

Minutes of the WQSB **Special Education Advisory Committee** meeting held on Thursday, October 20, 2022 held via virtual platform (Teams), at 6:30 pm.

**PRESENT:**

**Members:** Jennifer Brownrigg, Paul Dostaler, Megan Feltham, Jessica Fortier, Carolyn Hayes, Jennifer Idone, Jenna Jenkins, Kim Kourtsidis, Karenne Lachapelle, Roman Laroche, Trina Lasch, Sarah McGough, Michaela Montour, Sharon Pinkston, Dana Scott, Andrea Gage (Management Rep), Cindy Smith (Professional Rep), Kathlene Vibert (Teacher Rep), Darlene Doucet (Support Staff Rep)

**Observers:** Lisa Falasconi (DG Rep), Letitia Taylor (21-22 Chair)

**Regrets:** Stephanie Michaud

**1. Reading of Land Acknowledgement**

Letitia Taylor read the land acknowledgement.

**2. Approval of Agenda**

Letitia Taylor, outgoing Chair, acted in the role of Chair for the meeting, until which time that a Chair was elected.

**22/23-01 Adoption of the Agenda**

IT WAS MOVED by Darlene Doucet, seconded by Roman Laroche that the Agenda be approved.

**Carried**

**3. Welcome and Introductions**

Letitia Taylor welcomed new members to SEAC, and each member presented themselves to the new committee.

**4. Ratification of E-vote Approval June 14, 2022 Meeting Minutes**

**22/23-02 E-vote Approval of Minutes June 14, 2022**

IT WAS MOVED by Jessica Fortier, seconded by Sharon Pinkston that the minutes of June 14, 2022 be approved.

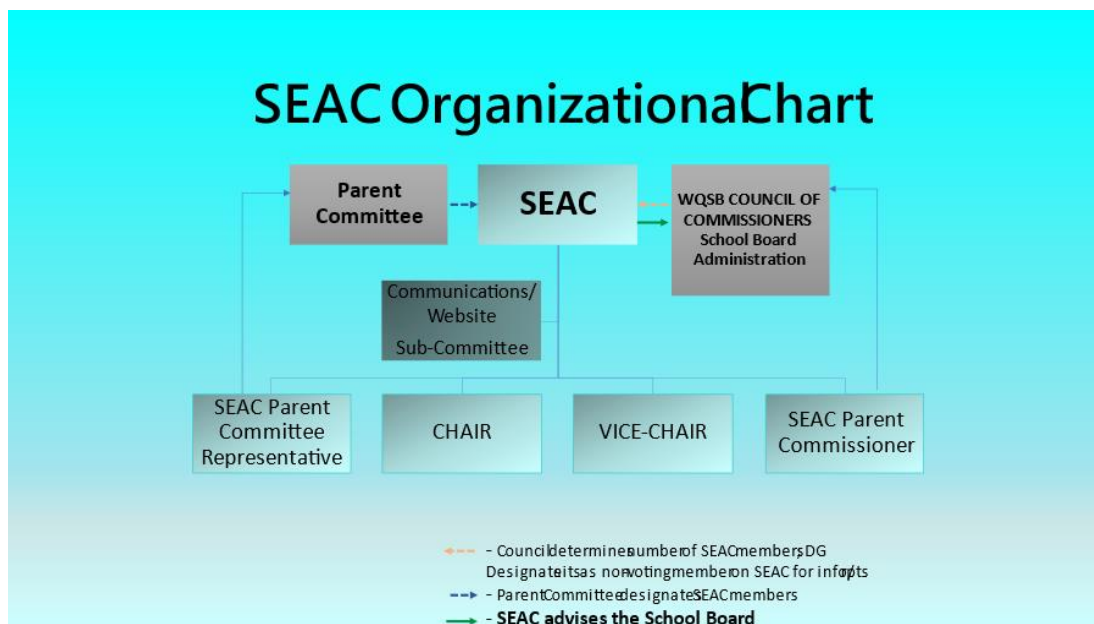
**Carried**

## 5. Orientation to SEAC's Mandate and Fundamental Governance Principles

Jessica Fortier outlined the mandate of the Special Education Advisory Committee as defined in the Education Act (s. 187)

