



English Parents' Committee Association

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SURVEY RESULTS
Parents with Special Needs Children



Katherine Korakakis is the President of the English Parents Committee Association (EPCA). In addition to this vital role in the Quebec educational sector, Katherine has spent most of her life working alongside start-ups in various verticals. For 10 years, she was responsible for the development of entrepreneurial initiatives and projects under the Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge, a Youth Secretariat program of the government of Quebec. Katherine is Head of Entrepreneurship at ProMontreal Entrepreneurs (PME), an early stage VC fund that has been around for 20 yrs, and is currently the vice-president of PME MTL Centre-Ouest and on the investment committees of PME MTL Centre and PME MTL Centre-Ouest. Katherine has also authored and co-authored guidebooks on entrepreneurship education and has served on the Boards of numerous corporations.

President's message

Supporting all students!

This edition of our newsletter looks in detail about students with special needs, a very personal subject for me and many others. These are children who are the most vulnerable in our schools and neighborhoods, and they unfortunately still do not receive the services and attention they deserve. The *Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur* (MEES) did put some much-needed focus on this issue in the last month, with a quick-turnaround consultation on revamping special-needs services. EPCA sought feedback from English-language special needs parents through a dedicated survey, and the results – which you can read about later on in this newsletter – were striking. Parents demand a rethink, as far too often they are forced to endure a long and painful process to get support for their children. It is time for wholesale change in how Quebec funds special-needs services and decides how those services are distributed. We look forward to strong action in this file.

Beyond special needs, we were very pleased to be included as part of MEES's *Rendez-vous pour la réussite éducative*, charting a new course for public education in a post pandemic world. We launched a consultation process with our member parent committees, soliciting feedback on what has worked and what hasn't in 2020–2021, and how we can learn from the experience to improve our schools in the long term. The parent perspective is an important one, and we are proud to share it with educational partners across the spectrum. You can consult our submission on the EPCA [website](#).

I know that the stress and frustration continues to mount among parents and children across our English-language school system. Our schools struggle with closures and quarantines due to COVID-19 and its new variants, and it wears heavily on our entire community. But we are resilient and will get through it together. Stay strong. The finish line for 2020–2021 is in sight.

From a parent advocating for a special needs child to EPCA President

I got involved with school governance because I found that children like my son tend to fall through through the cracks (regardless of private or public school systems).

I had to be an advocate for my son from the very beginning. When your child is young, you have an image of what life will be like as they grow up... what things were “supposed to be”. When they start to miss milestones and then eventually get assessed and diagnosed with a special need, you must accept and quickly adjust. And through all of that, you must start fighting. Fight for every specialist, every program every assessment and for every resource. Life quickly transitions to a series of battles to educate yourself, follow up, push for action, and find support and solutions.

When your child is young, you fight with the health and social services sector for services for your child. When they become school age, it is a natural progression that you then fight with schools and advocate on behalf of your child. For me, one of the major fights was for access to technology. My son’s difficulties with fine motor skills issues required him to have technology – but this required the specialist from his rehabilitation center to write a referral that technology was needed, sending the requirement documentation to the school and then waiting for the school to send it to the school board and then a wait for the requirement to be actioned in which I had to continue to push and fight. Over 18 months to get a laptop...

Because of the above, I started bringing everyone into the conversation to get results for my son. I also saw other parents of special needs children who did not know what to do and I tried to provide them with support and information on how to advocate for their children. This sense of helping people know what their rights were – and what the rights of their children were – pushed me to get even more involved with the school and ultimately with school governance.

Special needs parents are fighters from the start because they have to be advocates for their children from the get-go. As soon as you have a special needs child, you are supposed to be an expert in child development, gross-motor development, fine-motor development

...speech development, brain development. You are supposed to be a logistics expert, figuring out their schedule of appointments and moving them around the city in order to access all this stuff that is supposed to do something for them. It is exhausting work and it never ends. This is the life of a special needs parent.

It shouldn't be this hard, but it is. Not everyone has the time, the fight or even knows where to turn to get the right information to turn that into action.

