

Equal Education Association of Nova Scotia

NEWSLETTER

JUNE 1 2006

Hello Everyone:

Annual General Meeting

EEANS had its first annual general meeting on May 15th. It was a very busy meeting. The association mission statement and near term objectives were reviewed, a presentation on tuition support appeals was given, updates on EEANS activities discussed, the first members formally signed up, a executive nominated and elected, and lastly the members gave the new executive a list of objectives. As some parents noted they had trouble opening attachments, I've included a copy of the mission statement as distributed at the meeting:

About EEANS

The Equal Education Association of Nova Scotia (EEANS) is a non-profit association formed to advocate educational rights on behalf of all children with learning disabilities* (LD) in Nova Scotia. Our members are made up of parents of children with learning disabilities, medical, educational and legal professionals as well as concerned citizens.

Our Mission

Equal Education Association of Nova Scotia believes that children with learning disabilities deserve an education equal to children who do not have a learning disability. EEANS is dedicated to building a level playing field for children with learning disabilities to enable them to function as students with equal opportunities and to develop to their potential. EEANS believes that discrimination of in any form of LD children in the delivery of education funding and services should be abolished. EEANS believes education is not a "one size fits all" product, and there is a place for private schools in cases where the public system does not have the resources to meet the educational needs of LD children. EEANS believes that decisions regarding educational placement of students with learning disabilities must be based on the needs of each individual student rather than administrative convenience or budgetary considerations, and must be the result of a cooperative effort involving government, educators, parents, and the student, when appropriate.

*EEANS defines learning disability (LD) as those who have but not limited to: learning difficulties, autism, attention deficit disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Areas of Immediate Concern and Focus.

We are committed to making immediate changes to the present Tuition Support Program to make the program fair to all children with learning disabilities in the province.

1. Removal of the Tuition Support Program 2 Year Limit. The tuition support regulations need immediate amendment (in time for the 06-07 school year) to remove the 2-year limit on the program. Very few children with learning difficulties severe enough to warrant enrolment in a Special Education School can be expected to regain enough ground to return to public system in only 2 years. If these children with learning disabilities are forced to return to public school before they are ready, they will suffer significant setbacks, educational regression and emotional stress.
2. LD Funding Rights in Education Act. Ensure appropriate funding levels and programs for children with learning disabilities becomes a right by legislating it into the Education Act. Previous programs have come and gone due to revision of the Governor in Council Regulations. Once part of the education act, tuition support cannot be withdrawn at the discretion of the Department of Education or School Board.
3. EEANS Participation in Revision to the Governor In Council Regulations. Parent representation at the regulation table is critical to ensure our children's needs are met. Current regulations place too much emphasis on the presence of an individual program plan, versus psychoanalysis recommendation. The requirement for a letter of justification appears to be a test of parents writing skills versus providing a useful qualification tool. Last but not least, the exclusion of students not enrolled in the Nova Scotia public system is discriminatory to children arriving from out of province and those already in private school.
4. LD Funding Accuracy & Accountability. To require the government to produce a survey or census of the incidence of children with LD educational needs in Nova Scotia. The government can't make proper budget or fiscal decisions if they don't clearly understand the scope and nature of the issue.
5. Early Intervention / Timely Assessments. The Minister of Education should direct school boards to implement policies and practices to ensure early identification of, and intervention with, students who have special educational needs. Even without formal assessment, schools can recognize students who are experiencing learning difficulties. Intervention programs provided early in the primary grades may foster student success by helping students to become effective learners before learning difficulties result in student failure /retention and low self-esteem.

Additional tasks assigned to the executive by the general members:

- *Further discussion for the need of a membership coordinator - to be looked at by the Board
- *Have an electronic membership application available as soon as possible
- *Internal survey to be undertaken to understand the range of learning difficulties within the membership
- *Memberships - over 18 full voting privileges, under 18 non-voting privileges - voted and passed
- *A questionnaire will be drawn up and given to the membership to be used when talking to election candidates

The New EEANS Executive

Since the AGM, the executive met on the 22nd of May to nominate and confirm key positions:

Chair - Wade Brummet

Vice Chair - Brian Hickling

Secretary / Treasurer - Judy LeBlanc

Directors - Kevin Burrell, Yvon Dufour, Norma Woodworth, Sherry Beck-Ramey

Additionally one director position remains reserved for a parent from Church Hill Academy.

EEANS is making progress.

On May 24th, the conservative party released a statement regarding tuition support. EEANS has been very vocal with local politicians since January on this issue and that work has garnered some attention:

"Starting in the fall of 2006, extend the province's Tuition Support Program to three years, until greater consultation can be completed with parents, students educators, administrators and medical professionals on a new provincial policy for students with special needs"

On May 25th EEANS executives were invited to meet with Mr. Dennis Cochrane, Deputy Minister of the Department of Education to discuss our role. The meeting was informative, but most importantly signifies that EEANS has raised awareness of the issues surrounding tuition support.

Moving forward, EEANS continues to press for a meeting with the Premier, although we do not expect to be able to meet with him until after the election. As a result it is important for EEANS members and concerned parents to question provincial candidates in their area, to ensure they are aware of our concerns. To assist parents, EEANS is preparing a reference that voters can use to question candidates in their area. This may be particularly useful as candidates make their door to door rounds. What has become apparent over the last few months is changes to the tuition support program will only come through political pressure. The current election presents a unique opportunity, but we need your support as EEANS members.

EEANS website almost complete.

A website is presently in development and should be completed by mid June. This website will have general information about our association, as well as be a resource for news and events.

The website will be www.eeans.ca

The more members the better.

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