



# Superintendent's Message

## June 2013

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### Introduction

June usually signifies a busy period in the education calendar; APSEA's 2013 edition has been accentuated by activities associated with the Review process.

As the weather warms, our itinerary moves from school closing to summer camps, staff training and completion of the staffing process in preparation for a new school year. This *Message* contains an inspirational article from student Ashley Hache, "My Abilities versus My Disability", information on Danny Johnson's recent fundraising effort and updates on the Review, staffing and the Accessibility Committee.



Submissions for the *Superintendent's Message* are encouraged and should be sent to Pam Edmonds ([Pam\\_Edmonds@apsea.ca](mailto:Pam_Edmonds@apsea.ca)).

## Review Update

At its 7 June meeting, the Board of Directors gave favourable consideration to Dr. Fushell's final report on the Review and its recommendations. An all-staff information session was held on 13 June, at which time the report and its recommendations were made available. The Review concluded the provinces "appreciate the services which their students and teachers receive from APSEA. They do not have the capacity to deliver all of the services APSEA provides and they do not have the desire to develop separate infrastructures for the delivery of services. They do, however, want to find efficiencies in what APSEA does and to improve accountability." (37)

A plan to implement the recommendations of the Review (in conjunction with the priorities in the Strategic Plan for 2012-15) will be developed between now and November. The implementation of this plan will become a prime focus with the start of the 2014-15 school year.

The single major exception is the change to the organizational structure. Effective August 2013, the Centre-Based Supervisors will report to either the Director of Programs (BVI) or the Director of Programs (DHH). For various reasons, it was deemed appropriate to make this change, on a trial basis, for the coming school year.

Following the information session, a "Question and Answer" section was available on the database to give staff an opportunity to seek clarification and/or comment on the Review. Anyone having further questions may contact the Superintendent at [Bertram\\_Tulk@apsea.ca](mailto:Bertram_Tulk@apsea.ca).

## Board News

The Board of Directors held its annual meeting on 7 June, with the new Executive Committee being elected:

Chair – Carole Olsen, Deputy Minister, Nova Scotia  
Vice-Chair – John McLaughlin, Deputy Minister, New Brunswick  
Secretary – Alexander MacDonald, Deputy Minister, Prince Edward Island  
Treasurer – Janet Vivian-Walsh, Deputy Minister, Newfoundland and Labrador

Program Advisory Committee Chair - Don Glover, Director of Student Services, Nova Scotia  
Financial Advisory Committee Chair - Joe MacEachern, Director of Finance, Nova Scotia

## Staffing Update

While our staffing process continues, most positions for 2013-14 have been filled, as noted below. The update notes staff who are new to APSEA and those who are changing location or position for the coming school year.

Sharon Robertson – DHH Provincial Supervisor (New Brunswick)  
Janice Gavin – DHH Itinerant Teacher (Halifax, NS)  
Margaret MacDougall – DHH Itinerant Teacher (Moncton, NB)

Shawna MacKay – DHH Itinerant Teacher (Truro, NS)  
Peter Papoulidis – DHH Itinerant Teacher (Fredericton, NB)  
Fern Bannister – BVI Itinerant Teacher (Saint John, NB)  
Jessa Carr – BVI Itinerant Teacher (Strait Regional School Board, NS)  
Nicole MacDonald – BVI Itinerant Teacher (Cape Breton, NS)  
Cheryl MacNeil – BVI Preschool Consultant (Nova Scotia)  
Jennifer Allaby – BVI Itinerant Teacher (Fredericton, NB)  
Beth Button – BVI Itinerant Teacher (South Shore, NS)  
Carrie Vroege – Preschool Itinerant Teacher (NS)  
Jennifer Wills – BVI Itinerant Teacher (Valley, NS)  
Mary Currie – DHH Itinerant Teacher (Saint John, NB)  
Debbie Davis-Maybee – Supervisor of Assessment and Short-Term Programs (DHH)  
Eric Loughhead – Manger of IT (APSEA Centre)

