

Section 2: Membership

The composition or membership of SEAC is a key component of Regulation 464/97. (See Appendix 1 for a complete copy of the Regulation) School boards and school authorities have developed various practices regarding membership selection, but all SEAC membership should include Trustees and Local Association representatives, and may include additional members, and, if required, representatives for the interest of First Nations pupils.

To be eligible for nomination as a SEAC member the nominee must be:

- At least 18 years old
- A Canadian Citizen
- A resident of the school board or authority jurisdiction
- An elector or tax payer for the school board

SEAC members cannot be an employee of the school board or authority.

2.1 Local Association Representatives

In Regulation 464/97, Section (1) a “local association” is defined as:

“an association or organization of parents that operates locally within the area of jurisdiction of a board and that is affiliated with an association or organization that is not an association or organization of professional educators but that is incorporated and operates throughout Ontario to further the interests and well being of one or more groups of exceptional children or adults.”

There are three key concepts in this definition.

1. The local association of parents must operate locally within the school board jurisdiction.
2. The local association must be affiliated with an incorporated provincial organization that works on behalf of one or more group of exceptional students.
3. The local or provincial association cannot be an association or organization of professional educators.

The Ministry of Education document, *Special Education A Guide for Educators (2001)*, provides school boards with further guidelines (not in the regulation). In *Section A, subsection, Advisory Committees on Special Education*, page A27, it states:

“1) The SEAC seats for representatives of local associations should be used to bring to the committee the perspective of parents of children with a wide range of exceptionalities. Note that the ministry provides school boards with definitions of exceptionalities for use in the identification, placement, and review process. As many as possible of these exceptionalities should be represented on the SEAC.

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- 2) *Representatives of local associations should be persons who can express the concerns of the parents of the exceptional pupils of the board.*
 - 3) *Representatives of local associations should bring the perspective and resources of a provincial or a national association that is incorporated and that operates throughout Ontario to further the interests of one or more groups of exceptional pupils.*
 - 4) *The representative of the local association nominated by the association is normally the person appointed by the board.*
- As long as the association selects as its representative a member who lives within the jurisdiction of the board, the actual address of the “branch” of the association should not be significant.”*

Effective Practices to identify qualified local associations include:

- a. Checking the PAAC on SEAC list of provincial parent associations that is included in this handbook, and finding out whether they have local associations or chapters within the school board boundaries.
- b. Contacting provincial parent associations to identify local groups or chapters and/or to request nomination of eligible members of local associations or chapters.
- c. Maintaining an up-to-date list of local organizations that provide support to families of exceptional children or adults.

The maximum number of local association representatives that can be appointed is 12 (Regulation 464/97, Section 2 (2)) and in many school board jurisdictions there are many more than 12 eligible local associations.

Effective Practices for when a school board has received more than 12 nominations for appointment as local association representative include:

- a. Selecting from within the list of nominees to ensure that there is a representative for each of the exceptionalities.
- b. Asking representatives from similar groups, who represent the same group(s) of exceptional children or adults, to consider working together and nominating a single representative.
- c. Developing a policy or process to allow additional associations to be nominated to SEAC when a vacancy occurs.

In some areas of the province SEACs have had difficulty recruiting SEAC members who represent local associations. These SEACs may have to try new strategies to attract nominees.

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Regulation 262/97 (Section 3 (2)) addresses the situation where there are no local associations and permits a board to appoint two members and two alternates who are not members of the board. For additional strategies see Section 2.4 regarding additional members of SEAC.

2.2 Trustees

The number of Trustee members of SEAC is determined by Regulation 464/97 and the size of the board. School Authorities usually have one Trustee member and school boards may have one to three Trustee members.

PAAC on SEAC recognizes that Trustee members of SEAC are in a unique position to participate as members of SEAC in discussions and also in discussions at the Board table when decisions are made. Trustees are elected officials and are ultimately responsible for making decisions about special education programs and services and the special education budget. Trustees who are well informed and knowledgeable about special education are better able to make decisions that benefit students with special education needs.

Effective Practices to involve Trustees in SEAC include:

- a. Appointment of alternative Trustees.
- b. Inviting all Trustees to attend SEAC meetings when important presentations or discussions will take place.
- c. Providing regular written updates to the Trustees.
- d. Making presentations to Trustees on specific activities or topics.

2.3 First Nations Representative

Regulation 464/97 requires that boards appoint one or two representatives for Indian pupils if the school board or school authority has a representative for Indian pupils on the Trustees. The regulation also says that the representative shall be nominated by the councils of the bands with which the board has agreements.

2.4 Additional Members

Regulation 464/97 provides only limited direction about the appointment of additional members, sometimes called members at large. In Regulation 464/97, Section 2 (5) the board may appoint one or more additional members who are not:

- Representatives of a local association
- Trustee members of the board
- Members of another committee of the board

PAAC on SEAC recommends that all school boards and school authorities develop policies for SEAC that clearly define the number of additional members and the criteria that will be used to select additional members.

