

Equal Education Association of Nova Scotia

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 8, 2008

Dear EEANS Member:

2007: A YEAR OF PROGRESS AND FRUSTRATION

The most significant event of 2007 was the Minister's Review of Services for Students with Special Needs and its report. When first announced, EEANS and its members were very hopeful that finally there would be a form by which they could convey their frustrations and stories, and that by doing so, would convince government that immediate steps were needed to provide LD children both in public and private school the required supports they need.

Many of you took the time to appear before the panel and made your voice known. EEANS would like to thank you for sharing your personal experiences.

If you would like to view the report and Ministers response go to:

<http://ministersreview.ednet.ns.ca/>

EEANS' response to *The Minister's Review of Services for Students with Special Needs Report.*

In early 2007, Minister of Education Karen Casey named a three-person committee to conduct a review of services for students with special needs. In July 2007, the committee presented its report to the Minister and in late December 2007, the Minister and her department responded to the review's recommendations.

While we fully supported this initiative, our enthusiasm was somewhat tempered by the Minister's selection of appointees which, in our view, was not sufficiently broad to ensure a totally impartial report. Nonetheless some the recommendations that were presented are positive and merit our support. As for the others, EEANS will continue to make representation on behalf of special needs students before the Minister and the Province. Hopefully we can effect more positive changes to the recommendations outlined in the review.

The Department of Education persists in its commitment to an all-inclusive education system despite opposition from advocate groups. It supports the concept of universality of special services in lieu of the limited access to designated special schools by students from other regions. Consequently the minister supports the abolition of the tuition support program by June 2010 in favor of allocating those funds to school boards to assist in their efforts to offer enhanced services to students with learning disabilities.

We know first hand that certain students can not learn in a curriculum driven public system and that it would not necessarily be in their best interest to be assimilated back into public schools. At this time the tuition support program uses the per-pupil allocation formula to fund special needs students outside of the public schools. The funds themselves are redirected from school boards where the students would have registered. They are generally cost-neutral, do not affect budgets and create no hardships to the school boards involved. In fact, the Department of Education saves money in that it does not have to allocate additional money for resource teachers and specialists. We believe that the arguments put forth in the Minister's response are without base and we will continue to push for tuition support for as long as a student requires it.

We fully support the Department's appointment of a Learning Disabilities Consultant and the implementation of a provincial Learning Disabilities Strategy. We believe that this is a step forward in ensuring that special needs students and their families are heard and that their concerns are being considered in the future plans of the Department. However it is imperative that the incumbent to this position be able to operate independently and without restraint in order to ensure complete impartiality. EEANS will be monitoring the situation closely. It is hoped that we can build a good working relationship with this person.

We encourage all members to read both the Review Committees findings as well as the response from the Department of Education. They can be viewed on the Department's web site. We also urge you to contact your MLA as well as Minister Casey with your thoughts and concerns on the issue. The more vocal we are, the better our chances of being heard.

EEANS 2008 FOCUS

Our focus will not change very much from our 2007 focus. The three biggest things on last years list continue to need our energy and attention.

EXPAND THE TUITION SUPPORT PROGRAM

We will continue to put pressure on the government to expand the Tuition Support Program beyond their arbitrary 3-year limit. We will do this by talking with the press to make sure they are properly informed about all areas of the program. We will continue to make sure that the public understands two points. First, that the TSP does not cost the taxpayer anything. Second, that the TSP is helping kids right now and that these kids are thieving at a their private special education setting.

MAKE THE TSP PROCESS FAIR

We will continue to put pressure on the government to amend the discretionary nature of the TSP application process and the TSP requirements. *Note: We are investigating whether the*

process itself is discriminatory in nature, as other children with non-LD needs (such as children seeking the IB program) do not have the same burden or proof of need (i.e. paperwork and interviews etc.) put upon them. We want the department to make the TSP process a more fair, transparent, and generally, less of a burden on parents and their LD children.

REFORM IPP TO MAKE IT CONSISTENT ACROSS NOVA SCOTIA

We will continue to push for a more consistent IPP process across the province. This will mean that the department will need to issue clearer guidelines on the implementation of IPP as well as monitor, in a much better way, how their school boards are following IPP policy.

EEANS IS POLITICALLY BI-PARTISAN .

EEANS has been working with all three political parties in Nova Scotia and will continue to work with all three parties. We however, like to acknowledge Mr. Leo Glavine of the Liberal Party of Nova Scotia as well as Percy Paris and Bill Esterbrooks of the NDP for their enthusiastic support of EEANS initiatives.

EEANS ALL MEMBERS NIGHT MEETING

We will be announcing soon an all members discussion and general meeting to allow members to meet, ask questions and comments on how EEANS can better serve it's members.

EEANS NEEDS NEW MEMBERS

If you or your spouse are not yet a member and would like to join you can send a email to info@eeans.ca with the following information: Full name(s), address, phone number, email, number of children attending a special needs school, and school affiliation.

Also, please feel free to recommend membership in EEANS to other people. The more members. The bigger our voice.

Please note, you do not need to be a parent to join, we are open to every who wants to advocate for children with learning disabilities, there is no membership fee, and our membership list is held in strict confidence.

If you have questions or would like more information you can email the association at info@eeans.ca, or phone us at 462-0383.

Best Regards,

Wade Brummet, Chair
EQUAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION of NOVA SCOTIA