Section 4: Information and Knowledge Transfer

Special education is one of the most rapidly changing aspects of education. Knowledge about the special education needs of students; effective instructional and assessment strategies; as well as new initiatives from the Ministry of Education with related legislation, regulations, policy and resource guides, is constantly changing. SEAC members need to be engaged in a process of continuous learning.

PAAC on SEAC recommends that, **consistent with Regulation 464/97 Section 10 (2), all members of SEAC have continuous access to relevant information, and further, that SEAC orientation and training includes comprehensive information about special education.** This includes information about:

- **History and development of Special Education Advisory Committees (SEAC)**
  - o Education Act: Bill 82
  - o Evolution of SEAC
- **Roles and Responsibilities**
  - o Ministry of Education
  - o School Boards and School Authorities
  - o Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE)
  - o Special Education Advisory Committees (SEAC)
  - o Principals and Teachers
  - o Parents and Students
- **Legislation, Regulations and Policy including:**
  - o Education Act
  - o Regulations, particularly 181/98 and 464/97
  - o Policy/Program Memorandum
  - o Standards and Resource Guides
- **School Board Obligations and the Special Education System**
  - o School Board and School Authorities Roles
  - o Ministry Priorities and Key Ministry Initiatives
- **Funding of Special Education and Accountability**
  - o Education Funding and the Special Education Grant components
  - o Special Education Plans and Reports
  - o Board Improvement Plans for Student Achievement
  - o School Effectiveness Framework
  - o Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)

> **Effective Practices to provide SEAC members with relevant special education information include:**
> a. The Ministry of Education website section on Special Education at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/speced.html
> b. The Ministry of Education website for SEAC members at www.seac-learning.ca
> c. The Minister of Education Council on Special Education (MACSE) public repository at http://www.macse-on.ca/public.php
> d. SEAC Orientation Manuals created by each school board and provided to every member of SEAC.
> e. SEAC training sessions provided annually by the school board to all SEAC members.
> f. SEAC training sessions provided by local or provincial parent association to their SEAC representatives.
> g. Regular updates provided by provincial associations to their SEAC representatives.
> h. Section of the school board and provincial parent association websites dedicated to special education and SEAC.

SEAC members also require information about the special education program and services provided by their specific school board. **PAAC on SEAC recommends that SEAC members be provided information about:**

- **School board philosophy**
- **Organizational structure of staff and committees**
- **Special education program delivery model**
- **Individual Education Plan (IEP) and identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) Processes**
- **Related school board policies and procedures**
- **School board finances and budget development process related to special education**
- **Accountability processes, including development of annual Special Education Report and Board Improvement Plans for Student Achievement**

Some of this information is available in the school board annual Special Education Report and each member of SEAC should be provided with a copy of the Report, or information on how to access it on-line. Additional information may be summarized or copied and included in a school board Orientation Manual for SEAC members, as well as at SEAC member orientation and training sessions.

4.1 SEAC Orientation and Training

Regulation 464/97 Section 10, requires the school board to provide SEAC members, and their alternates, with information and orientation respecting:

> a. *The role of the committee and of the board in relation to special education; and*
> b. *Ministry and board policies relating to special education.*

This is to be provided "*within a reasonable time*" after the SEAC members are appointed. (Regulation 464/97 Section 10 (2))

Special education is complex and Ministry and board policies and practices, as well as research and understanding about special education, are evolving rapidly. In addition, membership of SEAC can change within each SEAC term.

PAAC on SEAC recommends that school boards provide SEAC orientation and training on a regular basis and that Professional Development for SEAC members should be on-going.

Effective Practices to support SEAC member orientation and training includes:
   a. Providing orientation sessions for new SEAC members.
   b. Holding annual training sessions for all SEAC members.
   c. Developing a SEAC orientation manual and providing all SEAC members with a copy.
   d. Matching new SEAC members with a mentor who is a more experienced SEAC member.
   e. Presenting information or training items within each SEAC meeting Agenda or within the annual schedule of SEAC meetings.
   f. Providing informal opportunities for SEAC members to meet and network during a meal break or special activity.
   g. Holding joint professional development sessions for school board staff and SEAC members.
   h. Inviting SEAC to send a representative, or attend as a group, professional development opportunities provided to the school board by the Ministry of Education or other Ministries or community organizations.

4.2 SEAC Member Skills and Relationships

Many SEAC members are volunteers, who may be parents of students with special education needs. SEAC members may have diverse backgrounds in terms of education, culture and experience and some may have limited committee experience. SEAC members may need to be clear about meeting expectations and meeting processes in order to become effective participants in SEAC meetings. (See also Section 5 on Meeting Processes).

PAAC on SEAC has identified some of the key skills that are useful for SEAC members, including:

- **Communication**
- **Presentation**
- **Team Building**
- **Problem Solving**
- **Time management**
- **Note taking**

- **Listening**
- **Assertiveness**
- **Decision Making**
- **Negotiation**
- **Research**
- **Organization**

SEAC training sessions, a SEAC Orientation Manual and meeting strategies can all be used to help SEAC members improve their participation and contribution.

