meeting more or having advance information - there is so much info to be digested in our meetings and only a couple of hours to discuss.”

“More in-depth discussion, less reporting at meetings”

“The way they run currently is that the Board presents info to the SEAC. It doesn't really seem to be a place for SEAC members to voice questions or issues.”

“SEAC could benefit from engaging and listen to voice of representatives and parents more.”

“Early engagement in issue resolution processes. More opportunity for discussion and debate as a large group. We always are in little groups of 2 or 3.”

“Our school board is open to ideas and suggestions from SEAC members”

“Sometimes we are INFORMED of decisions or policies rather than being CONSULTED but this is slowly changing.”

### **Orientation and Training**

Of the participants involved in this survey, 21% responded never or not sure about receiving training upon joining SEAC with comments emphasizing the quality of the training could use improvement. SEAC orientation and training was identified as the number one aspect needing improvement in the functioning of SEACs. There were 18 comments regarding the need for more training and orientation for SEAC members. Some specific comments are below:

“I would like to see training opportunities for members and more collaborative leadership initiated by SEAC.”

“More training - some type of class school kid - buddy system so new SEAC members can learn from old members.”

“Training on how this can effectively be done would help the less vocal associations' voices be heard. Not everyone is well-versed in the formal process by which SEAC operates.”

### **Parent Engagement**

Availability of information for parents was identified as one of the top three aspects needing improvement in how SEACs function. There were 18 comments concerning awareness by parents of SEAC, parent involvement in review of special education, parent awareness and understanding of special education. Some specific comments follow:

“Increase communication between school staff and SEAC. I'm not convinced the schools offer information to parents of students needing their support regarding the SEAC. Maybe because they are unaware of its usefulness?”

“Succession planning needed. Information needs to get out to parents, and the message needs to be consistent.”

“Many parents have asked why they are not being informed about the associations within our community that both sit on SEAC and serve families. This information needs to be shared with all parents early in the school year with accessible emails, phone numbers and websites if applicable.”

“It is important to disseminate information to parents so that they are made a valued part of the budget and planning process.”

“Needs to be more awareness of SEAC within school boards by staff and parents”

### **Member Recruitment**

The Francophone school boards seem to have more difficulty with recruitment and retention of SEAC members as only 20% reported they could recruit and retain members always or most of the time. There were 16 comments expressing concerns over the recruitment of new SEAC members and increasing the number of parent members on the committee. Some specific comments follow:

“Need to recruit more SEAC members from other organizations”

“There is a challenge with finding enough community members to sit on the committee. That is a priority for the upcoming term”

“We need more association members. We currently have two. Our previous superintendent made a half-hearted attempt at recruiting more, so our Vice-chair is in the process tackling the issue. The existence of SEAC, its role and its members should be advertised extensively to parents, thus giving parents a resource to consult when faced with Spec Ed issues. We are a very well-kept secret! “

### **PAAC on SEAC Role:**

#### **PAAC Awareness**

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 *Effective Practices Handbook for SEAC members*, *Annual Calendar* and website.

46% of respondents reported they were offered the *PAAC on SEAC Effective Practices Handbook for SEAC Members* always or most of the time, although 34% had never or not sure they had seen the Handbook. Comments indicate that when the Handbook was shared it was used for initial training and as a model:

“We modelled our own handbook after the PAAC on SEAC handbook and share that one instead”

“It was shared when it was first published but has not been shared since so not all members would be aware of it.”

Over 62% of respondents had used the PAAC on SEAC website at least sometimes. However 37% had never heard of the website or were not sure. Comments included:

“Didn’t know about it.”

“To my knowledge, it has not been made available.”

53% of English Board respondents indicated they used the PAAC on SEAC *Annual Calendar* only sometimes or never. 73% of French Board respondents indicated the same. 38 respondents commented on this question. Most indicated they were not aware of the existence of the PAAC on SEAC calendar.

“Where is it found? Sounds very relevant.”

“Haven’t a clue!”

“I simply don’t know.”

“I don’t know if this calendar is behind our annual planning or not.”

### **Next Steps:**

In response to the survey comments and the issues expressed, PAAC on SEAC plans to take the following actions:

1. Share results of survey with Ministry staff, SEAC chairs and on PAAC on SEAC website
2. Ask Ministry to develop new resources for SEAC, including resources for SEAC training, with help of PAAC on SEAC
3. Send a notice to SEACs to encourage use of *PAAC on SEAC Effective Practices Handbook for SEAC Members* for training and the *Annual Calendar* for planning
4. Enhance resources on PAAC on SEAC website, with webinars and short articles, by applying for additional funding, possibly through the Ministry of Education Parent Engagement Office.