



Superintendent's Message

May 2012

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Introduction/Update

APSEA continues to be a community of high activity, a small sample of which is contained in this "Message". The month of May can be described as a period in which the "rear view mirror" analogy applies. Although our main focus must be what lies ahead of us, we should not lose sight of our journey to date.

This issue contains articles on student activities/success, a positive story of collaboration between an itinerant teacher and a library to increase braille holdings, autism workshops, update on the playground, Strategic Plan and the school calendar for 2012-13.

Submissions for the June "Message" are encouraged and should be sent to Pam Edmonds (Pam_Edmonds@apsea.ca).



Braille Books in Antigonish

- submitted by Nicole MacDonald, Itinerant Teacher (BVI)

In May 2011 the Antigonish Town and County Library moved into a larger, newly renovated location. The new library has a larger computer centre, children's section and offers a variety of programs to support literacy and information in Antigonish.

Most recently, Nicole MacDonald, APSEA Itinerant Teacher, worked with Kristel Fleuren-Hunter, Librarian, to expand the variety of braille books available for emergent and early readers. Kristel was happy to receive the books and enthusiastically mentioned that nothing can replace the experience of literacy when “a child has the opportunity to physically explore, hold and read a book.” Kristel is excited that all children in the community will see braille in the library where they can begin to learn that people read in different ways.

Nicole has offered to continue working with the library to expand book accessibility, including story boxes (having stories accompanied with objects) that can be used during literacy groups with parents and children. Nicole has also provided information about accessible books. The library has shown an interest in this media and may further explore this option as they apply for summer student employment grants in the upcoming months.



Nicole and Kristel with new books at the Antigonish Town and Country Library.

Playground Update

- submitted by Karen Keats, c/o APSEA Playground Committee

As you may have noticed, the APSEA playground is undergoing changes. To date, the APSEA Playground Committee has met with a playground designer who recommended equipment, layout of the playground and ground covering most appropriate for the children. When we have a copy of the playground design, it will be shared with potential donors to request funding support.

At this time, the APSEA Playground Committee would like to invite anyone who may be able to suggest potential donors to send this information to the committee via Karen Keats (Karen_Keats@apsea.ca, 902-424-0564, 5940 South St., Halifax, NS B3H 1S6).



This is an exciting project and we look forward to lots of outside play in the not too distant future.



Courage Canada

- by Alex Angus MacEachern, Student, and
Nova Herring, Itinerant Teacher (BVI)

At age 17, Mark DeMontis was diagnosed with *Leber's Optic Neuropathy*, leaving him legally blind. Although he had planned to play hockey after high school, he instead found himself establishing "Courage Canada", a national, registered charity with the goal to implement learn-to-skate programs and hockey schools for Canadians who are blind and visually-impaired. (To learn more about Mark, his inline skate across Canada, and his organization Courage Canada, please go to <http://www.couragecanada.ca/>)



This winter Mark and his Courage Canada Team brought their skate program to Halifax for the first Learn to Skate Program in Atlantic Canada. The workshops took place on January 17, February 13 and April 23, 2012. Fourteen (14) students took part ranging in age from 5 to 19 years. Most students were from the Halifax area, but some travelled from as far away as Cape Breton to take part!

Some of these students had never been on skates before and were introduced to a new sport they have learned to love, while others honed their skills and got to practice on the ice with adapted hockey pucks and to skate with Mark himself.





Alex Angus MacEachern (Grade 6) from Port Hood, Cape Breton, travelled the farthest for the hockey workshop and had this to say:

“Me, why I think we should all have a chance to play. I like hockey because it’s fun to play. It’s cool to play the sport with your friends. It’s very exciting to score a goal and it’s awesome to rush the puck up the ice.”

“When I think about Mark, I think of Mark as a blind hockey player that is trying to help other blind kids to try the sport and teaching other blind kids to skate and to shoot and pass the puck. Mark gives me hope. Mark makes me feel normal and not alone. It was nice to talk to someone who knows.”

“What I thought about the puck. I thought the puck was very cool because when it moves it makes noises and it was lighter than a traditional puck, you have more control with a blind hockey puck.”

Quotes from other participating students:

“Skating was fantastic! Thanks to Courage Canada and all people involved including teachers were terrific.”
Kosaar Sarder, age 7.

“I liked playing hockey because I was part of a team.” Jonathan White, age 10.

“My favourite part was shooting and scoring on the net, it was fun!”
Mary White, age 8.

