



Equal Education Association of Nova Scotia

NEWSLETTER

October, 2006

Hello EEANS member:

2006 has been a successful year for EEANS.

In April 2006, we hit the ground running with media attention surrounding one of our most urgent of issues - the Tuition Support Program. As a result of this attention, and of voicing our concerns to MLA's and political parties, the Tuition Support Program was temporarily extended to a third year. This was done as part of the Conservative Party's education platform and was implemented upon their winning the election.

In May 2006 we held our first AGM and appointed our executive board. During this meeting the membership agreed to our short-term objectives of extending the Tuition Support program beyond two years.

In June members of the executive were invited to attend a meeting with the Deputy Minister Denis Cochrane and others from the Department of Education. At this meeting the deputy outlined the terms of the third –year extension as well as outline a consultation process. We are waiting for a follow up meeting.

In August, we developed and posted a modest website to inform people about the issues as well as to give parents strategies on how they can advocate for their child. Please check it out at (www.eeans.ca).

In September, EEANS was invited to talk on CBC Information Morning. It was a great opportunity to clear up some of the misconceptions the general public has regarding Special Education funding and the Tuition Support Program.

In October, we mailed every MLA a letter informing them of our concerns regarding the Tuition Support Program and asking for their support.

What EEANS will be focusing on for the 2006-07 school year?

EEANS will be lobbying the government and Department of Education to have an EEANS representative at table during talks regarding any reform or modification to the Tuition Support

Program. We are also encouraging the department to include educators, professionals, academics and others who have a stake in this program.

We hope the government will convene these meetings in a timely manner as the extension is presently only for the 2006-07 school year and time is ticking.

TSP Third-year extension is temporary.

The government extension of a third year only applies to this year (2006-07) and does not in any way mean that the program will be kept at three years in the future. The legislation as it is presently written, only allows for one year with a second year extension at the discretion of the department of education. Until the legislation is re-written, our children will be vulnerable to the whims of the Department of Education and their application reviewers.

No time limit on this crucial program.

EEANS fundamentally disagrees with any time limit on funding for children with LD's. We are of the opinion that any child who is at the point of needing to leave the public school system to receive the appropriate education and setting, should not be forced back to the public system by virtue cutting off their funding unit. Some kids will need it for a couple years, others will need it longer.

The department of education has stated on many occasions that they believe 2 years is adequate. EEANS believes that what's best for the child should be the only deciding factor to their return to public school. This funding unit is theirs and they are entitled to it for as long as they need it.

The application process needs to be streamlined and made fair.

EEANS is concerned with another aspect of the Tuition Support Program, which is the onerous application process. We feel that some of application requirements are discriminatory and in many cases, require documents that are out of the control of parents to provide.

Here are some of our areas of concerns:

1. Requirement of an IPP. We feel that having an IPP in an application should be a supporting document to prove need not a mandatory document as it is now. An IPP is given at the discretion of a school or board of education. Thus, IPP's are in the full control of the Department of Education and their boards of education not parents. We have heard many cases where parents have had IPP's refused for their children by the school or board of education staff even though the child is in crisis. They had no other course but to enroll them in a Special Education School. They were subsequently turned down for Tuition Support because they did not have an IPP.
2. The requirement of an explanatory cover letter explaining why you want this support for your child. The reality is this is the child's application. The cover letter should come from them, and since many of them would find it very difficult to write such a letter, the requirement is discriminatory. No other government benefit requires a letter explaining why the applicant is seeking the benefit. EEANS feels that the undue burden of the bureaucratic red tape built into the present application process needs to be over hauled immediately. As mentioned above, we are

presently looking into whether any other benefit programs to non-LD students in Nova Scotia require the same amount of red tape to see if this process is discriminatory to children with LD.

3. The requirement of attendance in a Nova Scotia public school. Nova Scotia is a great province and place to live. The government has programs in place to influence both businesses and people to come to this province. You've probably seen the "Come to Life" television commercials now running on air. There is presently a requirement in the legislation that stipulates "the child must have attended a Nova Scotia public school for one year". This requirement has the effect of reducing eligibility to receive this benefit merely on the basis of where the child attended school. We have heard of more than one case where people moving in from another Canadian province, who enrolled their children in a Special Education School, were then denied funding because of this clause. EEANS is seeking to have this clause removed from the legislation on the grounds that it contravenes the freedom of mobility section (6.3) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

What you can I do to help?

One of the things every concerned person can do is to call your MLA. Tell them of your concerns regarding the present Tuition Support Program. Tell them your story. Relay to them, EEANS issues with the program and solicit their support in government. Direct them to www.eeans.ca to find out more about the issues.

The more members, the bigger voice.

We are always looking to add names to our membership. Membership is free, and open to all including grandparents, friends, professionals etc.

Thank you for your support in joining EEANS and for helping to make Nova Scotia a great place for our children to learn and grow. 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