My advice to parents is to reach out to other parents who are going through the same things. Talk to them, connect with them, and share with them. I highly recommend becoming involved with parent governance... I did, and I never looked back. I turned my fury into action and vowed to help others and I am extremely proud of what we have been able to accomplish in all levels of parent governance.



Conversations with a Parent

Debra Wright

Debra is 36 years old and is parent to three kids and two step-kids. Her 10-year-old is mild to moderate spectrum ASD and her 14-year-old has severe anxiety at times. Debra's youngest has been diagnosed for eight years and was originally non-verbal, but they were able to unlock that without therapy as soon as they had a diagnosis. Debra is currently in school full time studying Administrative Assistance at the Nova Career Center in Chateaugay.



What has your experience been like navigating the school and support systems with special needs children?

It has been generally positive, but it has been hard to get actual support. I did end up getting support from the school/school board, but that was because I did research on my own concerning how to navigate the system and the rights of the children. I did find trying to look for this information in the public domain to be extremely difficult.

What have you found hardest and most helpful?

Finding the information has been the hardest. Also, my daughter suspended from school in kindergarten (!) because there weren't resources available to support the child. However, I looked at this (and many other things over the years) as a teaching moment for me, the school, and the school board. In the end, this experience allowed me to help evolve the school's disciplinary policy to ensure it takes into consideration children with other needs.

What does it mean when your child is going onto a modified program?

A Modified Curriculum is used to address deficiencies in specific areas. Students are expected to work within their abilities, but the goal is for the child to attain the required goals by the end of high school. Modified Curricula may also include life and/or social skills.

What does it mean to have an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP)?

IEPs are for children with special needs and/or learning difficulties. They are opened at the school level and may be recommended by teachers; however, they can be difficult to get opened and so a parent may need to advocate for one on behalf of their child.

There are both Academic IEPs and Behavioural IEPs and the right one should be selected to ensure that the student is appropriately supported. Progress in IEPs is measured in SMART goals to get the student where they need to be, within the appropriate timeframe for the specific child. Some specific items that have been included in my child's IEP are noise

Conversations with a Parent

cont.

...reducing headphones; places to go when the child is feeling overwhelmed; and the ability to work at own pace and have breaks when necessary.

When someone reads an IEP, it should be clear to whom it belongs. If a parent reads their child's IEP and it doesn't sound like the child, it needs to be amended. Note that parents should be consulted in IEP development and should be in all meetings discussing IEPs and progress. Children should be in IEP meetings as is appropriate for their age/requirements.

A final point is this: The earlier you get an IEP, the better... and the earlier your child can advocate for themselves, the better.

What should other parents look out for?

I would suggest that parents keep the following in mind:

- Look out for resources – not only therapy, but support that other parents can provide.
- Learn and teach – take the opportunities to learn and give back when you can.
- Maintain a positive view that hard times/situations can be used as a teaching moment.
- Pay attention and listen to other parents that have had similar experiences.
- Know that there are resources out there – take advantage when you see them and don't be afraid to ask if you don't know what to do.
- Know your rights
 - Read laws and the Education Act,
 - Understand the situation that the child will be going into, and
 - Stand up for your rights, spread the word to other parents, be politically correct when you are doing so, and speak truth to power (i.e. new principal, etc.).
- For older children, help them become advocates for themselves.

Do you have any final Tips & Tricks?

- Biggest tip – build a foundation of support to both get support yourself and help to support others as well.
- Best support system includes the whole school team – parents, teachers, admins, and supports (and child) should be all working together on behalf of the child.
- Seek out others who have similar experiences to support your journey.
- Get to know who is on your school's Governing Board, the Parents' Committee representatives for your school board, and those on the Special Needs Advisory Committee for the school board – or join parent governance yourself!

EPCA PARTNER ACTIVITY

Going virtual with the EMSBPC's Parent Conference

This year's edition is open to all parents, right from your computer!

EPCA's members often put together compelling activities that are of interest not only to local parents, but also to the wider English-language parent community in Quebec. And with the pandemic, more of these events are turning virtual, opening the doors even wider to participation where geography no longer matters.