Effective Practices to support SEAC Member participation include:
a. Developing or sharing a Code of Conduct for members, or Meeting expectations or Meeting norms, that outline expectations and if necessary, consequences. (See also Table 5 for examples of Meeting expectations.)
b. Providing SEAC members with Meeting documents at least 3 business days before the meeting.
c. Providing SEAC members, staff and guests who are making presentations with clear direction on purpose and content as well as time limits.
d. Requesting presenters provide handouts with summary information with key ideas or facts in bold print or bulleted lists.
e. Encouraging presenters to organize information into blocks which have frequent stops to check that members have heard and understood materials.
f. Including time limits for presentations, or a time keeper, to make sure presentations are not too long or detailed.
g. Assisting SEAC members to make presentations at SEAC by providing an outline or list of questions to frame the presentations; a presentation template, opportunities to present to smaller groups.
h. Indicating on the Agenda when an item is presented for decision making and provide templates or tools to help identify options and

The Ministry of Education has developed a resource guide that can be used at SEAC, *Shared Solutions, A Guide to Preventing and Resolving Conflicts Regarding Programs and Services* for Students with *Special Education Needs (2007).* This document includes information and strategies to understand conflict, build positive climates, to listen and communicate effectively. Many of the charts and tips can be shared with SEAC, included in a SEAC Orientation Manual or used in training sessions. Some school boards have developed training activities using Shared Solutions for staff, and many of the same exercises can be used in SEAC training.

In Table 4, there is a list of questions for SEAC members to ask themselves when they are preparing for a SEAC meeting.

Table 4: Preparation Checklist for SEAC Meeting	
The "W" Questions	**The "HOW'" Questions**
Where is the meeting?	How do I contribute to SEAC?
When is the meeting?	How do I acquire information?
What is the purpose of the meeting?	How do I share information?
Why am I going?	How do I use the information?
What do I want to accomplish at the meeting?	How do I encourage others to participate?
What information should I take with me?	How do I learn and listen effectively?
What issues do I want discussed?	How do I encourage the board and other SEAC members to investigate all options?
What am I going to report about my association?	How do I acquire feedback?
What information do I want to leave with after the meeting?	How do we support a process which will encourage feedback and follow through by SEAC members and the school board administration and Trustees?
What will I do with the information I have gained?	

SEAC members should arrive at SEAC meetings on time, and prepared with relevant information, having read the Agenda and support documents provided at least 3 days prior to the meeting. To help set the tone at meetings, the school board can prepare or share materials on a Code of Conduct, or meeting norms. Table 5 shows some examples of meeting expectations or meeting Norms.

Table 5: Examples of Meeting Expectations or Norms

Establish Expectations for Members	1. Arrive on time 2. Review Agenda before meeting and bring any relevant information 3. Turn off all cell phones and pagers, or set to vibrate, for the duration of the meeting. 4. Raise your hand to indicate your request to speak 5. Listen to others 6. Be courteous 7. Do not interrupt other speakers or dominate discussion
Establish Procedures for the Meeting	1. Determine break times, or agree that members can leave room or get refreshments, as needed 2. Agree whether members can walk around during meeting 3. Discourage side meetings or conversations 4. Identify time keeper for Agenda items 5. Identify critical items or tasks for the Meeting 6. Agree on the use of a facilitator or rotating facilitator for discussions 7. Establish time frame and process for discussions (may include allowing a facilitator to have discretion on extending time limits to allow every member an opportunity to speak) 8. Obtain agreement on items that may require voting by members
During Presentations or Discussions	1. Use a facilitator or ask members to facilitate parts of discussion 2. Agree to reserve judgment on ideas generated during brainstorm 3. Stay focused and on time 4. Discourage rehashing or repetition of positions or statements 5. Allow for breakout into teams for discussion of components or alternatives 6. Identify relevant issues, and state all concerns related to issue at the meeting 7. Table or record in "Parking Lot" issues or items for future discussion
At end of meeting	1. End on time or ask for a Motion to extend Meeting 2. Review Meeting action items, include dates and times 3. Determine what will be included in Meeting Minutes

4.3 Member Recognition

An important element of effective volunteer management is volunteer recognition. It is important that SEAC members are recognized for the significant contribution that they make to

the school system. Many school boards have formal volunteer recognition programs and hold annual events to recognize all volunteers. Other school boards have processes in place to track years of volunteer services and recognize outstanding contributions. **PAAC on SEAC recommends that SEAC develop a policy or process, or use existing school board recognition programs, to recognize the contribution of SEAC members.**

Effective Practices to recognize the contribution of SEAC members include:
  a. Recognition of SEAC members with other volunteer recognition events held by the school board.
  b. Holding an event during April, Volunteer Recognition Month, to recognize the contribution of SEAC members.
  c. Recognizing SEAC contributions and years of service at the last meeting of each term of SEAC.
  d. Holding an annual event to recognize and thank SEAC members, such as a Christmas luncheon, or a summer BBQ.
  e. Presenting certificates, or small tokens, to recognize SEAC members on an annual basis, or when SEAC members leave.