*187. The functions of the advisory committee on services for handicapped students and students with social maladjustments or learning disabilities are (1) to advise the school board on a policy for the organization of educational services to handicapped students and students with social maladjustments or learning disabilities;(2) to advise the resource allocation committee and the school board on the allocation of financial resources to the services intended for those students. The committee may also advise the school board on the implementation of an individualized education plan for a handicapped student or a student with social maladjustments or learning disabilities.*

An organizational chart created by the previous Communications subcommittee was shared with members. Letitia Taylor explained the organizational chart and referenced a document she submitted to introduce and explain the Organizational chart (see Annex A). Robert's Rules are not strictly applied, however have provided some flexible structure.



## 6. Orientation to SEAC's Structure and Website

Letitia Taylor referenced the designation process and other SNAC (Special Needs Advisory Committees – other English school boards) processes for designation. Parent Committee designates, as per the Education Act. Other school boards have process whereby members are elected at an initial meeting of SNAC, then sent to Parent Committee for designation.

SEAC developed sub-committees and adhoc committees. Annex A provides background info, submitted by Letitia Taylor.

Letitia created another document regarding the website which can be forwarded to members.

## **7. Report from the Chair/EHDAA Parent Commissioner**

Reports read by Letitia Taylor.

### SEAC CHAIR REPORT

*As SEAC begins this year, it has experienced a great deal of growth and development and has faced significant challenges. Now is a time of locating strength and courage to use your collective voice, of casting and taking hold of a vision for a SEAC that is continuing to define its leadership role and occupying its lane as it moves to do more and better work into the future. I will coordinate with the new Chairperson in order to send out a summary of the feedback submitted from last year's SEAC to provide some perspective on trends and concerns. Some of the highlights include that SEAC needed to have a more focused and helpful orientation plan for new members other than just assigning reading from the Handbook or sitting through long PPT presentations with little time for Q&A. Therefore, the documents created for this meeting can be expanded upon and put together into a folder or document to make a formal orientation kit. Also, it was emphasized that meetings should have more modest agendas and not go overtime; this has been a challenge for many years. We've asked for input on setting the meeting day and time this year to hopefully fit in better with people's rhythms. Most importantly, it was clear from the comments in the survey and from my conversations with members who have chosen not to return, that in order to overcome external and internal challenges, SEAC members need to be in solidarity with one another and show up in meetings focused on how to improve the educational environment and experiences of all students with special needs. Two years ago, I shared with the SEAC table something I had heard in conversation with a SNAC Chairperson in another school board. She said that the WQSB SEAC had the reputation among other SEAC/SNAC groups in the province of doing nothing with any visibility or impact beyond its own table. She said they had heard that we held the minimum number of meetings required by the Education Act and it seemed like that was really all we accomplished. She wondered why that was. This happened to coincide with that question starting to be posed by our own SEAC members themselves at the time, and so, happily things began to change about 2 years ago. SEAC has begun to build up its internal policy foundation and structures, and more importantly has found ways to communicate beyond its table with stakeholders and other SEAC/SNAC groups that have wisdom and experience that they can share with us. We have held 2 parent/caregiver events, we created an informational postcard campaign to increase the profile of SEAC, and most significantly, we've created a website that is having a positive impact on viewers through the resources, FAQs and new Blog put up on the site. As of today, there have been 2,424 visits to the site since it launched in September last year, with 572 of those in the last 30 days. There are also emails asking about how to become involved in SEAC that are starting to come in this year. Just one measure of our success is that this year there were an unprecedented 37 applications to serve on SEAC, which was challenging for the Parent Committee to comb through, but what a terrific problem to have! I am most proud of the fact that under the IEP tab on the website you can find the most comprehensive set of information and tools ever made available to parents and caregivers within the WQSB in one place. And there is more to do. More resources to share, more events to plan,*