That's exactly the case with the Parents Committee of the English Montreal School Board (EMSBPC), which is hosting its fourth annual Parent Conference this Sunday, April 18. The topic couldn't be more pertinent. With children and teens facing so many issues and parents often struggling with how best to help their children, the EMSBPC has planned a series of workshops on a variety of issues pertaining to both your children and teens. This conference is entirely virtual, and you can register here: www.emsbparents.ca.

EPCA is proud to work in partnership with our member parents' committees, in bringing you excellent programming on topics of interest to you. Forget geography... if you are anywhere in Quebec, we encourage you to join the EMSBPC's virtual conference.

Register now!



Virtual PARENT Conference 2021

**Workshop
topics
will
include**

- Keynote by Dr. Earl Rubin: Resilience during the COVID Pandemic
- Setting Boundaries on screens with your children
- Building up children to help them bounce back from life's challenges
- Field Trips of the Future
- Assistive Technology tools for student writing support
- Discrimination, Inclusion & Equity
- Many Others!

**April 18th, 2021
9:00 to 16:00**

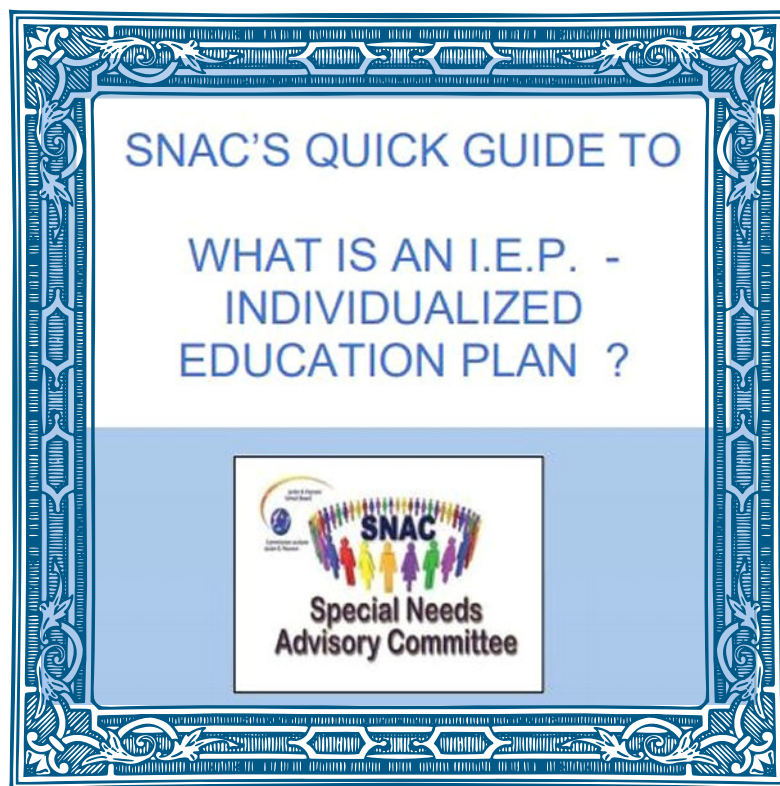
Register now!

 www.emsbparents.ca

 facebook.com/EMSBParents

★ Don't miss our early
bird promotion

LBPSB Quick Guide: What is an I.E.P?



What is the Lester B Pearson School Board (LBPSB) Special Needs Advisory Committee (SNAC)?

The Special Needs Advisory Committee of LBPSB is a very active committee that meets monthly and works in between meetings to develop tools or share information that will help parents of students with special needs on their journey through the education system.

According to the education act, section 185: "Every school board shall establish an advisory committee on services for handicapped students and students with social maladjustments or learning disabilities". At LBPSB we call this committee SNAC, although other school boards may have a different name for this committee (please look at your school board's website to inquire for your region so you may connect yourself with your local committee). The Special Needs Advisory Committees are composed mostly of parents of children with special needs but there are many other stakeholders who sit on the LBPSB SNAC (and those at other school boards), including teachers, principals, support staff, administrators, and representatives from the Council of Commissioners, Director General, and community agencies.

Years ago, we very proudly developed a complete I.E.P. Resource Kit in consultation with advisors, experts, and school stakeholders that sit on the SNAC. This is available both

Continued on next page

LBPSB Quick Guide: What is an I.E.P? cont.

