

2014 PAAC on SEAC Survey Results and Comparison

PAAC on SEAC conducted a survey of SEAC members beginning in June 2014. The survey was created using the same questions as the 2009 survey with some additional questions added. The purpose of the current survey was to provide a comparison for the 2009 survey, gain a better understanding of SEAC's perspectives and views on Regulation 464/97 and PAAC on SEAC as well as provide a tool to utilize when advocating to the Ministry of Education specific to SEAC needs.

A Survey Monkey survey tool was used and the survey was open for approximately 6 weeks. The link to the survey was distributed by each PAAC on SEAC member to their SEAC representatives. In addition, a letter was sent to all school boards, both English and French, addressed to the Chair of SEAC to encourage all members to respond.

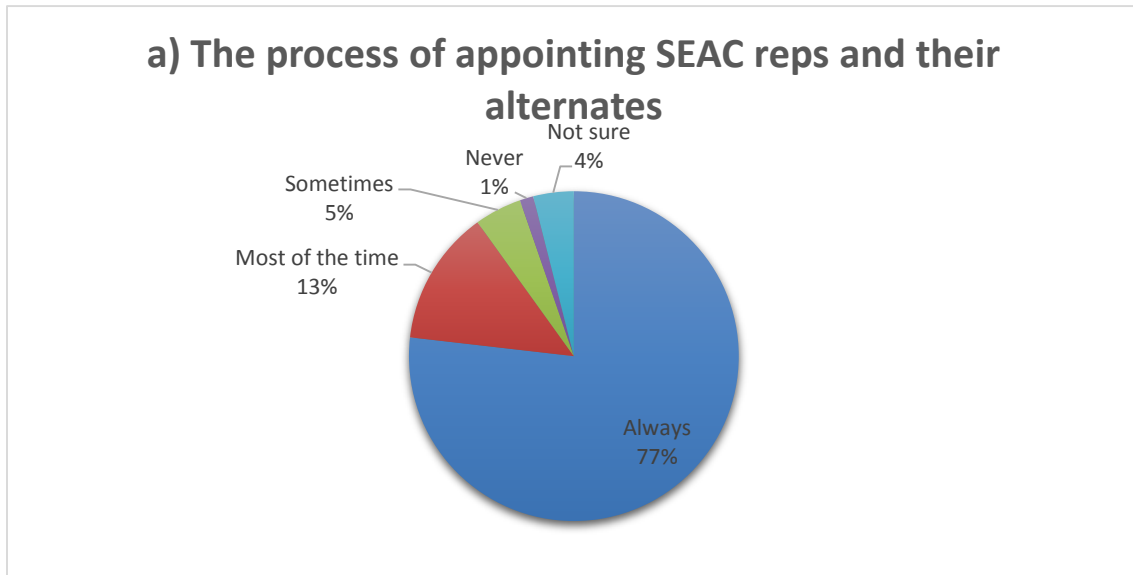
The total number of respondents to the 2014 survey was 178, an increase from the 2009 survey by nearly 27%.

Within the survey questions were asked to identify what school board and parent association the respondent was affiliated with and the number of years the respondent had been a member of SEAC. The information was sorted into the same categories as the 2009 survey for comparison purposes and the results from questions 1-5 suggest that:

1. 50 boards in total responded to the 2014 survey. This included separate and public as well as French school boards. This is the same number of boards as the previous survey in 2009.
2. For some boards in the 2014 survey there were as many as 11 respondents. This increased by 1 from the 2009 survey.
3. We saw a decrease in the number of different provincial associations or organizations by 4 in the 2014 survey. 2009 had 24 different groups where 2014 had only 20.
4. The number of years on SEAC for the 2014 survey was comparable to the 2009 survey, considering there was a difference in the number of respondents to this question between years.

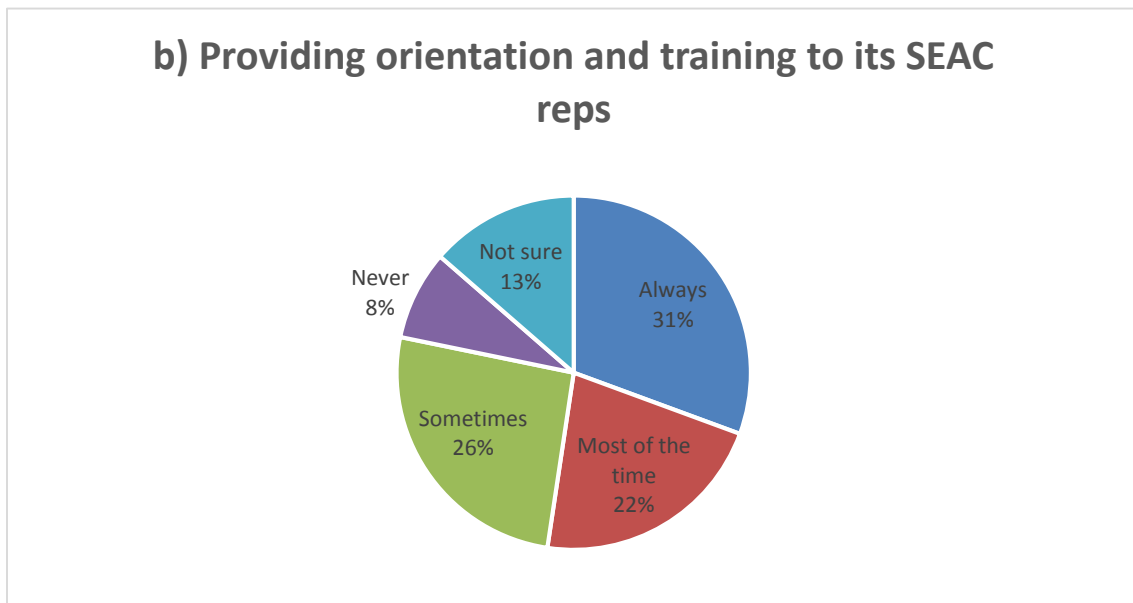
The following section is a summary of each question from the 2014 survey including select respondent comments. Trends, comparison information and points to consider will follow the question summary.

Q6 My school board complies with its mandate under Regulation 464/97 including:



PAAC on SEAC Comments:

- 77% of respondents responded 'always' which was nearly a 10% increase from the 2009 survey
- School boards have a responsibility to comply with their mandates all of the time, PAAC on SEAC would like to see this response increase over time



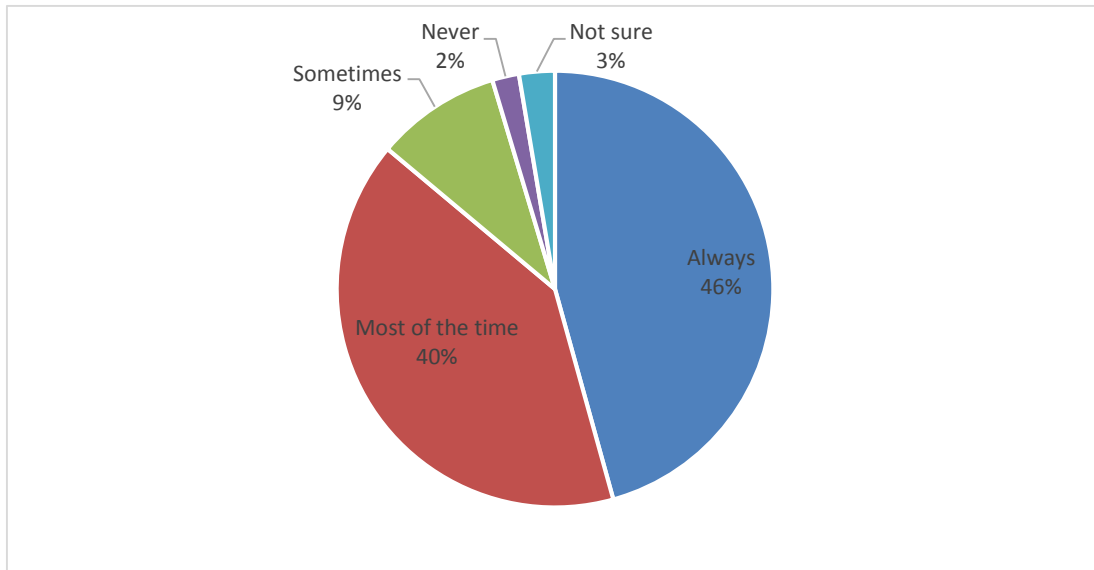
PAAC on SEAC Comments:

- Orientation and training continues to be a challenge for SEAC representatives
- 21% report never or not sure

Comments from survey respondents:

- “Technically training is provided. I think it could be done better and be more fulsome.”
- “I haven’t necessarily received training on how to be an effective SEAC rep.”
- “could do more.”

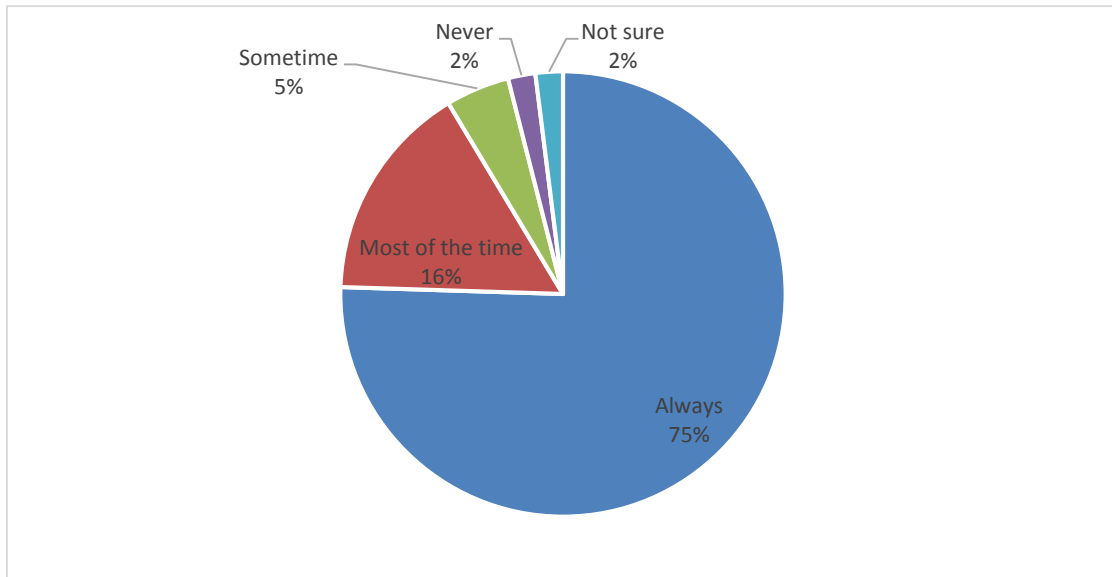
Q7 My SEAC plans in advance for the topics to be covered throughout the year:



PAAC on SEAC Comments:

- 86% of respondents indicated that their SEAC plans their schedule in advance always or most of the time.
- This is a 15% increase from the 2009 SEAC survey