*more outreach to do (for instance to parents in region 8 of the WQSB who unfortunately did not get postcards early and are not represented on SEAC this year); there's the initiative of offering more formal advice to the school board about solutions to problems like bullying and violence related to students with special needs, behavioural management, transitions between schools, and something that SEAC has advocated for so far unsuccessfully over the years, which is more focused and improved training for staff who interact with and speak into the lives of our students. There are 16 parents and 4 Board employees, as well as the Director of Complementary Services around the table contributing to the ideas and initiatives that SEAC wishes to accomplish this year. There is so much potential to do meaningful and impactful things in service to students with special needs and their families. As my official membership in SEAC comes to an end, I will reiterate something I said to the SEAC table at the beginning of last school year: My earnest and sincere ambition has been to leave behind a lasting legacy of a SEAC that recognizes its own worth and dignity and power as an advocate for students with special education needs and their families. Also, as the WQSB strives to fulfill its mission to instruct, socialize and qualify students, I have tried to convince the Board level Administration of the significant value added of partnering with SEAC as an institution within the system of education. With so many talented and experienced members, SEAC has much to offer by carrying out its mandate of giving sound and informed advice to the school board that supports special needs students in realizing their full potential. It all rests on the investments we choose to make in building a collaborative, productive and mutually respectful relationship between SEAC and the WQSB Administration. I say we, because I will carry the mission and vision of SEAC with me to every table at which I sit within this school board and beyond, and I will speak of its valuable contributions to the school system every chance I have. Now then, as this year's SEAC takes off with the baton you've been passed, I urge you to run the race set before you in earnest, with discipline, courage and endurance. There are many outside this table who are rooting for you; and our students are counting on you to never give up!*

*Respectfully submitted, Letitia Taylor SEAC*

## PARENT COMMISSIONER REPORT

*The Council of Commissioners met for the first time this school year in September; its next meeting will be next Tuesday, Oct. 25th. I will serve as Parent Commissioner until November, when the person you elect tonight will be sworn in. At the September Council meeting, there was one issue of particular note on the agenda related to SEAC. Although over the last two years, I was not the only Commissioner with a student who had an IEP, I am the only one who has put forward issues of inclusion related to special needs students. I put forward a follow up resolution last month asking for a report of the statistics that had been gathered concerning students with special needs who were affected by bullying and violence; I expected it to be shared by the Administration publicly and with SEAC, so that next steps could be taken toward coming up with focused solutions reflecting best practices. SEAC is well-placed to work in collaboration with the Administration to highlight and spread those ideas across the school system. This issue was raised at the Council table for the first time two years ago. I put forward a resolution at that time asking for the Board Administration to require schools to start counting and coding bullying reports in a way that specific information about such incidents involving students with IEPs could be captured, and then report back to Council so that information could be shared with SEAC. I was told at the time that a resolution wasn't necessary, and that the Administration would follow through on this, so I withdrew it. The Administration has indeed asked schools to enter this information into the data base and last year was the first year that was collected. Therefore, at the end of last year, SEAC asked the Director Complementary Services to provide a report, but she felt unable to do so before the start of this year. In September, I asked for a report*

*to be given to Council in its public meeting and was told it would be put on the agenda of the closed-door caucus meeting before the public meeting. I was not told that a report would be provided, and it was not. So, I put forward another resolution, which was met with a great deal of resistance, despite the promise made two years ago when I withdrew the first resolution. Moreover, the Chair of Council directed questions at me like, what are you going to do with this information, and seemed to imply that there was no obligation to answer my request for information if there was no record of SEAC making the request first. Remember, that specific ask from SEAC was a part of the resolution I was persuaded to withdraw two years ago. In any event, as was affirmed by one of my colleagues on Council, any Commissioner can ask the Administration for information, and it should be provided. In the end, this resolution was tabled until the October meeting next Tuesday. I will be pleased to welcome the person you elect this evening to Council. I trust you will choose someone with integrity, perseverance, and a clear vision of the needs of students with exceptionalities, so that there will be more than one voice advocating for transparency, accountability and a spirit of cooperation. Respectfully submitted, Letitia Taylor*

## **8. SEAC Member Terms**

See Annex B for SEAC Member Term document provided by Letitia Taylor, which was presented to SEAC.