“Using the new puck, it was the first time I knew when the puck was behind me, between my legs and when it was coming through to the front.” Alex Angus MacEachern, age 12



At the end of the final session when Mark presented the question, “Do you think we should do this again next year?” his question was answered with loud collective shouts of “YES!!!!!!!!!!”

Thanks to Mark & the Courage Canada Team for bringing the Learn to Skate program to Halifax. Thank you to all the students who participated and the parents & vision teachers who made it possible for the students to get to the rink! A great time was had by all, one stride at a time!



Canadian National Mathematics League Contest

- submitted by Jim Parsons, Itinerant Teacher (BVI)



Tarah Sawler

Classmates at Armbrae Academy know Tarah Sawler is really good at Math. Just recently, Tarah's class took part in the Canadian National Mathematics League 2011-2012 Annual 7th Grade Contest. The test consists of 35 Math problems and the students have 30 minutes to complete them. Not everyone has time to finish before the tests are collected. Tarah placed 6th in Nova Scotia for Grade 7.

Tarah is blind, so she reads and writes (and adds, subtracts, multiplies and divides) in braille. In a recent email, Kim MacIntyre, one of Tarah's Math teachers, described how Tarah wrote the test:

“She did it orally with us reading her the questions. I read the first part and Stephanie [Sajatovich] the second. It was particularly impressive because she worked out all of the problems without being able to see the possible answers (her choice not to have them read to her). Occasionally, she used her BrailleSense, but mostly she solved the problems mentally.”

Congratulations, Tarah!

Autism: Evidence-Based Practice

- submitted by Shelia Bulmer, Autism Project Coordinator



Dr. Rue in PEI with Marlene Breitenbach, Special Education Autism Consultant, and Dr. Sandy MacDonald, Deputy Minister.

The first week of April saw each of the Atlantic Provinces host a conference on evidence-based practice with Dr. Hanna Rue as the guest speaker. Dr. Rue is the Executive Director of the United States National Autism Center and Chair of the National Standards Project (NSP). The NSP released a report in 2009 (currently being updated) providing comprehensive information on the level of scientific evidence that exists in support of educational and behavioural treatments available for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

The goal of the conferences was to more explicitly and corporately establish the concept and implementation of evidence-based practice within our respective educational systems. The audience across provinces varied somewhat, but generally included district autism consultants/specialists, district and board administrators, related education professionals (speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, psychologists) and external stakeholders such as preschool intervention agencies, health and provincial autism societies representatives. Conference attendance was 46 (NB), 81 (NL), 148 (NS) and 70 (PEI).



Dr. Rue in NB with Shelley McLean, Autism Learning Specialist, and Hon. Jody Carr, Minister



Dr. Rue in NS with Rosalind Penfound, Deputy Minister, and Susan Jozsa, Provincial Autism Consultant

Dr. Rue provided an overview and video demonstrations of the 11 practices their study determined as effective in producing favourable outcomes for individuals on the autism spectrum.

Accordingly, these treatments are established as effective based upon the quality, quantity and consistency of research findings. Following Dr. Rue's presentation, educators had the opportunity to discuss with their colleagues the following three questions:

1. What are you doing currently in your district/region that is evidence-based?
2. What are the challenges in ensuring that evidence-based practices are being applied in our instructional settings?
3. What are the next steps in becoming more evidence-based in our instructional practices?

Conference participants overwhelmingly evaluated the conference as positive and very relevant to their work. Individuals highlighted the value of being able to discuss their work with district counterparts and colleagues. Although the participants identified challenges in providing evidence-based programming to the ever-increasing number of children on the spectrum, they remain committed to this perspective.



Dr. Rue in Newfoundland with Dan Goodyear, Director of Student Support Services, and Jason Geary, Provincial Autism Consultant

Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan process continues on schedule. The response rate to the March survey was extremely high, more than doubling the responses from 2009. The 206 respondents included 112 parents (54.4%), 41 teachers (19.9%), 19 students (9.2%). The remaining 34 responses (16.5%) came from the Board of Directors, Departments of Education, support staff and administrators.

Our mission, vision and guiding principles received positive overall ratings: 84%, 85% and 87% either agreed or strongly agreed with the respective statements. These ratings are even higher (92.6, 94.1, and 97.8 respectively) when the neutral and no opinion responses are excluded. The item on the appropriateness of the priorities for 2012-15 had a higher proportion of neutral (27 or 13%) and no opinion (23 or 11%). Thus, 74% agreed or strongly agreed with the draft priorities. Of those who took a pro/con position, proposed priority areas saw 97.4% agree/strongly agree versus 2.6 who disagreed/strongly disagreed.