...electronically and in hard copy, and we continue to send them out to our schools in the hopes that they will get into the hands of parents. If ever an LBPSB parent would like a copy, they can ask their school resource team or email us at snac@lbpearson.ca. Even parents who are not a part of the LBPSB school system can access the resources at: <http://snac.lbpsb.qc.ca/eng/IEP-Documents/page.asp>.

Last month we finalized our latest tool: *SNAC's Quick Guide to What is an I.E.P. - Individualized Education Plan?*

What is the purpose of the new Quick Guide tool?

The purpose for the Quick Guide was to have a one-page pamphlet parents could use as a reference for quick tips about the different types of individualized education plans and what could be expected at an I.E.P. meeting, among other things. It can be printed out by parents into a trifold information pamphlet. The Guide is not limited to LBPSB parents, but anyone can view it and print it on their website at: <http://snac.lbpsb.qc.ca/eng/extra/img/367SNACIEPTifoldPamphletApprovedMarch2021.pdf>.

What has the response to the new Quick Guide been?

The Quick Guide was approved only a few weeks ago and the response has already been amazing. Parents and staff have written to us thanking us for providing tools like this to help guide them. We have also received several questions from parents coming into the system or new to a diagnosis, which is wonderful.

What else has the LBPSB SNAC been doing?

We also have our facebook page, which is now a year old. It can be found at: <http://www.facebook.com/specialneedsadvisorycommittee>. On this page, we showcase upcoming conferences or activities that are of interest to the special needs parent population.



Only 10 Weeks Left!

TUTORING

Parents, there are only 10 more weeks of school. If your child needs help, **NOW** is the time to be hiring a tutor if you think one would be helpful for your children. Children still have time to learn any essential skills that they might not have mastered in class. Remember, receiving one-on-one support from professionally trained educators is the best way to ensure that your children understand important concepts. Learn Quebec offers free online tutoring and homework support, as well as excellent tips for parents. For more information, visit: <https://www.learnquebec.ca/what-is-online-tutoring->!



CONTACT TEACHERS

If you have any concerns about your children's academic progress, email their teachers and ask for an appointment to discuss concrete ways that you can help support your child at home. Remember, working collaboratively with your child's teacher is one of the best ways to promote academic success.

... to Summer!



KIDS NEED TO HAVE A BREAK IN THE SUMMER

Our children are in school for 10 months so the summer months should be a break from school. Continue daily reading, but if possible refrain from bombarding them with tutoring, summer school, academic camps, etc. Having time off, **a real vacation**, is important every year but especially this year with everything that our children have been through. Focus on family time and outdoor activities like picnics, bike rides, hikes, playing sports... whatever your family likes to do together!

EPCA IN THE NEWS

'Parents are super stressed': Quebec high school plan draws mixed response

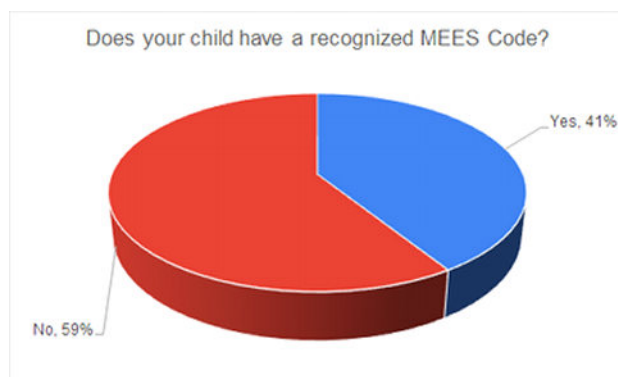
Jesse Feith • Montreal Gazette

Publishing date: 24 March 2021

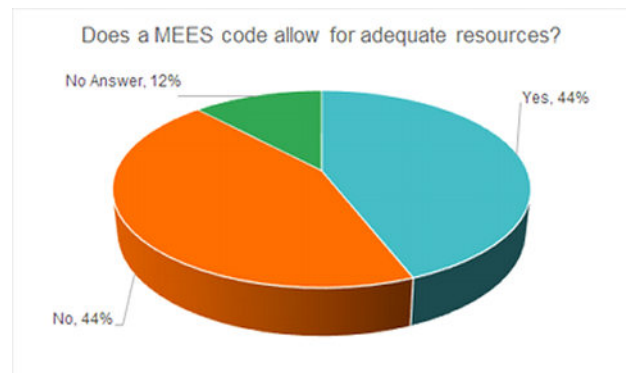
https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/parents-are-super-stressed-quebec-high-school-plan-draws-mixed-response?fbclid=IwAR1cplDppti1Fr_oyNGCCe2fMsVTwVvhs1fjLuUhCt-fqlWKBhH0Rh70ds

