

Special Education Advisory Committee

Have you ever wished you could be at the table when important decisions are being made about special education? Have you wished you could be part of discussions about funding priorities and how staff and resources are prioritized? You can! The Ministry of Education mandates a role for parents in these decisions by being a member of the SEAC.

Being a SEAC representative is an exciting opportunity to help the education and growth of students with special education needs in the Kingston area. SEAC stands for Special Education Advisory Committee. The committee is made up of trustees, teacher representatives and parent representatives of parent associations such as Down syndrome, Easter Seals, Autism Ontario and Community Living Kingston and District (CLKD). Each of the local school boards has a separate representative from Community Living Kingston and District. Ellen Tseng-Farr ellentsengfarr@gmail.com currently represents Community Living Kingston and District for the Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board (ALCDSB). An alternate representative is needed for ALCDSB. Erin Sheldon sheldon.erin@gmail.com represents Community Living Kingston and District for the Limestone District School Board. The alternate representative for the LDSB is Kristen French.

You don't have to be a member of SEAC to attend meetings. All SEAC representatives are supposed to have alternates; alternates can attend meetings along with the regular representatives. If there is already a CLKD SEAC representative in your board, there is still an opportunity to sit on SEAC representing another parent association, such as the Down syndrome Society, Autism Ontario, or Integration Action for Inclusion.

SEAC provides input and advice on special education issues to local school boards. Advocating for our children's needs in an evolving education system is extremely important. As parents we are the experts for our children and what better voice then to speak on behalf of all the students with special needs. Some of the issues addressed at SEAC are related to important programs such as Best Buddies, summer school support, accessibility issues within our schools and transition planning. Community Living SEAC representatives help advocate for effective inclusive classroom practices.

Parents have many reasons for joining SEAC. We work closely with the special education decision makers in our school board. We can help other families with children with disabilities in our school district. We can share our valuable experience and knowledge, become more educated about special needs education, and provide input into the decision making process of special education. We can provide a communication link with the community and advocate for educational programs for all students.

SEAC has a mandate from the Ministry of Education to review and provide input on the annual Special Education Plan, special education budget, and the Accessibility Plan. As members of SEAC, we meet and learn from experts on issues such as transition planning and we can share our ideas in return. Board staff conduct presentations on related issues such as mental health and compassion fatigue. Students do presentations at SEAC so we can see firsthand the impact of the wonderful programs in our

schools. We are involved in annual reviews on how our school boards are doing in regards to special education achievement and quality of IEPs in comparison to the rest of the province. We can write letters to the Ministry of Education to advocate for the needs of our students. We review the board improvement plans for student achievement each year.

There are many more aspects of SEAC to share however the efforts of our board to help improve our children's lives is foremost at the SEAC table. The meetings for the Algonquin and Lakeshore Board are in Napanee once a month on Monday evenings during the school year. In the Algonquin and Lakeshore board, travel costs are covered and a meal is provided prior to the meeting. The Limestone Board meets once per month on a Wednesday evening. Most meetings last just a few hours. If you have an interest in representing CLK at SEAC for either board in our district please contact Danielle Carnegie email danielle.carnegie@clkingston.ca or phone 613 546 6613 ext. 225.