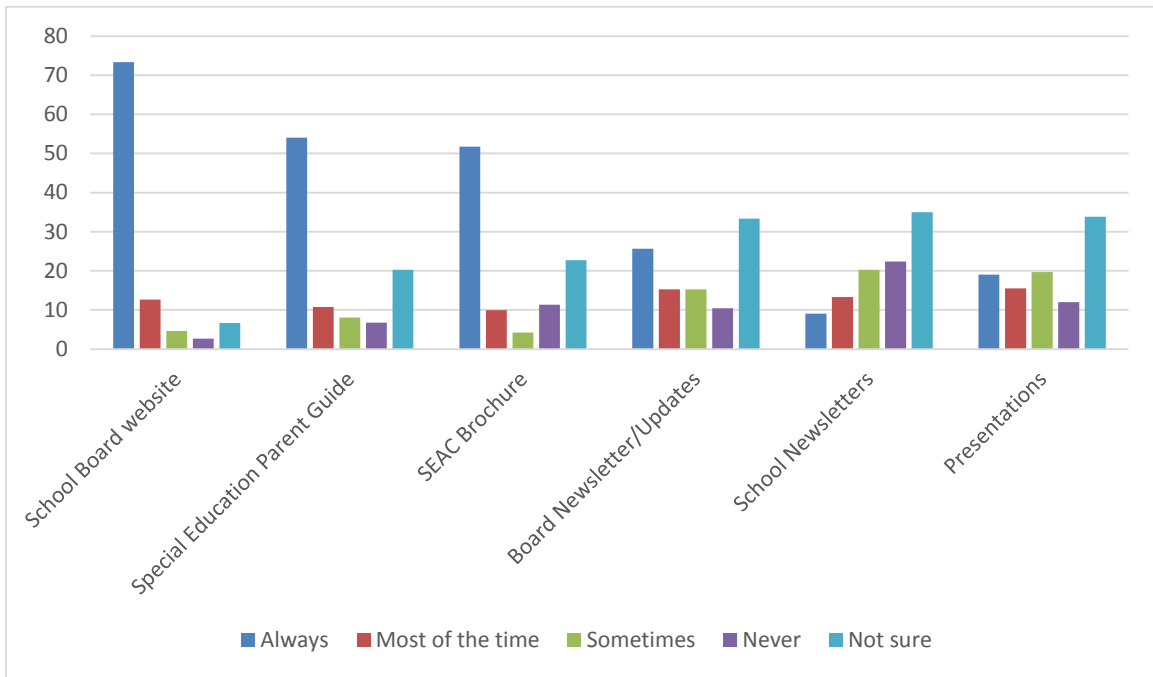
Q8 Members of my SEAC receive the agenda and information for the meetings several days in advance:



PAAC on SEAC comments:

- 75% reported that information was provided with advance notice always
- This is a 10% increase from the 2009 survey

Q9 Information about SEAC membership, roles and meeting times are available via:



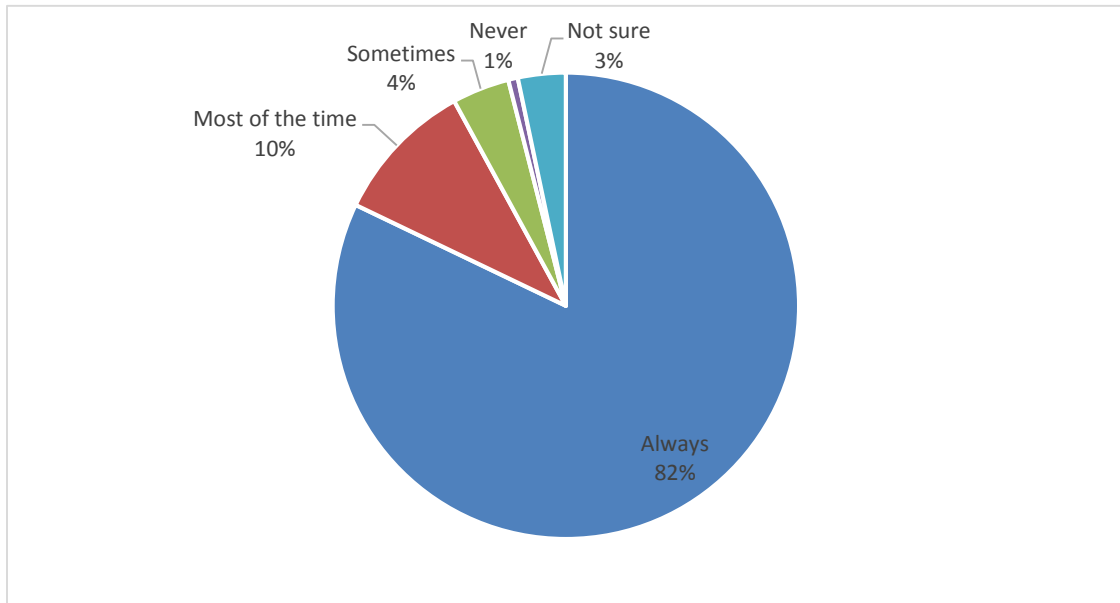
PAAC on SEAC comments:

- School Board website ranked the highest in information sharing platforms
- In-school documents like board/school newsletters and presentations continued to be identified as the least utilized methods of sharing information about SEAC.

Comments from survey respondents:

- “I don’t see what the schools get from the board.”
- “am not aware of any of these formats being used in our Board”
- “The SEAC link is sometimes difficult to locate.”

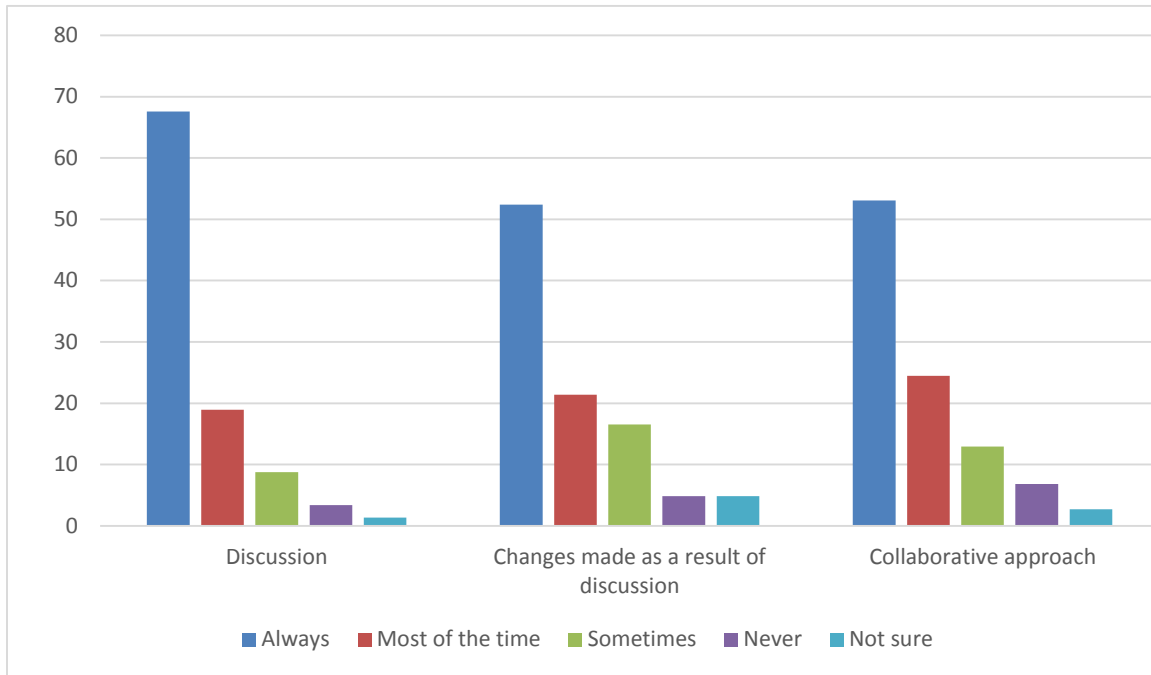
Q10 SEAC welcomes information distributed by local association members:



PAAC on SEAC comments:

- 92% of respondents indicate that SEAC welcomes local association information
- Increase of 12% from the 2009 survey

Q11 My school board consults SEAC in the development of its Special Education Plan and/or yearly amendments through:



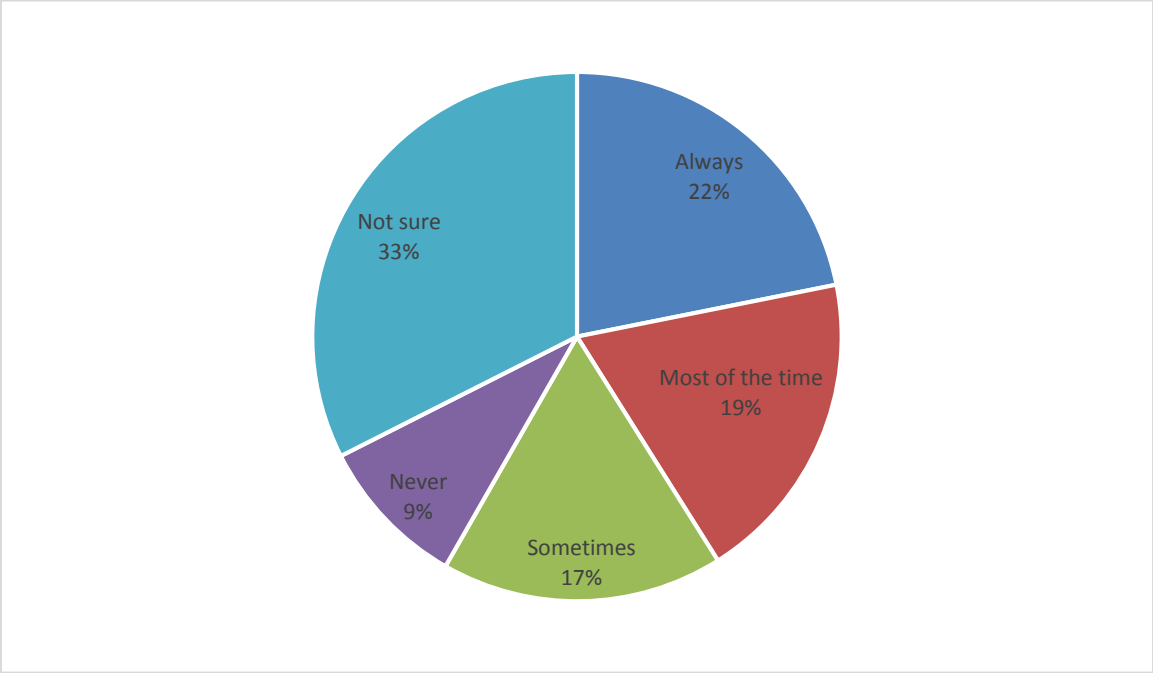
PAAC on SEAC Comments:

- Discussion was identified as the more common way that SEAC consults about the Special Education Plan at 68%

Comments from Survey Respondents:

- “No experience seeing changes made at our suggestion.”
- “Staff go through and update the plan. They then present the plan with the changes highlighted to SEAC with very little or no discussion.”