While these statistics convey a solid indication of consensus, the many written comments were particularly helpful in our efforts to improve the document. In fact, each of the statements was revised through the process. A copy of the updated version of the document is attached (page 10), which will be presented for Board approval in early June.

Sincere appreciation to everyone who participated in the survey process!

Looking Ahead

The last few weeks of the school year are upon us. The APSEA calendar for 2012-13 is attached, a further testament to the proximity of a new September!

Between now and the end of June, most our staffing will be finalized; the next “Message” will include a full update on position changes.

As I write, teachers from NS and PEI are involved in Spring professional development sessions; the NB staff met on 4 May in Fredericton. Negotiations for a new contract with the NSTU began on 15 May. Upcoming scheduled events at APSEA include the Executive and Board meetings (6-7 June), the annual meeting of the Canadian Association of Educational Resource Centres (CAER) on 7-8 June, the Danny Johnson fundraiser on 20 June, in addition to the usual series of year-end meetings. Our annual Fall Inservice dates (including the retirement banquet) have been confirmed for 23-25 October.

Enjoy spring!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bertram Tulk". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Bertram Tulk, EdD
Superintendent

APSEA Calendar for 2012-2013

Monday 3 September 2012	Labour Day
Tuesday 4 September 2012	Organizational Day for Teachers
Monday 8 October 2012	Thanksgiving Day
Tuesday 23 October to Thursday 25 October 2012	APSEA Annual Inservice
Friday 26 October 2012	NSTU Provincial Inservice
Monday 12 November 2012 (in lieu)	Remembrance Day
Thursday 20 December 2012	Last Working Day before Christmas
Thursday 3 January 2013	First Working Day after Christmas
Monday 4 March to Friday 8 March 2013	March Break – NB
Monday 11 March to Friday 15 March 2013	March Break – NS
Monday 18 March to Friday 22 March 2013	March Break – PEI
Thursday 28 March 2013	NL - Last Day of School (Spring Break)
Monday 8 April 2013	NL - School Reopens
Friday 29 March 2013	Good Friday
Monday 1 April 2013	Easter Monday
Monday 20 May 2013	Victoria Day
Friday 28 June 2013	Last Full Day of Classes



Atlantic Provinces Special
Education Authority (APSEA)

Strategic Plan

2012 – 2015

The Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA) is an interprovincial co-operative agency established by the Ministers of Education of New Brunswick, Newfoundland-Labrador, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.

MISSION

We provide educational services, in collaboration with our partners, to support children and youth from birth to 21 who are blind/visually impaired (BVI) and/or deaf/hard of hearing (DHH).

VISION

We support families and the public school system in the education of children and youth who are blind/visually impaired (BVI) and/or deaf/hard of hearing (DHH). Our professional commitment focuses on providing comprehensive educational opportunities, which lead to the highest potential for independence, self-sufficiency and productive, fulfilling lives.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Key organizational principles guide the design, implementation and evaluation of educational services. We are:

- child-focused and family-centered
- collaborative, involving the student, family, teachers and other professionals
- supportive of independence and self-advocacy
- committed to equality of educational opportunity
- research and evidence-based
- accountable for learning outcomes
- guided by provincial policies, procedures and guidelines
- future-oriented, flexible and innovative

STRATEGIC PLAN 2012-15

Priority 1: Communication

- 1.1 Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to communicate effectively and regularly with internal and external stakeholders.

Priority 2: Strategic Management

- 2.1 Identify opportunities to maximize operational effectiveness and efficiencies.
- 2.2 Review, update and develop new APSEA policies, procedures and guidelines as needed.

Priority 3: Programs and Services

- 3.1 Review and update criteria for service eligibility.
- 3.2 Establish a framework for measuring student success.
- 3.3 Maximize support to the public education system by establishing competencies and expectations for APSEA professional staff.

Priority 4: Human Resources

- 4.1 Update the performance management process.
- 4.2 Determine future human resources needs.
- 4.3 Review existing procedures for staff orientation and develop a formal orientation program.

Priority 5: Research and Innovation

- 5.1 Engage in research to build a body of knowledge to guide programming and delivery of services with an innovative focus.