Lisa Falasconi noted that upon review of the Education Act, it is defined that the Parent Committee is responsible for the designation process of SEAC parent members, which would also include the length of term. Once SEAC is formed, then SEAC defines the internal rules of procedure. Lisa suggested that a recommendation be shared with Parent Committee.

### **22/23-03 Parent Member Terms**

IT WAS MOVED by Jessica Fortier, seconded by Sharon Pinkston that SEAC parent members hold half (8 members) at 2 year terms, and half (8 members) at 1 year terms.

**Carried**

Letitia suggested process whereby half of members volunteer for 1 year member terms, then, should half of the members volunteer, the remaining members would hold 2 year member terms.

The parent members proceeded to volunteer for 1 year terms. The following volunteers for 1 year terms were provided, resulting in the remaining members with 2 year terms.

1 year term	2 year term
Karenne Lachapelle	Jennifer Brownrigg
Dana Scott	Jessica Fortier
Paul Dostaler	Jennifer Idone

Sharon Pinkston	Kim Kourtsidis
Megan Feltham	Roman Laroche
Carolyn Hayes	Trina Lasch
Sarah McGough	Michaela Montour
Jenna Jenkins	Stephanie Michaud (not present)

## 9. Meeting Dates/Time

Prior to the meeting a poll was sent to members, which was reviewed again and each member was asked to choose a Monday per month and a time period for 22-23 meetings.

Jessica shared the live results, which with a majority of votes will be the proposed dates for 22-23 meetings:

- Meetings will be held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of each month.
- Meetings will be held from 6:30pm-8:30pm.
- Should the Monday be a holiday or for another exceptional reason, the meeting will be moved to another day of the same week.
- A list of the proposed dates will be provided for next meeting minutes.

## 10. Elections

Election process was facilitated by Letitia Taylor. 365 Microsoft Form was used to tally votes. Andrea Gage and Kathlene Vibert were scrutineers of the voting process, as they do not hold a voting eligibility in some of the election process. No objections were raised by members.

### a) Chair (1-year mandate)

- Nominations:
  - Sharon Pinkston nominated Jessica Fortier, Jessica declined nomination
  - Roman Laroche nominated himself
- **Elected by acclamation: Roman Laroche**

### b) Vice-Chair (1-year mandate)

- Nominations:
  - Jessica Fortier nominated herself
  - Jenna Jenkins nominated herself
- Ballots counted via e-vote (Forms)
- **Elected by majority: Jessica Fortier**

### c) Secretary (1 year term)

- Jennifer Brownrigg nominated herself
- **Elected by acclamation: Jennifer Brownrigg**

### d) Parent Committee Representative (1-year mandate)

- Nominations:
    - Michaela Montour nominated herself
  - **Elected by acclamation: Michaela Montour**
- e) EHDAA Parent Commissioner (2-year term)
- Nominations:
    - Jessica Fortier nominated herself
  - **Elected by acclamation: Jessica Fortier**

**Roman Laroche continued the meeting in role of Chair from this point forward in the meeting.**

**22/23-04 Meeting Extension at 8:30pm**

IT WAS MOVED by Jessica Fortier, seconded by Sharon Pinkston that the meeting be extended by 30 minutes, till 9:00pm maximum.

**Carried**

**11. Q & A**

Members were provided time to ask questions.

Discussion included:

- Subcommittee member lists
- Platform for meetings

**12. Adjournment**

**22/23-05 Motion to Adjourn**

IT WAS MOVED by Darlene Doucet, seconded by Andrea Gage that the meeting be adjourned at 8:45pm.