## Accessibility Committee

- Reg Dunphy, Audiologist and Joe MacDonell, O&M Supervisor

The APSEA Accessibility Committee continued to meet on a regular basis during 2012-13, with the Superintendent as the committee chairperson. There are two sub-committees: the Blind or Visually Impaired (BVI) comprised of Joe MacDonell, Sheila Jamieson and Ron Alley; and the Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH) comprised of Reg Dunphy, Amy Parsons and Sonny Gallant. The range of issues this year included: improving the lighting in various locations around the Centre; installation of convex mirrors in strategic hallway locations around the Centre to allow sighted individuals to see people approaching from around a corner; improvements in the yellow marker strips on the stairs to allow for greater visibility for individuals with visual impairments; braille signage and menus for the cafeteria; the use of font types and sizes most visually accessible in hard-copy and electronic formats; improvements in ZoomText and JAWS to allow for improved access to the APSEA database and APSEA website for individuals who are blind or visually impaired, and planning for the creation of a tactile 3D graphic of the APSEA Centre in collaboration with Dalhousie University.

Our main focus has shifted to accessibility awareness training for APSEA staff. The goal has been to identify important points with respect to informing and sensitizing staff to the special needs of the students we serve, as well as the special needs of visitors to APSEA who are blind or visually impaired or deaf or hard of hearing.

The DHH sub-committee provided a presentation on accessibility issues related to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to APSEA Senior Management and their support staff on 9 April 2013. Melba Blunden from the Deafness Advocacy Association of Nova Scotia (DAANS) presented on accessibility issues related to individuals who are deaf and Reg Dunphy provided a presentation related to accessibility issues related to individuals who are hard of hearing. This session was a trial run or first effort; helpful feedback was received from participants which will result in improvements and added focus for the presentation. A second presentation will be planned early in the school year.

The BVI sub-committee's primary focus has also been the planning and early implementation of awareness and training sessions for Centre-based staff. The three areas to be covered in these ongoing training sessions are: How to Offer and Provide Sighted Guide Assistance (Power Point & Hands-On Training), Low Vision Awareness, and Technology.

Both sub-committees plan to produce video recordings to help raise accessibility awareness. When completed, they will be available for viewing on the APSEA database tree.

## My Abilities versus My Disability

- Ashley Hache, Grade 12 Student (BVI)

I was born with Peters Anomaly, a rare congenital eye disorder which is probably going to worsen into adulthood as glaucoma often becomes a concern. I have no vision in my left eye and a current acuity of 20/125 in my right with a moderately restricted visual field.



I was very fortunate growing up that my parents pushed me to do my best, allowed me independence, and let me follow my dreams. I was never shown special treatment at home due to my disability and I had the same expectations placed upon me as my sighted sibling. I attended regular school and my Mom advocated for me to learn the same curriculum as my sighted peers and allowed me to participate in all school activities without restriction. I did have an EA (Educational Assistant) during the time I was a print/Braille user, but upon reaching high school I no longer required this extra support.

I participated in sports including soccer, skating, swimming and skiing. I took ballet for several years and then moved into Hip Hop. These all have challenges for a visually impaired person but I was determined to succeed and the last thing I wanted was to be treated differently. I remember needing a baseball cap with a large bill for soccer, and even then I rarely spotted the ball. When I went skating and skiing, I could not see the people around me and had a few bumps and bruises to show for it. I had excellent instructors at dance class, who made sure I understood the steps while at the same time not singling me out or drawing attention to my disability.

These are just a few of the things my parents encouraged me to do and looking back I am very glad they did. I was so proud of myself that I could participate with my peers and achieve a level of success. I learned important lessons during these times – “perseverance pays off” and “where there is a will there is a way”. The decisions my parents made when I was a child helped to shape me into the person I am today and I am very grateful to them.