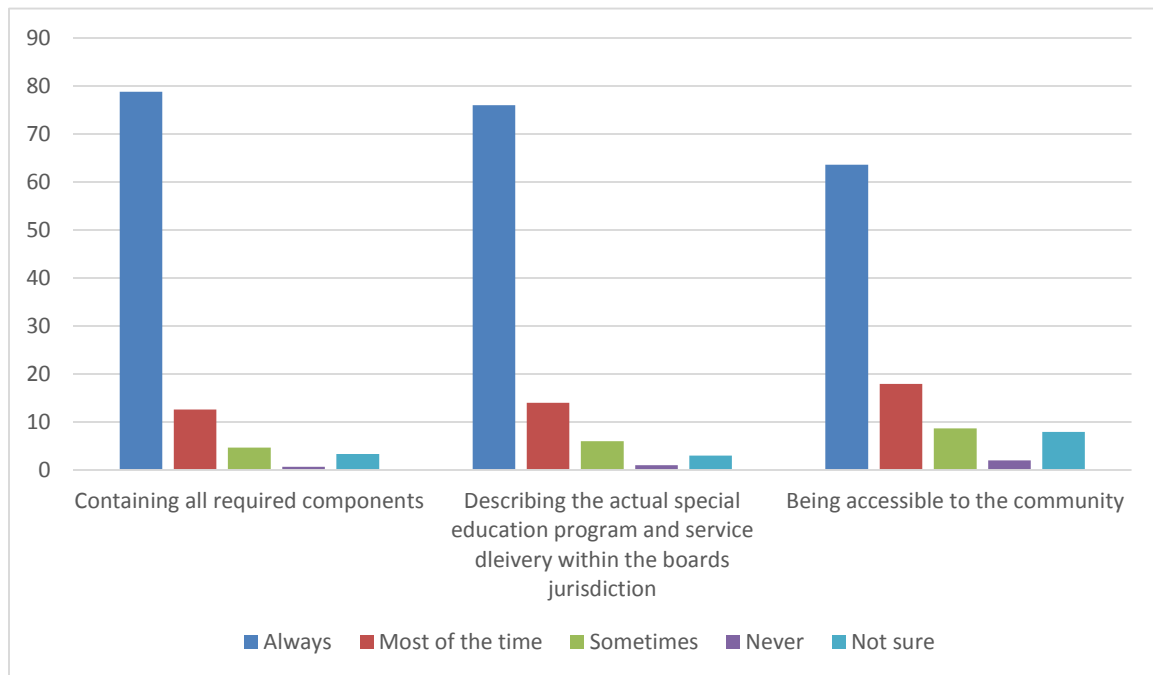
Q12 Any minority reports from previous years are taken into account in developing the Special Education Plan/amendments:



PAAC on SEAC Comments:

- Not sure is the highest response at 33%
- Current SEAC members should be aware of the previous year’s activities, including what minority reports were developed and what/if there was any action or outcome from them

Q13 My school board's special education plan complies with the Ministry of Education's standards for school boards' special education plans (2000) in terms of:



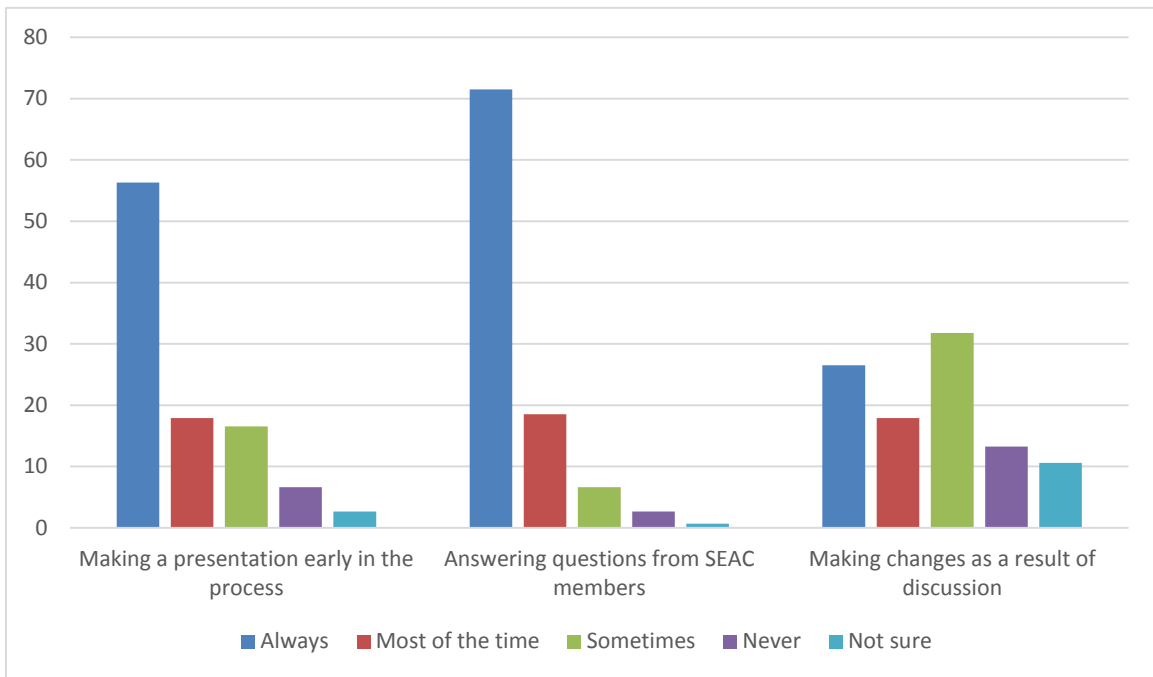
PAAC on SEAC Comments:

- 64%-78% of the respondents feel that their school board always complies with the Ministry of Education's standards for Special Education Plans.
- 3-4% of the respondents were not sure or felt that their school board never complied with the Ministry of Education Standards
- 10% of respondents felt that the Special Education Plan was never or not sure how it was accessible to the community

Comments from Survey respondents:

- "Very generic description of programs so that administration has lots of room to manoeuvre"
- "It is available via the board website"

Q14 My school board consults SEAC in its special education budget by:



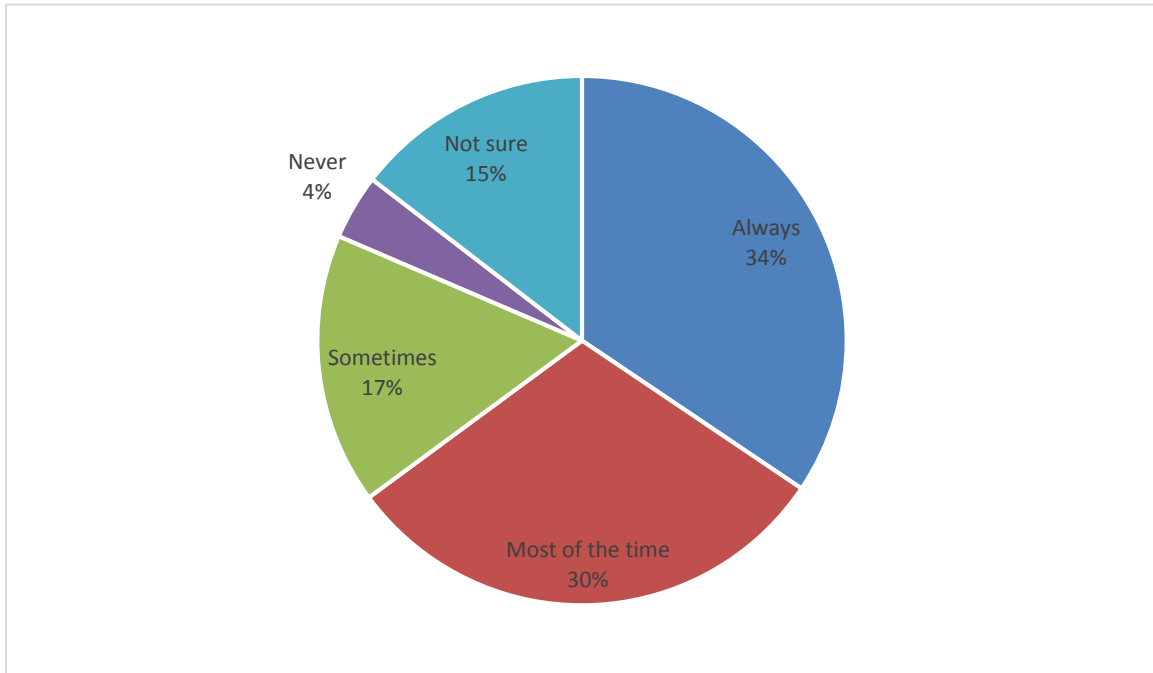
PAAC on SEAC Comments:

- The data would indicate that SEACs are consulted more often via presentations and offering a question and answer period, however we see that limited change is made to the Special Education Budget via these consultations. This could indicate that either change is not required, or that school boards are not considering SEACs feedback in their special education budget planning

Comments from survey respondents:

- “In my experience on SEAC, I’ve not seen any changes made resulting from a discussion of the special education budget at the SEAC table.”
- “A presentation is only given if a special request is made..”

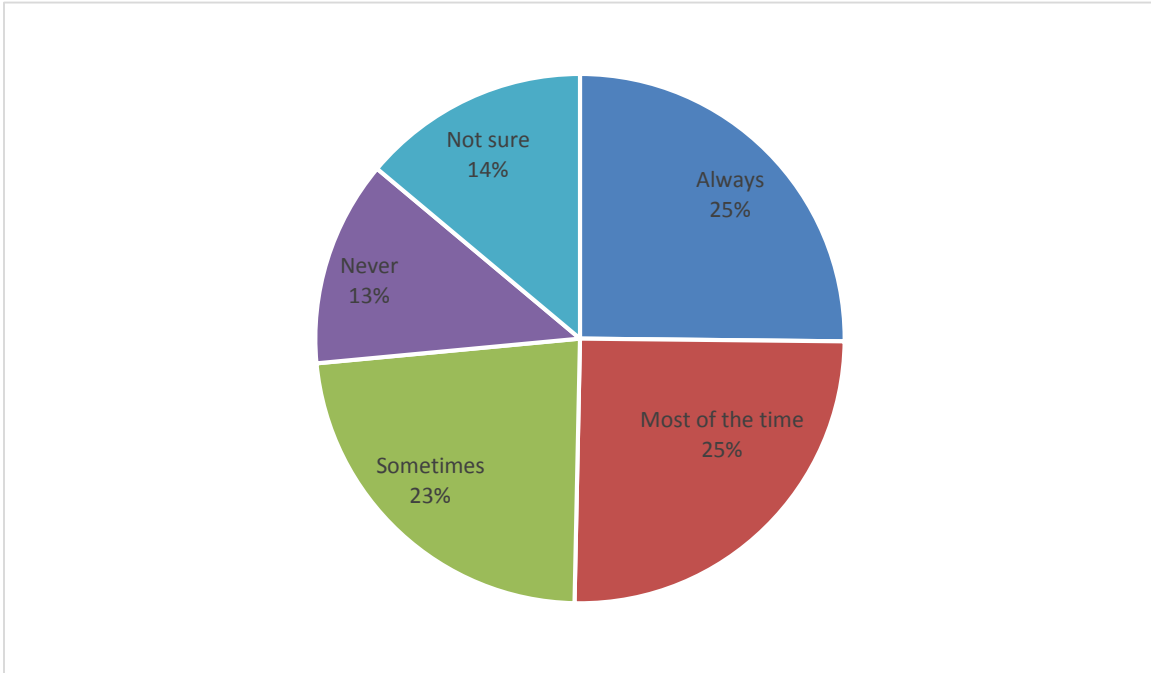
Q15 My school board provides the October Report and other relevant statistical information to SEAC in a timely manner:



PAAC on SEAC Comments:

- 64% report that the October report is provided in a timely manner either always or most of the time.