**Carried**

**Annex A**

Introduction to SEAC – Org Chart: Things to notice and to keep in mind The provincial government deliberately and intentionally created the parent-led governance structure of SEAC separately and at arm's length (in terms of accountability) from the school board. The parents form the majority of SEAC's voting membership (16 parents and 4 Board employees on SEAC this year); only parents can hold official positions on SEAC; quorum is dependant on attendance of parents; and the Director General (DG)

or his designate is a non-voting member of SEAC. The links to the school board are specified and few, and the lines of accountability flow for the most part from the school board to SEAC. That is to say, we do not report or answer to the school board on substantive matters, rather we advise the school board on them. Case in point, the legislature has mandated that we be informed yearly on things like the state of finances related to special education, so that we can make informed recommendations for resource allocation, for example. The lines are dotted as they flow from the school board and the Parents Committee, indicating that they have limited input to SEAC. The Board has power, influence and input to SEAC by way of their employees on the Committee, i.e., the principal, teacher, support staff member, and Complementary Services Department professional, who sit and vote on SEAC; we benefit greatly from their first-hand experience with our special needs students. Also, the DG designate provides valuable information and insights to SEAC deliberations but does not have a vote. The line from SEAC to the Board is solid because we have a specific, ongoing role to advise the WQSB; we also have a representative (SEAC Parent Commissioner) to the Council of Commissioners and (SEAC PC Rep) to the Parent Committee. The lines from those roles are solid because we have actual influence and power (a voice and voting rights) on the Council and the Parents Committee. As a Parent Commissioner, the SEAC representative is considered a full member of Council with all the rights and responsibilities of every other Commissioner. There are a few distinctives about SEAC: Unlike on Parent Committee, not all schools are represented on SEAC. It is good when there is significant representation from rural and middle/high schools in a given year, because that does not always happen. Another difference between the PC and SEAC is that not all of our members necessarily sit on a Governing Board (GB). For those of you who do, you are encouraged to ask the GB Chairperson or principal for a place on every GB agenda to report back to your child's school about the happenings at SEAC. For those of you who aren't already on the school GB, you can ask to be included at their meetings as a guest/observer and to also have a space for giving feedback to the school about SEAC. Everyone is encouraged to communicate about SEAC with their H&S, other parent groups or social media sites related to your child's school. Hopefully, the above helps to orient everyone a bit more. Don't be shy to ask questions.

Submitted by Letitia Taylor

## Annex B

### SEAC MEMBERSHIP TERMS

Last year, SEAC decided to transition parent membership terms from one-year to two-years. Regrettably, this was not accurately reflected in the information that the Administration sent to prospective SEAC candidates this year. Although the Board employee categories have remained fairly stable across the years, the largest category of members is that of parents of students with special needs, and that means that there may be significant turn over in overall SEAC membership in any given year. This creates a challenge in terms of solidifying and building up the institutional knowledge, memory, and experience of SEAC parent members, which given the complexity of the subject matter takes time to acquire. Other SEAC/SNACs in Québec have adopted longer terms in order to increase continuity and avoid having to start from scratch in terms of member orientation for the majority of the group each year. The Director of Complementary Services is also in favor of two-year SEAC membership terms. It was recognized that Terms of parent members should be settled before officers are elected. It was initially proposed that SEAC transition to two-year staggered terms for parent



members starting with the 2022-23 school year. After completing this sort of transition, it would result in only half of the parent members being up for re-election each year; everyone, after this year, would serve a two-year term. However, it was decided to leave the decision about staggering terms and how to do that for the first meeting of the year. Therefore, at this meeting, SEAC parent members must first decide if they wish to institute a staggered term system. If so, then they must decide how. It was suggested last year that there may just be natural preferences expressed that would lead to 8 parents choosing to take one-year terms and leaving the rest to take on two-year terms. Some things to consider when reflecting on this are: a. Parents who have students with just one year of schooling left in the WQSB should be assigned to one-year terms, in anticipation of the position being vacant after one year. b. Parents who are brand new to SEAC may wish to volunteer for a one-year term if they want to test and see if the experience suits them. If this process of volunteering for a one-year term is not definitive, then for the remainder of the slots, a process of random selection would be employed.

Submitted by Letitia Taylor