I have been followed by APSEA (Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority) since the age of two. I feel that this organization has contributed greatly to my optimistic outlook on life. I received direct service from an itinerant teacher several times a week when I was younger, was taught how to interact socially with my peers, acquire daily life skills, how to explain my disability to others and how to advocate for myself when necessary. I owe APSEA more than I can ever repay. I learned that my disability is just one facet of my character – it does not dictate how I live my life.

I feel that my visual impairment has, in some ways, been an advantage for me. I have traveled to places that otherwise I may not have gone, met many people who have positively impacted my life, learned quickly how to overcome any initial awkwardness with my peers, and have made several lifelong friends.

I am about to enter a new chapter upon graduation from Moncton High School, as I have been accepted at Crandall University. I intend to pursue a Bachelor of Arts/Eng. followed consecutively by a Bachelor of Education. I know that I will succeed in this endeavour, as I have the perseverance necessary and I will not accept defeat. I know that my disability is going to present challenges in this new environment but my family and friends will be here to support me as they have always done in the past.

I now volunteer for APSEA as a camp counselor several times a year. I hope I am a good role model for the younger children at camp. I hope they see a person who deals with their disability bravely, realistically but always optimistically. I would never tell someone how to deal with a disability because each person has their own set of challenges. I can only pass on what has worked for me - surround yourself with people who have your best interest at heart, never refuse assistance if you need it, show your appreciation for the gifts you have been given and always live your life with a glad heart.

***"I choose not to place the "DIS" in my ability" – Robert M. Hensel*** - This quote perfectly describes how I am choosing to live my life.

### Danny Johnson's Fundraising Event

- Karen Keats, Classroom Teacher



On 4 June 2013 Danny Johnson (long time APSEA supporter), hosted a fundraiser at his place of employment, JDA MacKenzie Architects, located in Halifax, NS in support of the new APSEA playground. That date marked Danny's 731<sup>st</sup> consecutive day (exactly 2 years) of typing and he can now claim a Canadian National Typing Record.

APSEA staff and students, and JDA Mackenzie Architects employees attended the event. APSEA teachers Steve Trussoni and Marcy Tilford accompanied students Gabrielle and Emma as they performed Leroy Andersen's The Typewriter. Emily, another APSEA student, wrote Danny a thank you letter and presented him with a gift.

This year Danny has raised \$4,640.00 for APSEA. As part of the fundraiser Danny sold tickets on a basket of items donated from various businesses. John Thomson, employee of JDA Mackenzie Architects, was the winner of the basket. Congratulations John! To date, Danny has held 27 fundraisers: 13 for the Military Police Fund for Blind Children (\$214,456.00) and 14 for APSEA (\$130,524.16) for a total fundraising effort of \$344,980.16.

We appreciate all that Danny has done to support the children APSEA serves and we thank him for his time and dedication.



## Looking Ahead

We are seeing noticeable improvements to our playground. A committee has been engaged in a fund-raising drive for the past year and has already secured donations to rebuild our playground. The project is a major undertaking, so it was divided into two phases: Phase 1, which includes the swings, climber and activity panels, will be installed in the coming weeks; Phase 2, which includes the main structure and 10 spin, will be the focus of our fund-raising efforts in 2013-14.

The APSEA community is transitioning due to departures of people who have served in leadership roles: Joan Skinner (who retires after a career in various positions, including Director and Provincial Supervisor), Ann Power (who returns to government, after serving as Director of Resource and Assessment Services since September 2008), and Peter Bowers (who has been Manager of Information Technology since February 2010). I take this opportunity to express our appreciation to these and all our colleagues for past service and wish them the very best in their future endeavors!

Sir Winston Churchill once remarked, “Every day you make progress. Yet there will stretch out before you an ever-lengthening, ever-ascending, ever-improving path. You know you will never get to the end of the journey. But this, so far from discouraging, only adds to the joy and glory of the climb.” The journey of education is unending ... In the immediate aftermath of a positive Review, we must now focus on responding to its recommendations to support our quest to better serve children and families. Let's work together to enjoy the climb!

Best wishes for a wonderful summer!



Bertram Tulk, EdD  
Superintendent