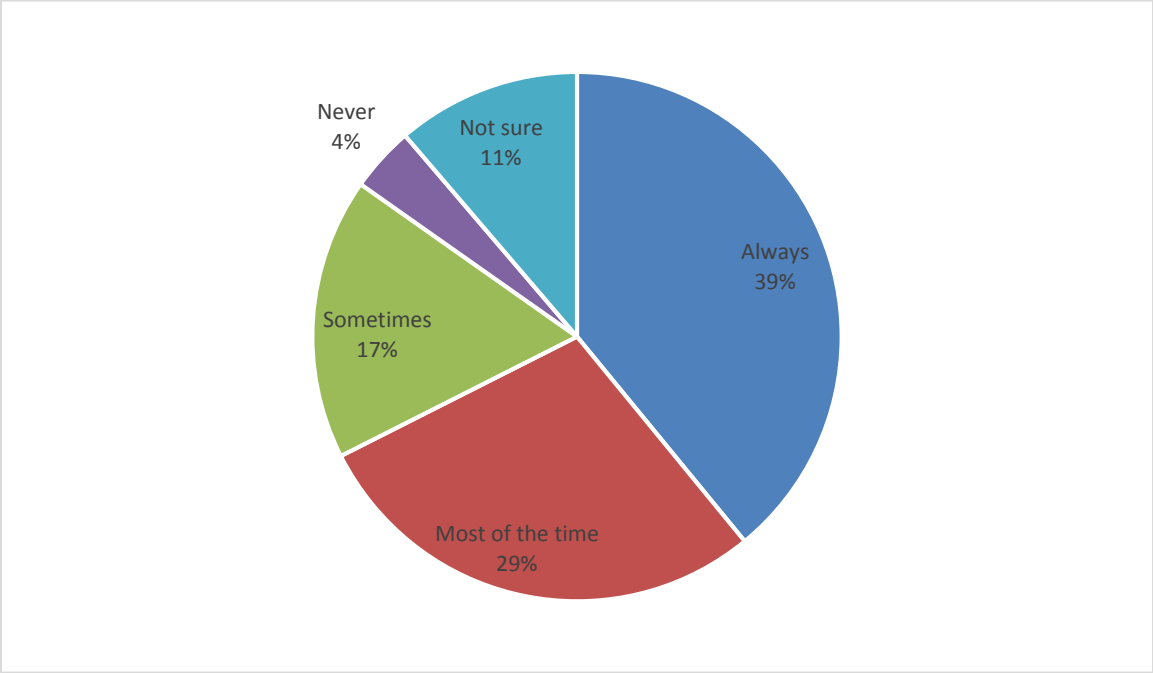
Q16 My SEAC is informed about the number of professional assessments carried out by school board personnel each year, and the number of students on waiting lists for professional assessment:



PAAC on SEAC Comments:

- 50% of respondents felt that assessment information was shared always or most of the time
- Professional assessments and the waitlists for these services are important information for SEACs to be aware of. Currently, only half of the respondents are kept up to date on this information which could drive conversation and raise awareness within the SEAC community regarding barriers for students with special needs accessing support

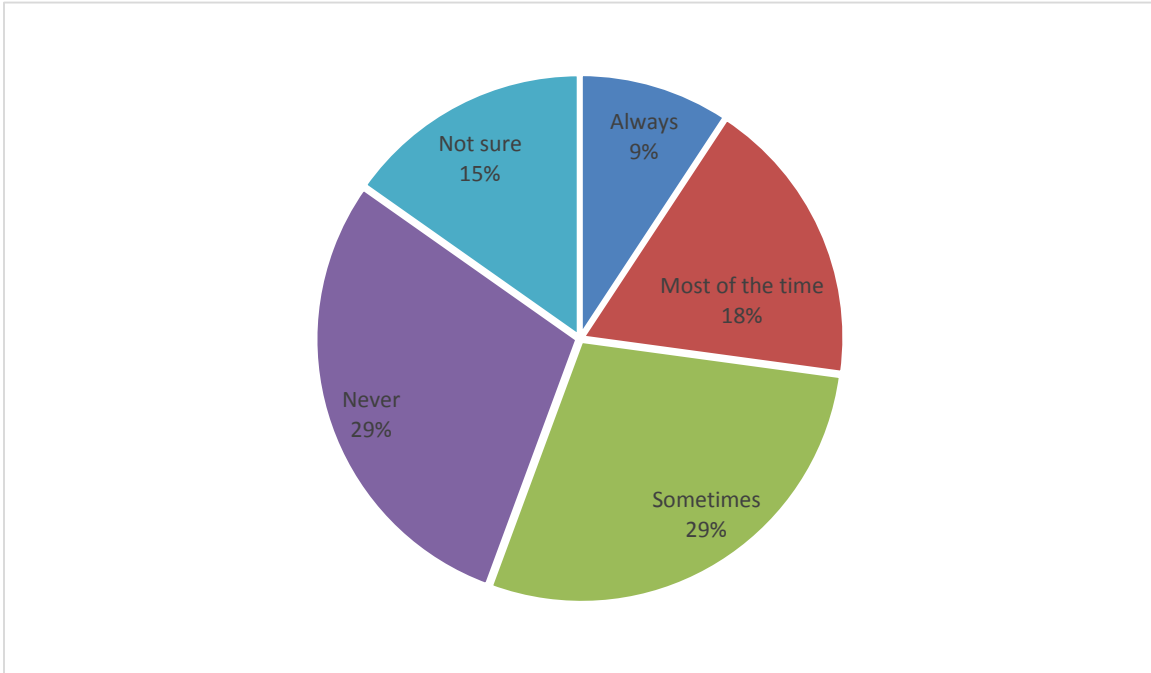
Q17 My school board tracks and reports to SEAC on the participation levels, exemptions, deferrals and achievement of its students with special education needs in all the EQAO testing:



PAAC on SEAC Comments:

- 68% of respondents report that their school boards report to SEAC on students with special education needs and EQAO testing always or most of the time
- This is an increase of 12% from the 2009 survey

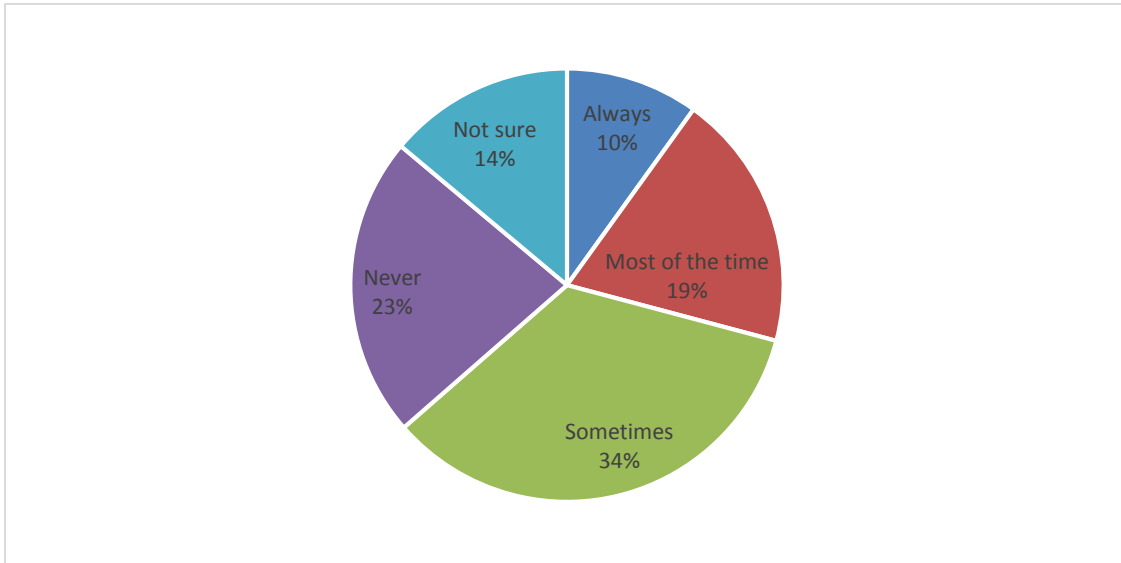
Q18 My school board involves SEAC in planning how to assist students with special education needs who are doing poorly in or who are exempted from the EQAO testing:



PAAC on SEAC Comments:

- Almost 30% of respondents report that their school board never involves SEAC in planning to assist students with special education needs during EQAO testing times.
- Less than 10% report that their SEAC is always consulted with regarding EQAO testing. Local associations have vast amounts of resources and information which could be shared in consultation with the School Board as it relates to supporting students with special education needs

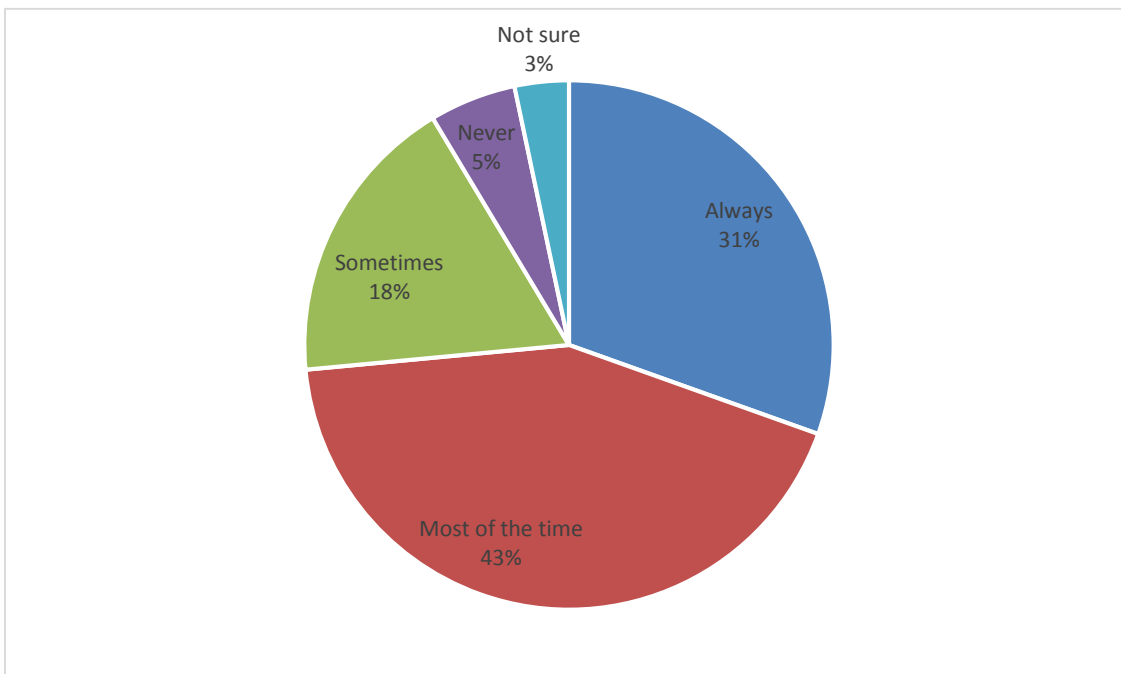
Q19 My school board includes SEAC in the planning and provision of professional development to teachers:



PAAC on SEAC Comments:

- Nearly a quarter of respondents indicated that they were never consulted regarding professional development for teachers with 15% reporting that they were unsure

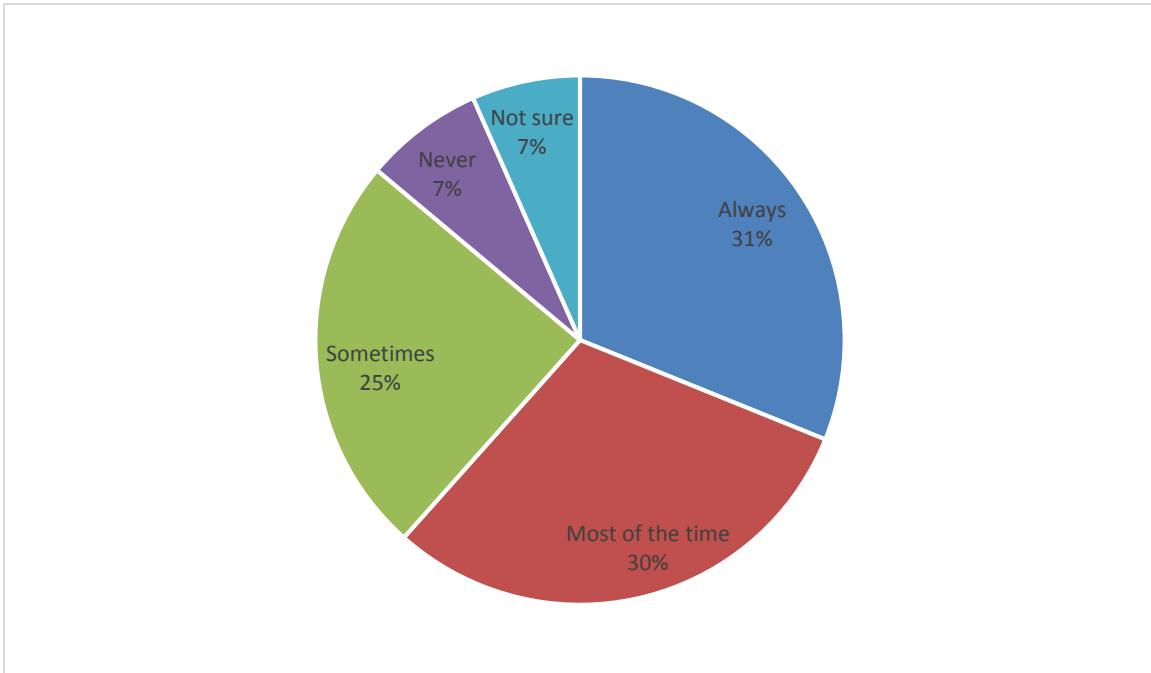
Q20 My school board provides regular and timely information to the SEAC on all matters related to the development and delivery of special education programs and services:



PAAC on SEAC Comments:

- 74% of respondents identified that their school board provides information to the SEAC always or most of the time regarding matters related to the development of special education programs and services

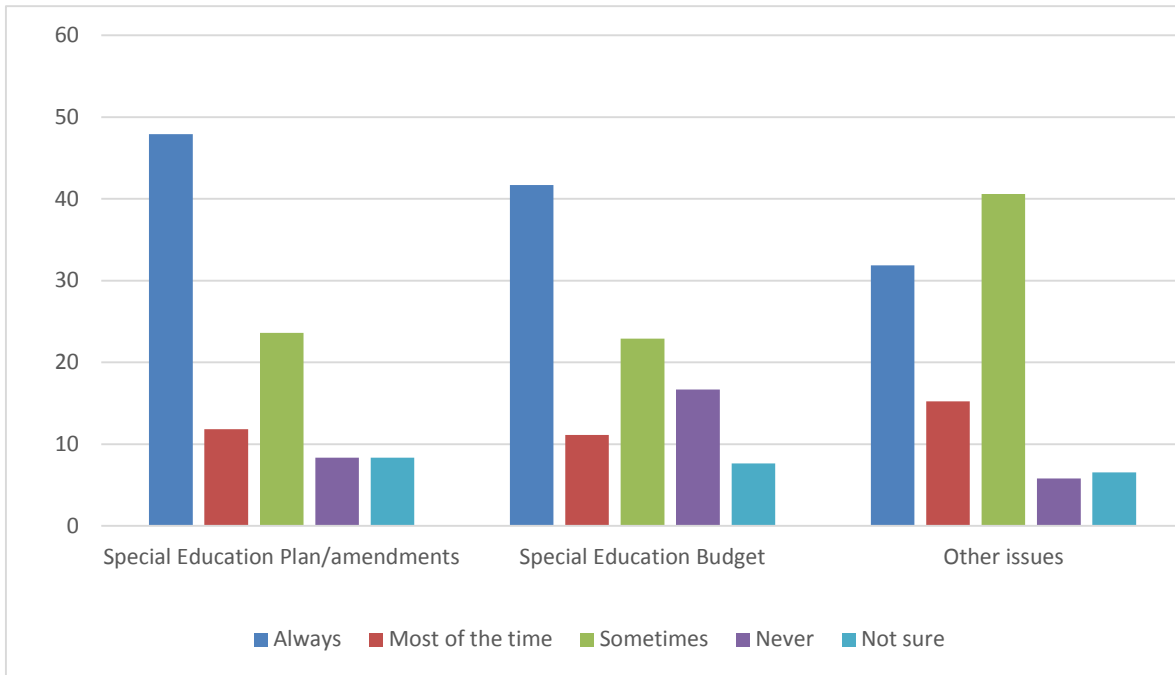
Q21 My school board involves SEAC in a meaningful way in discussions regarding the way special education students are treated under school board policies such as safe schools and character education policies:



PAAC on SEAC Comments:

- 61% report they were always or most of the time involved which is an increase from the 2009 survey, however there is opportunity for a further increase by School Boards and SEACs working collaboratively and sharing information and ideas

Q22 My SEAC makes motions to the School Board about:



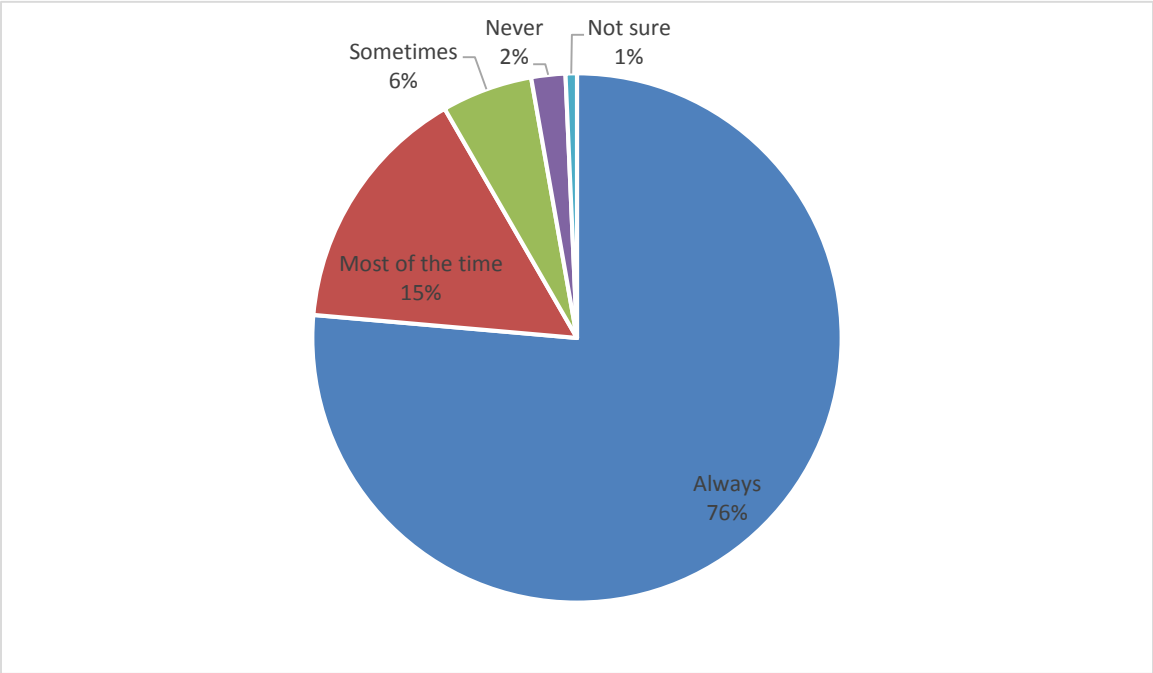
PAAC on SEAC Comments:

- Less than 50% of respondents report that motions are made regarding the Special Education Plan amendments and special education budget
- SEACs were less likely to pass motions on other issues

Comments from survey respondents:

- “no motions seem to be brought forward, but changes seem to be considered after discussion.”
- “we don’t make actual motions but our suggestions are heard sometimes”

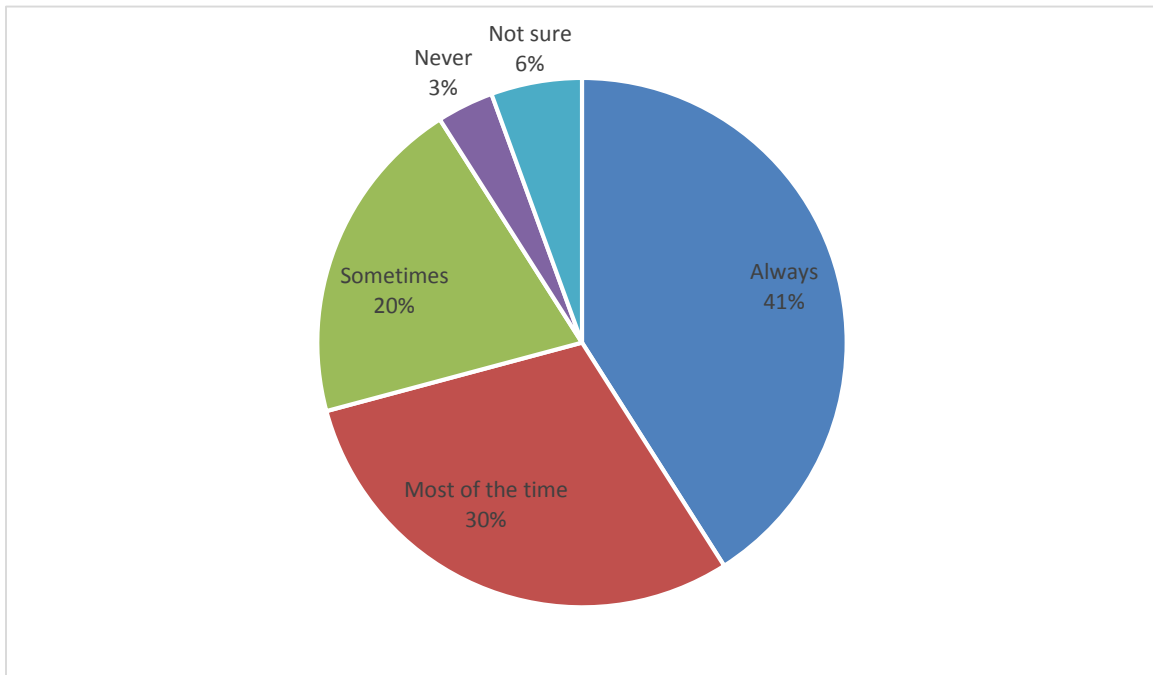
Q23 My SEAC encourages input and discussion from all members on all presentations:



PAAC on SEAC Comments:

- 91% of respondents felt that their school board welcomed input and discussion from SEAC members on presentations always or most of the time

Q24 SEAC member opinions are respected and considered in the development of special education policy at my school board:



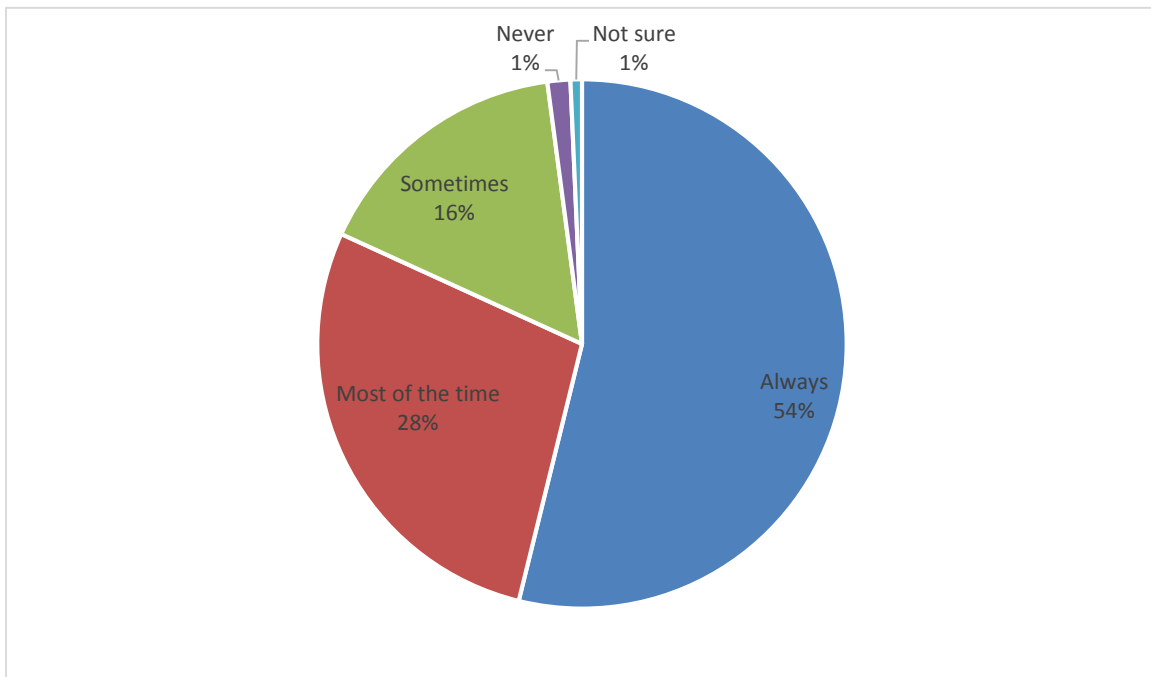
PAAC on SEAC comments:

- Over 70% of respondents indicated their opinions were respected and considered always or most of the time. This is a 13% increase from the 2009 survey
- Comments indicate that some do not feel opinions are incorporated into special education policy development in their boards

Comments from survey respondents:

- "We are an advisory committee only; we have been told"
- "I guess opinions may be respected and considered but rarely implemented"

Q25 SEAC members share information about their organizations on a regular basis:



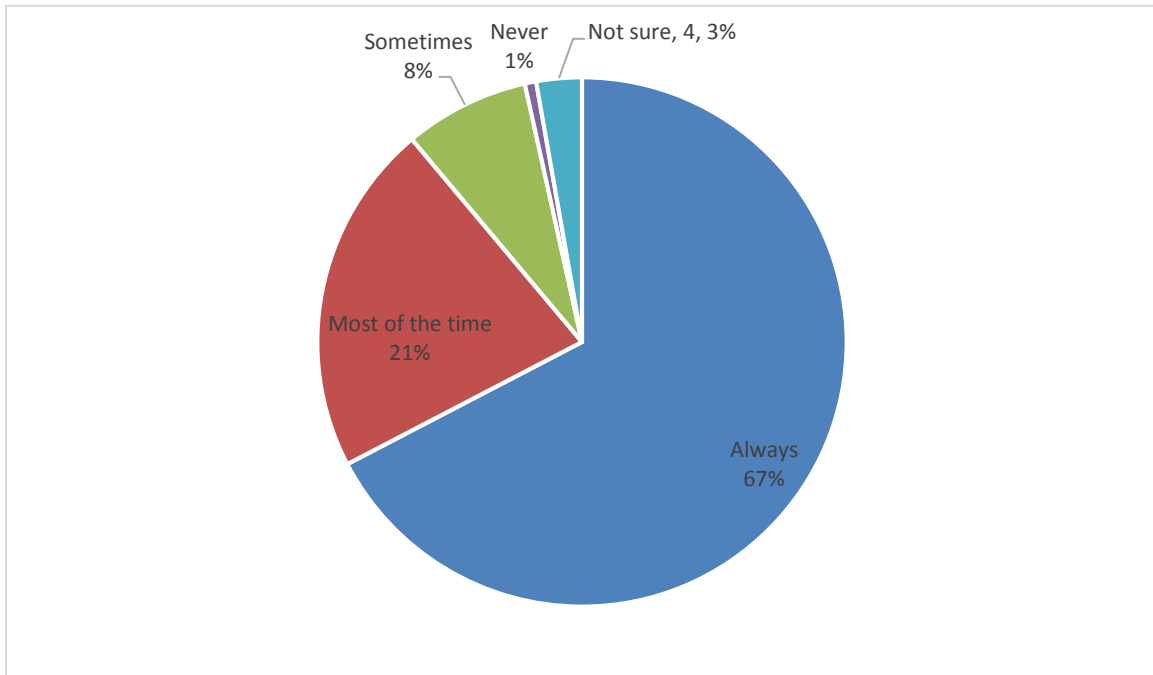
PAAC on SEAC comments:

- Over 80% of English Board respondents said their SEACs share information always or most of the time. Among the French board respondents, only 54 % said the same.

Comments from survey respondents:

- “Monthly everyone is encouraged to speak on whom they represent and any new projects/courses soon to be available”

Q26 SEAC members talk to each other and discuss different points of view respectfully:



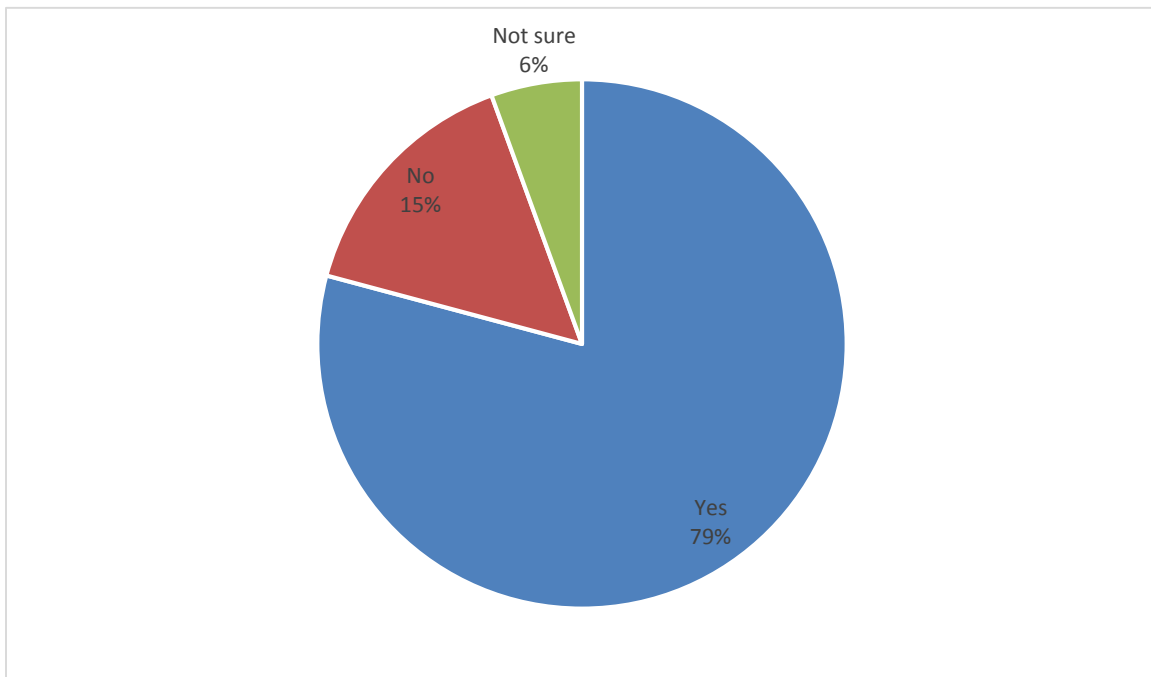
PAAC on SEAC comments:

- Nearly 90% of respondents said they discuss points of view respectfully always or most of the time.

Comments from survey respondents:

- “This recently has started to happen in a meetings prior to SEAC - however it is my impression it is not positively looked upon by members of the school board.”
- “Sometimes the perception that other members have when we advocate for our group of representative students is that we are being "confrontational" even if that is not the case.”
- “Not much discussion occurs during our meetings.”

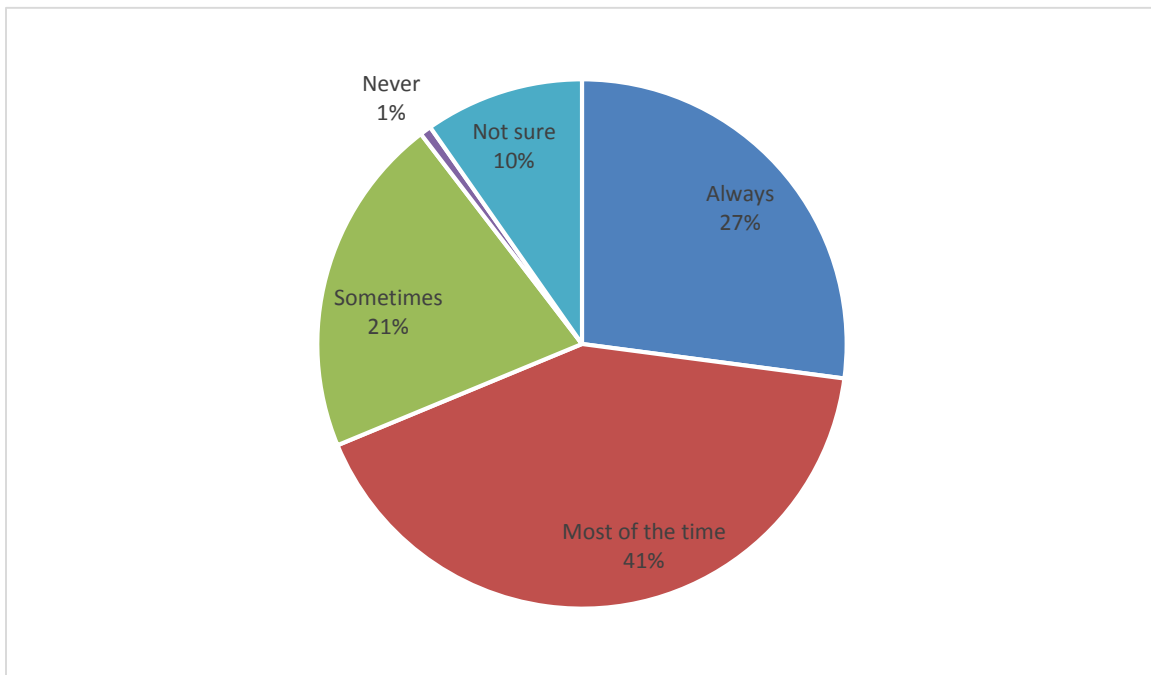
Q27 Local Association members have served as chair of my SEAC:



PAAC on SEAC comments:

- 83% of English Board respondents said Local Association members had served as SEAC chair. Of the French Board respondents, 55% said that Local Association members had NOT served as SEAC Chair.
- Several respondents, including a full 18% of French respondents, indicated they were unsure about the Chair position and some, both English and French, indicated the position is usually or always held by a trustee.

Q28 My SEAC is able to recruit and retain members:



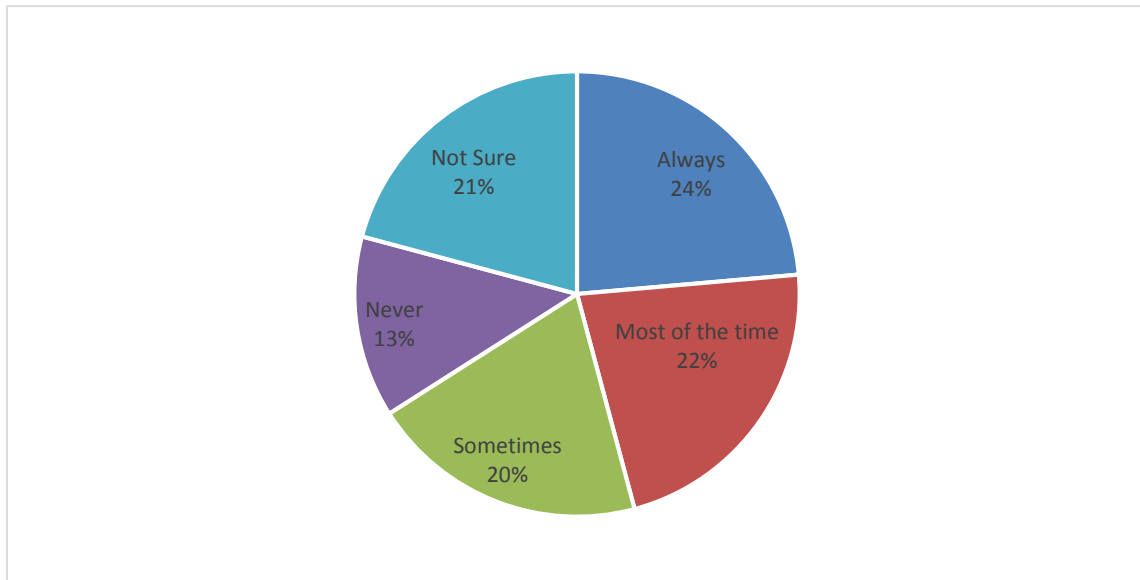
PAAC on SEAC comments:

- 73% of English Board respondents reported that their SEAC is able to recruit and retain members always or most of the time. Less than 20% of French respondents reported the same.
- Comments (14 in total) centered largely on the difficulty of recruiting new members going forward

Comments from survey respondents:

- “It is becoming more and more difficult to get active and involved parents to stay”
- “It is very difficult to find new members to replace existing members wishing to retire”
- “Some areas have not been well represented.”
- “It is difficult to find francophone parents who are not Board members to take on SEAC positions”

Q29 My SEAC offers/shares the PAAC on SEAC Effective Practices Handbook with its members:



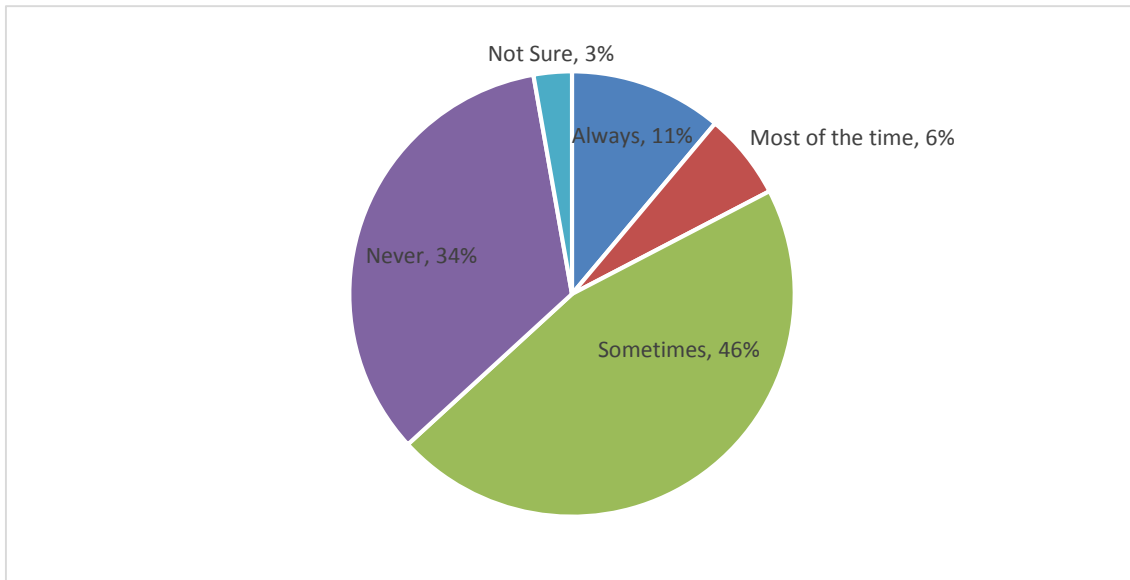
PAAC on SEAC comments:

- Only 46% of respondents reported they were offered the PAAC on SEAC Effective Practices always or most of the time.
- 30 respondents commented on this question, with the majority indicating they were not aware of the handbook.

Comments from survey respondents:

- “Where can you get it? Sounds useful.”
- “I’ve never heard it mentioned at any meetings”
- “We modelled our own handbook after the PAAC on SEAC handbook and share that one instead”
- “I have not been made aware of this publication.”
- “It was shared when it was first published but has not been shared since so not all members would be aware of it.”
- “Don’t recall having seen this document before. I certainly would review it in detail and share it with SEAC.”

Q30 As a SEAC member, I have used the PAAC on SEAC website:



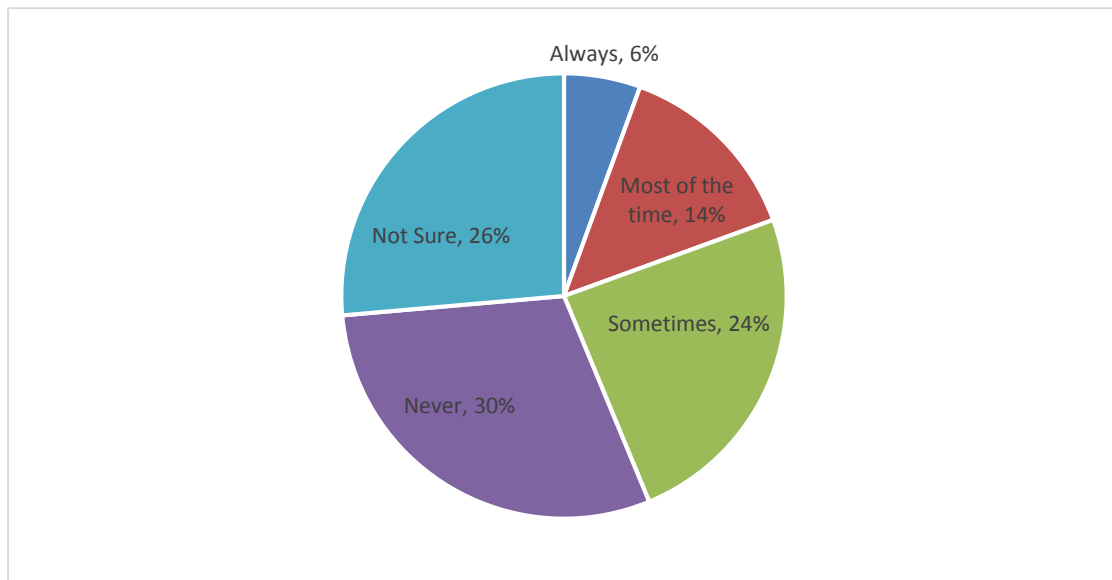
PAAC on SEAC comments:

- Almost 80% of English Board respondents said they visited the PAAC website only sometimes or never. 100% of French Board respondents said the same.

Comments from survey respondents:

- "Didn't know about it."
- "To my knowledge, it has not been made available."

Q31 My SEAC uses the PAAC on SEAC Annual Calendar for annual planning:



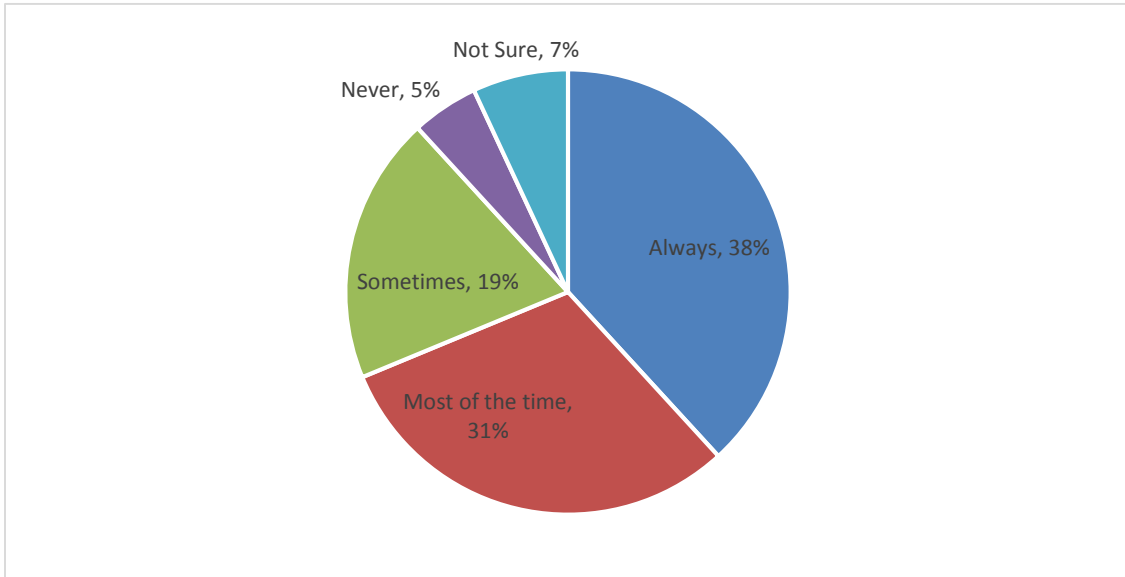
PAAC on SEAC comments:

- 53% of English Board respondents indicated they used the PAAC on SEAC 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.

Comments from survey respondents:

- “Where is it found? Sounds very relevant.”
- “Haven't a clue!”
- “I do not know.”
- “I simply don't know.”
- “I don't know if this calendar is behind our annual planning or not.”

Q32 My school board consults with SEAC when developing or changing policy related to special education:



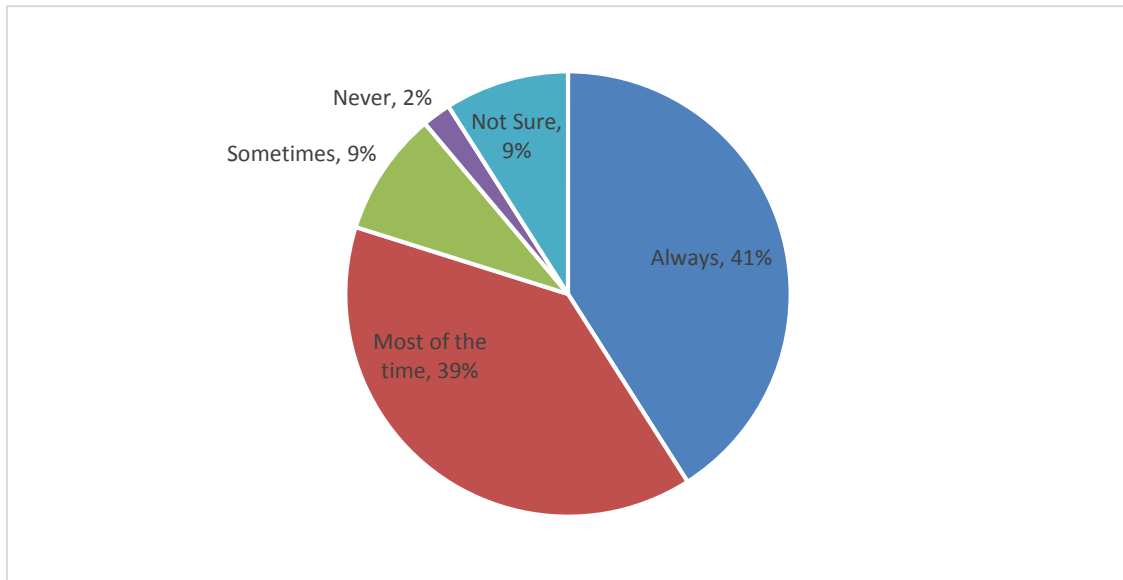
PAAC on SEAC comments:

- 69% of respondents reported that their school board consults with them all or most of the time when developing or changing special education policy. 24% said they were only sometimes or never consulted. 7% said they were not sure.

Comments from survey respondents:

- “The school board shares lots and lots of special education information; however, I am not sure that it is to this extent where SEAC can make such recommendations.”
- “They don't consult us, they tell us.”
- “Does this imply before it becomes policy or after -- many times we are consulted after the fact, and maybe asked what we think, but this is after the fact. Sometimes we are asked prior to change, but again, it's usually when the policy is too far developed. Would be great if we could be consulted at the 'very beginning' stages.”
- “I see it as done after the fact....we need to address issues of concern that we have to ensure policy/procedure implementation.”