Effective Practices for the selection of additional members include:

- a. Appointment of an individual from a community agency or organization that supports any group(s) of exceptional children that are not represented by an existing local association representative.
- b. Appointment of a representative from a community organization that supports the needs of one or more group of exceptional children, but does not meet the criteria as a local association.
- c. Promoting the need for additional SEAC members in the local and community newspaper or media, to school councils, and through the school board Website.
- d. Development by school board Trustees, with SEAC input, of a list of criteria or a rubric to support an interview or screening process to review additional member applicants.

2.5 Alternate Members

Within Regulation 464/97 it is recommended that the board appoint alternate members for SEAC members who are local association representatives, Trustees and for First Nations representatives. Alternate members can ensure that a voting member is available in the absence of the SEAC member, and can assist the SEAC member in preparing for meetings and connecting with the local association and provincial parent association.

Effective Practices to involve alternates in SEAC activities include:

- a. Providing all communications and meeting resources to the alternate members. Electronic distribution of materials will help to reduce the cost.
- b. Making it clear during training that the SEAC member is responsible to provide information to the alternate and to be in regular communication.
- c. Encouraging all alternate members to attend every SEAC meeting.
- d. Nomination, by parent associations, of an alternate member who is able to extend the reach of the SEAC representative by covering a different geographical area.
- e. Nomination, by parent associations, of alternative members who have an interest in becoming the SEAC representative in the future.

2.6 School Board Personnel

Under Regulation 464/97, the school board is required to make available the “personnel and facilities” for the “proper functioning of the committee”. (Section 10 (1)). In most school boards this means, at least, a staff for administrative support including recording and distributing Meeting Minutes, providing notification of Meetings, and other communications, and ensuring meeting rooms are available and refreshments provided, if necessary. (For further discussion on administrative support for SEAC meetings, see Section 5.1)

SEAC Meetings are usually attended by a supervisory officer responsible for special education. In addition, some school boards assign additional staff to attend SEAC on a regular basis as a resource to the committee.

Effective Practices to provide resource staff to SEAC include:

- a. Inviting senior staff responsible for professional services at the school board to attend SEAC meetings on a regular basis.
- b. Inviting special education staff to attend SEAC meetings on a rotating basis.
- c. Inviting Principal Associations to assign a representative Principal or Vice-Principal to attend SEAC meetings.
- d. Regular presentations to SEAC about each special education program or service

2.7 Membership Nomination Process

The term of SEAC is the same as the term of the elected Trustees, and it lasts four years. Election of Trustees occurs during the municipal election process held every four years usually in late October or early November. The current SEAC term started after the October 2010 elections, with subsequent elections to be held in 2014 and 2018. The SEAC membership is appointed by the newly elected Trustees at one of their first official meetings.

The process for inviting nominations and appointing SEAC members varies between school boards. Some school boards invite nominations as early as September of an election year. Other school boards ask for nominations after the Trustees hold their first meeting and others accept nominations for several months following an election.

Effective Practices to solicit nominations for local association representatives include:

- a. Sending letters regarding the nomination process to all eligible local and provincial parent associations that represent exceptional students.
- b. Providing community groups, or organizations that support children who have special education needs, with information about SEAC eligibility, and the nomination process.
- c. Posting information about SEAC and the nomination process on the school board website.
- d. Advertising for SEAC nominations in the local or community newspapers.
- e. Sharing information about SEAC and the nomination process with school councils and home and school association.
- f. Increasing awareness about SEAC with the development of a SEAC brochure or fact sheet.
- g. Making the SEAC brochure available at every school, or providing copies to all parents of students with an Individual Education Plan, or who receive special education programs and services.

2.8 Replacing SEAC Members and Filling Vacancies

In Regulation 464/97, Section 7 is very clear about the situations in which a member of SEAC vacates his or her seat and Section 8 concerns how the vacant seat should be filled. In Section 7 (1) “ a member vacates his or her seat if he or she:

- (a) is convicted of an indictable offence;
- (b) absents himself or herself without being authorized by resolution entered in the minutes from three consecutive regular meetings of the committee; or
- (c) ceases to hold the qualifications to be appointed to the committee.”

PAAC on SEAC recommends that each school board have a written process regarding vacancies and how they will be filled.

Effective Practices for a policy regarding SEAC vacancies and how they will be filled include:

- a. Making clear to members, or have a written policy, on the requirement of the member to notify the Chair of SEAC if they are convicted of an indictable offense.
- b. Formalizing the process for authorizing extended absences for SEAC members who need to miss two or more meetings, for example due to illness, family emergencies or employment changes.
- c. Formalizing the process for the school board or SEAC Chair to notify the member, and especially, the relevant local association, when the member has missed meetings.
- d. Providing a description of the qualifications required to be appointed to the committee.
- e. Developing a process for school board or SEAC Chair to invite local associations to provide another representative.
- f. Development of a procedure to fill a vacant seat during the term of SEAC.