



Good News Release

Special education at RCCDSB is geared to student success

Students with special education needs at Renfrew County Catholic District School Board are reaping the benefits of the Board's longstanding commitment to ensure that they have the resources and support necessary to achieve their personal best.

With the help of a Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), made up of trustees and community representatives, the Board has established programs that ensure equitable access for these students, as well as a nurturing and safe environment to close gaps in learning and provide opportunities to achieve success.

Members of the 2014–2015 SEAC committee include Board Trustee Anne Haley in the position of Committee Chair, Joan Daley (Member at Large), Derrick Nearing (Autism), Jeanne Charette of Autism Ontario, Kathy O'Connor of VOICE for Hearing Impaired Children, Colleen Whittier of Easter Seals, and Mark Searson, the RCCDSB's Superintendent of Educational Services.

The winter issue of our *Notebook* newsletter describes the Board's Special Education programming for every student in the Board who is identified as exceptional, or who receives special education programs or services. Each of these students' program needs are addressed through an Individual Education Plan (IEP). That plan is based on consultations between the student, parents, school staff and outside agencies or consultants. Each plan is tailored to the student's strengths and needs, and is carefully monitored to ensure that the student's goals are being met.

"We have a wonderful team at RCCDSB that works in collaboration with experts in partner agencies to provide the best and most innovative programs to our students with Special Education needs with inspiring results," says Director of Education Michele Arbour.

Two Special Education Coordinators (SECs) oversee the Special Education program and provide liaison with principals and teachers, as well as with agency representatives. As well, there are Special Education Resource Teachers who help to develop students' individual education plans, with classroom teachers and educational assistants. Other members of the team may include social workers, paraprofessional resource staff, and a speech and language pathologist.

Assistive technology is an important aspect of the Special Education program. The Special Education Coordinators work with school staff to evaluate students' needs for assistive technology and identify the most suitable equipment. The Board also has 15 in-house Assistive Technology Trainers—special education resource teachers and educational assistants who have volunteered for special training—to help train teachers and students in use of the assistive technology and equipment. Parents can also attend these training sessions in the use of equipment that might range from iPads, to tablets or laptop computers.

The Board also has established sensory rooms, or Snoezelen rooms, in many of our schools to provide students who have special needs with an opportunity for relaxation, exploration and stimulation in a multisensory environment. The rooms offer soothing music, gently changing patterns of light, pleasant scents, unique items to investigate and comfortable furniture.

“Our goal is to create safe, engaging learning environments and to provide support to meet the diverse learning needs of each student,” says Board Chair Bob Michaud. “The success of our Special Education program is reflected in student achievements. And the 2013–2014 EQAO assessments showed that RCCDSB students with special needs exceeded the provincial average in every one of nine subgroups to earn an overall excellent standing.”

The Board is planning a full-day SEAC symposium on April 25 that will be geared to parents of children who have special needs. The event, to be held at St. Joseph’s High School in Renfrew, is open to all parents and will include supervised children’s activities. The symposium is supported by a Parents Reaching Out grant from the Ministry of Education.

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For further information, please contact:
Michele Arbour, Director of Education
Renfrew County Catholic District School Board
499 Pembroke Street West
Pembroke, ON K8A 5P1
Phone: 613-735-1031 or 1-800-267-0191