Q33 Regulation 464/97 is clear in defining the role of SEAC:



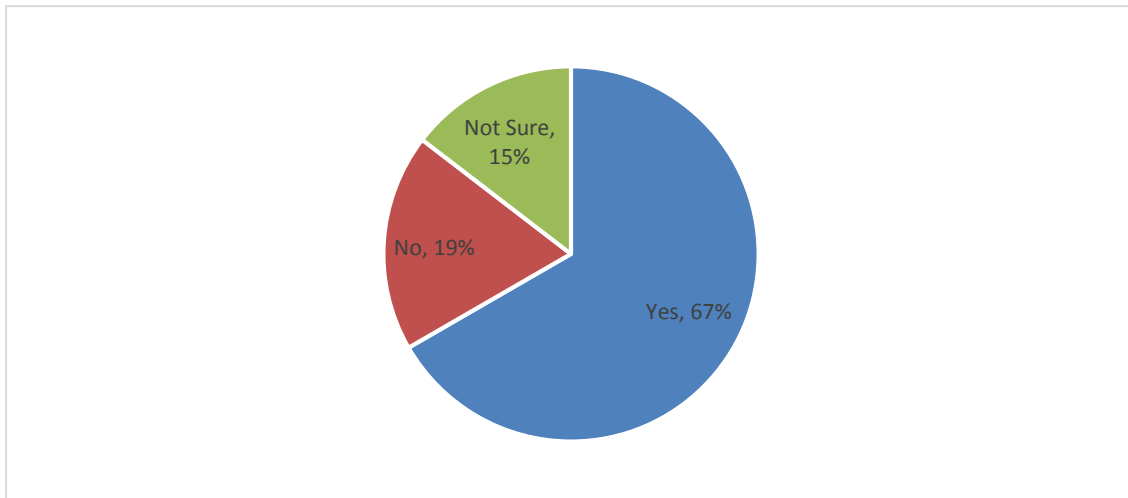
PAAC on SEAC comments:

- While 80% of respondents agreed that Regulation 464/97 is clear in defining the role of SEAC, the comments indicate that many SEAC representatives are not aware of the regulation

Comments from survey respondents:

- “Not familiar with this legislation.”
- “Not having an orientation I have not been provided with resources of relevance such as this.”
- “Don’t know what this is.”
- “Not sure what 464/97 is”
- “Not sure what this means.”
- “Too vague”
- “‘Consultation’ is not clearly defined...what does that mean? Especially regarding budget”

Q34 My SEAC has developed a terms of reference for operating procedures at SEAC:



PAAC on SEAC comments:

- 67 % of respondents reported that their SEAC has adopted terms of reference. 15% were not sure. Comments indicate that SEAC representatives are not familiar with how their committee is operated:

Comments from survey respondents:

- "There may be terms of reference, but I am not sure."
- "No orientation - I am unaware of this."
- "They probably have but I don't believe I am aware of it."
- "I imagine it has, but I don't think I've seen it...."
- "There may be such a document, but I don't recall seeing it."
- "I could not find this."
- "I have not been made aware."

Q35 Please select the top THREE most effective practices of your SEAC:

Effective Practices	# of responses	% of responses
Meeting planning	56	39%
Timely distribution of reports and statistical information to SEAC	60	42%
Meeting effectiveness	43	30%
SEAC relationship/collaboration with Trustees	53	37%
SEAC relationship/collaboration with Board staff	79	55%
SEAC input to budget process	34	24%
SEAC input to Special Education Plan	60	42%
Recruitment/retention of SEAC reps	15	10%
SEAC orientation and training	9	6%
Availability of information to parents on SEAC roles, membership, meeting information	8	6%
Other	9	6%
Total Respondents	144	

PAAC on SEAC comments:

The top three responses were the SEAC relationship/collaboration with board staff, timely distribution of reports and statistical information, and SEAC input to the Special Education Plan. 55% of respondents applauded their relationship and collaboration with Board staff.

48 respondents chose to comment on this question. Just under half of the comments noted "respectful and cooperative relationships" between SEAC and staff. In particular, many noted the "professionalism and dedication" of their fellow SEAC members, with one respondent noting the benefits of networking amongst the members. Meetings were often described as well-planned and smooth and efficient.

At the same time, one noted "I know that our SEAC is probably one of the most effective but that doesn't mean we can be complacent." Several respondents indicated they feel their SEAC lacks in effectiveness, that there is "little to no influence over services" and that "SEAC input into budget recommendations is rarely followed." One indicated, "I hear so many parent stories that indicate that the policy is not hitting the pavement in a real and working fashion." Others also indicated frustration with a lack of "community-focus" and difficulty in recruiting representation from local associations.

Q36 Please select the top THREE aspects needing improvement in the functioning of your SEAC:

Areas in need of improvement	# of responses	% of responses
Meeting planning	11	8%
Timely distribution of reports and statistical information to SEAC	24	17%
Meeting effectiveness	41	28%
SEAC relationship/collaboration with Trustees	19	13%
SEAC relationship/collaboration with Board staff	19	13%
SEAC input to budget process	45	31%
SEAC input to Special Education Plan	35	24%
SEAC orientation and training	83	58%
Availability of information to parents on SEAC roles, membership, meeting information	74	51%
Other	21	15%
Total Respondents	144	

PAAC on SEAC Comments:

The top three areas needing improvement were SEAC orientation and training at nearly sixty percent, availability of information to parents and SEAC input to the budget process. Several respondents also mentioned in their comments that recruitment and retention of SEAC reps is an issue; due to an error in the preparation of Survey Monkey, PAAC on SEAC neglected to include that option among the selections.

56 respondents chose to comment on this question. Many mentioned they feel at "arms length" of dealing with significant issues and giving input to the budget process, with one commenting, "input means more than just reviewing the document.". There was frustration expressed with the volume of reports presented at SEAC meetings in lieu of meaningful discussion on substantive issues. Specific comments include:

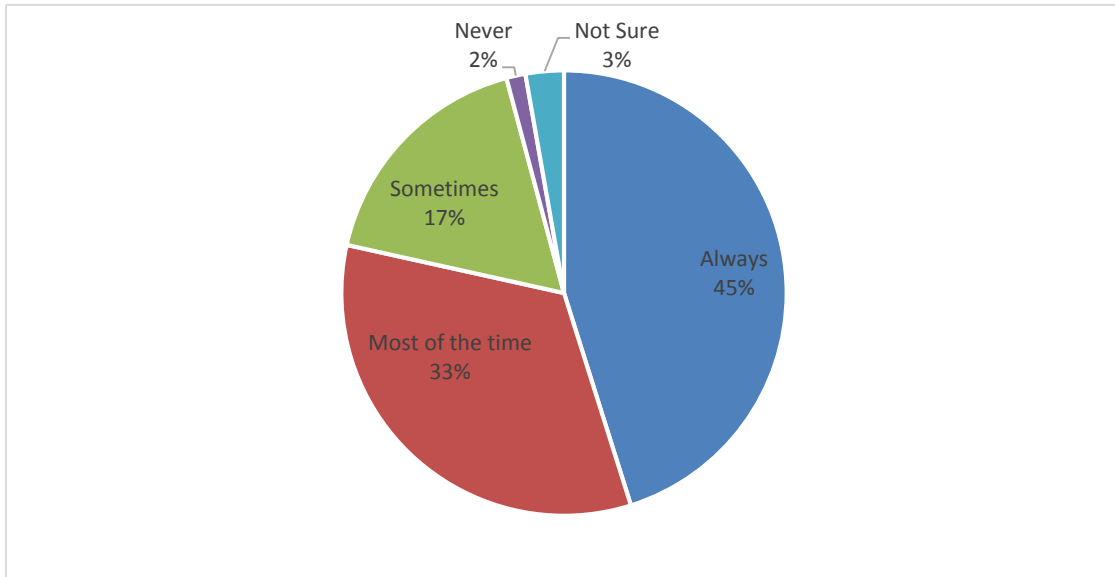
"I would like to see our SEAC have a stronger "leadership role" within the board, rather than so often being the "recipient" of info from the board."

"Special education plan and budget are reviewed with SEAC but it is already a "done deal". We approve it but do not have any input into it"

There were also many comments with regards to the lack of information to parents with one respondent saying "all parents I have spoken with are unaware of this committee". There were also

numerous comments regarding lack of SEAC training, particularly for those SEAC members who join mid-term.

Q37 I am engaged on my SEAC and I feel my contributions are valued:



PAAC on SEAC comments:

- 78% of respondents indicated they felt engaged and that their contributions are valued always or most of the time. There were only four comments on this question. All suggested the question was really two parts and registered a disconnect between the respondents engagement and the extent to which their contributions are valued by staff.

Comments from survey respondents:

- “I AM ALWAYS ENGAGED AND THE SENIOR ADMIN OFTEN MARGINALIZES OUR EFFORTS WHEN THEY DIFFER FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF SENIOR ADMIN”
- “I certainly speak my piece and some staff members do make me feel valued. Others I feel "tolerate" the contributions of SEAC members while pretending to value contributions.”
- “These are two questions. I am engaged Always because I make sure I am but I feel my contributions are valued Most of the time”

Q38 Please share your ideas for enhancing the effectiveness of the SEAC voice in addressing the needs of Special Education students in your Board:

PAAC on SEAC comments:

83 respondents provided input to this question. The majority of the responses centered around the need for more training opportunities, problems with process of SEAC meetings, and the need to recruit more representation and build awareness of SEAC among parents and school staffs.

With regards to orientation, one respondent commented, "orientation is important and needs to be consistent with all new members.....one year later, I still feel I am unable to contribute to the committee and be effective in representing my agency." Others stressed the need for training outside of regular meeting time. A number of respondents suggested forums to connect provincially with other SEACs and one also requested that the Ministry provide support for SEAC orientation.

Many respondents expressed concerns with Board and SEAC processes that stress information over consultation. Specific comments include: "the way they run currently is that the Board presents info to SEAC. It doesn't really seem to be a place for SEAC members to voice questions or issues.", "SEAC needs to have a stronger voice. A lot of times the Board presents decisions after they have been taken.", "We do not contribute. We are educated about other services provided to our students, what is being done in special education, etc., but we do not add to this, change things, etc."

Finally, there were at least twenty comments regarding issues of recruitment and building awareness of SEAC. Comments include: "it is important to disseminate information to parents so that they are made a valued part of the budget and planning process." "Full membership representing the needs of the community would be extremely helpful to address issues and concerns.", "needs to be more awareness of SEAC within school boards by staff and parents.", "SEAC could benefit from engaging and listen to voice of representatives and parents more.", "information needs to get out to parents and the message needs to be consistent."

Q39 Do you have any other comments you wish to share?

PAAC on SEAC comments:

54 respondents chose to provide additional comments. Most comments referred to issues with SEAC processes and awareness of SEAC. Many also thanked PAAC on SEAC for undertaking this survey indicating that there was a need for updated information from the SEACs.

Many respondents' comments indicated they felt that their SEAC would be more effective if "brought into the discussion early on." There were also concerns expressed with involvement of local associations versus trustees. One commented, "SEAC local representatives should have more control over the meetings. Listen to us, we do know our kids best." Several also asked for help, as in this example: "Special education plans are being ignored by the Ministry.....Why is SEAC not mentioned in the checklist-other than a check we have one?" More "involvement at the provincial level" was also called for with suggestions including SEAC Chairs attending the OPSBA General Meeting and MOE meetings. Another commented that "Ministry takes TOO much of ARMS length when it comes to Education"

Respondents also expressed concerns regarding knowledge of SEAC by parents. Specific comments include: “I wish more folks knew about SEAC” and “It is sometimes difficult to recruit SEAC members.” One suggested, “wish that SEAC members could actually share with other board staff at PD days about their associations and the children they represent so other folks understand our special needs students from a parents perspective.”

Finally, one contributor summed up the process and awareness issues with the following: “Suggest that SEAC as an entity will become less and less effective as a collective voice for Spec Ed students as the mindset of “Education for All” is applied across Ontario and concurrent budgets for schools and declining enrollments continue to define budget directions. I feel very strongly that the mandate/scope for SEAC has to evolve if SEAC is to remain an effective voice of change for Boards. SEAC evolution will be required to ensure that new members are recruited to fill seats of long time serving members.”