Survey of Parents with Special Needs Students

The survey had a total of 2,325 responses; 1,435 respondents completing the survey in full, demonstrating the complexity of both the survey itself and the subject matter. The vast majority (59%) of students whose parents believe are struggling do not benefit from the additional provincial funding that is granted to school boards to support additional services for students with special needs.



This is a troubling discrepancy between what parents believe may be in the best interests of their children, what teachers and other professionals believe, and what MEES officials may conclude. Even for students who were eventually granted a recognized MEES difficulty code, the delay was extreme. More than 33% of those who received a code had to wait 12 months or more for the diagnosis to be completed. Once the diagnosis was received, 20% had to wait an additional six months or more to receive a decision from MEES on coding.



Even more troubling is that 57% of respondents were never informed that there was a possibility that their child's diagnosis and request to receive a difficulty code could be rejected by MEES. Further, there is no consensus if being granted a recognized MEES difficulty code has allowed students to receive adequate services to ensure their success, with 44% agreeing and 44% disagreeing with the statement. We also included several open-ended questions

to allow the sharing of experiences, prompting over 530 comments, the majority of which detailed a negative overall experience in either the student evaluation process or the allocation of services.

A key conclusion from our consultation is the fact that there seems to be significant confusion about the process, specifically in how difficulty codes are administered and granted to students in need, and what the value of such codes actually is. Respondents are not convinced that a MEES code actually brings additional services that will contribute to student success in all cases.

The survey results also point to the fact that additional funding should be allocated to ensure that all students who need special needs services receive them; the administration must become more efficient and nimble; and a thorough rethink of information provided to parents is called for. Something must be done to address the significant delays in getting a diagnosis and receiving a decision from MEES as these delays cause students to continue to struggle and fall further behind. The impact is profound and every day counts. The status quo is no longer sustainable and EPCA has called upon the Government to restructure and rethink policies and procedures for special needs services in the public education system.

EPCA MISSION STATEMENT

The English Parents' Committee Association (EPCA) is a coalition of parents' committees of Quebec's English-language public school boards, representing more than 100,00 students in the youth sector.

EPCA advocates for a strong and sustainable English-language public education system to ensure the best possible educational outcomes for our children, while respecting the culture and language of anglophone Quebecers.

To do so, EPCA seeks to engage and motivate parents across Quebec to contribute to strong, representative and effective parent governance, to foster positive relationships with stakeholders across the educational spectrum, and to provide guidance and support to all member organizations.

What would you like to see in
our upcoming editions?

[TELL US HERE](#)

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EPCA STRATEGIC PILLARS

INFORM

Using all communications tools at our disposal, offer up-to-date information on public education initiatives, parent governance interests, best practices and issues management to ensure a healthy, well-engaged anglophone parent community.

CONSULT

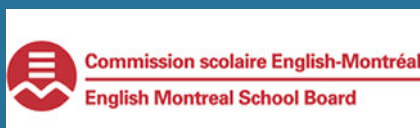
Ensure strong, high-quality and consistent feedback mechanisms with members and partners across the English-language public school network through both electronic and in-person methods.

SUPPORT

Provide training and professional development at all levels of parent governance, optimize the sharing of best practices and provide multiple support services for parent committees, governing boards and parent delegates in need.

ADVOCATE

Push for appropriate policy change and improvement through enhanced partnerships with like-minded organizations, Government working groups/tasks forces, and related organizations, through well-considered political positions on behalf of English- Language parents committees across Quebec, taking into account regional difference and the urban/rural divide.



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WHO ARE WE?

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