

## SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

**Wednesday, June 2, 2021, 7:00 pm**  
**Zoom Meeting**

- Members:** Christine Boothby (Trustee), Rob Campbell (Trustee), Sonia Nadon-Campbell (Community Representative), Amy Wellings (Community Representative), Terry Warner (VOICE for deaf and hard of hearing children, Alternate), Cathy Miedema (Association for Bright Children), Mark Wylie (Down Syndrome Association), Lisa Paterick (VIEWS for the Visually Impaired), Katie Ralph (Autism Ontario, Ottawa Chapter), Ian Morris (Ontario Associations for Families of Children with Communication Disorders), Dr. Maggie Mamen (Learning Disabilities Association of Ottawa-Carleton), Safina Dewshi (Ottawa-Carleton Assembly of School Councils)
- Association Representatives (Non Voting):** Jennifer Titley (Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Teachers' Federation), Connie Allen (Professional Student Services Personnel, Alternate), Jean Trant (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, School Support Personnel), Catherine Houlden (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Teachers), Nancy Dlouhy (Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Operations Committee)
- Staff and Guests:** Lynn Scott (Trustee), Peter Symmonds (Superintendent of Learning Support Services), Nadia Towaij (Superintendent, Program & Learning K-12), Dr. Petra Duschner (Manager of Mental Health and Critical Services), Stacey Kay (Manager, Learning Support Services), Nicole Guthrie (Manager, Board Services), Christine Kessler (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Kate Stoudt (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Amy Hannah (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Brent Smith (System Principal, Program & Learning K-12), Jennifer Offord (System Principal, Program & Learning K-12), Kristin Riddell (System Principal, Program & Learning K-12), Emily Wagner (Instructional Coach), Diane Dreef (Instructional Coach), and Leigh Fenton (Board/Committee Coordinator)

1. Call to Order

Chair Nadon-Campbell called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. She noted that the meeting is taking place on the land of the Algonquin Nations and reflected on the recent discovery of the remains of 215 Indigenous children on the grounds of the Kamloops Indian Residential School in Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation territory. Chair Nadon-Campbell stated, "We share in the grief and horror of a nation and have lowered the flags at all OCDSB schools and buildings in remembrance. We can only hope this discovery and our collective response helps further our learning on the importance of truth and reconciliation. As an organization dedicated to education, we must continue to shine a light on the injustices of the past and work diligently to change the future." She asked for a moment of silence.

2. Approval of the Agenda

**Moved by Amy Wellings,**

**THAT the agenda be approved.**

**Carried**

3. Delegations

There were not any delegations.

4. Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report

4.1 SEAC Report, 5 May 2021

**Moved by Christine Boothby,**

**THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee Report dated 5 May 2021 report be received.**

**Carried**

4.2 Forward Agenda

Superintendent Symmonds noted that the forward agenda highlights that the work of SEAC is closely connected to the objectives contained within the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan, for example, to champion high learning expectations for all students in all programs, to prioritize the dignity and well-being of students in inclusive and caring classrooms, and to remove barriers to equity of access, opportunity and outcomes. He stated that the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has delayed the release of the Right to Read Inquiry until the fall of 2021 at which time it will be shared with SEAC. He expressed appreciation for the work that SEAC undertook in the 3 March 2021 budget break-out sessions, input which Learning Support Services (LSS) was able to use as the District developed a staff recommended budget.

Superintendent Symmonds solicited input about information that members would like to incorporate into the SEAC forward agenda for the 2021-2022 school year, indicating that ideas can later be shared to the committee coordinator or chair by email.

Ms. Miedema remarked that over the last couple of years, she has appreciated that the meeting agenda allows for considerable discussion around issues of importance. Her preference is that of an effective meeting format to gather feedback on proposed directions, as opposed to reading staff reports on initiatives which are underway in schools.

Dr. Mamen contributed that she is interested in understanding more about plans for professional development activities. The Learning Disabilities Association of Ottawa-Carleton (LDAOC) is concerned about the learning gaps that may present in children returning to school after a considerable period outside of the formal classroom setting. LDAOC would like to learn about strategies that will be used by teachers to identify children experiencing difficulty and the use of tier one evidence-based interventions in the classroom.

5. Matters for Action

5.1 Report 21-154, Special Education Plan 2020-2021 and Special Education Report 2021 (P. Symmonds)

Your committee had before it Report 21-054, Special Education Plan 2020-2021 and Special Education Report 2021, seeking the approval of the plan.

System Principal Hannah noted that over the course of the 2020-2021 school year, SEAC has had an opportunity to review and provide input into the standards that comprise the plan.

**Moved by Christine Boothby,**

**A. THAT the 2020-2021 Special Education Plan, attached as Appendix A to Report 21-054, be approved; and**

**B. THAT the 2021 Special Education Report, attached as Appendix B to Report 21-054, be approved.**

**Carried**

6. Presentations

6.1 Destreaming the Grade 9 Math Curriculum (N. Towaij)

Instructional Coach Wagner, System Principal Smith and System Principal Offord led a presentation on the goals for destreaming educational pathways at the District, specifically in mathematics, beginning in September 2021. The purpose of the initiative is three-fold: to support the

cultural shift in the District to identify and dismantle systemic discrimination and structural inequities; to increase educator capacity for effective, culturally-responsive instruction, assessment, and evaluation in destreamed, multi-level classrooms; in addition to increased student engagement, achievement and well-being. As a first step, these actions will target grade 9, with a specific focus on math by destreaming efforts. However, the work of de-streaming is part of the broader equity work in schools and begins in pre-kindergarten and extends to grade 12

The objectives related to destreaming grade 9 math include phasing in destreamed courses for all compulsory courses to replace a separate academic and applied pathway. The ultimate goal is to remove barriers and support students in graduating from secondary school and pursuing post-secondary education pathways of their choice. The original intention behind applied courses was to provide a different pedagogical approach to learning. However, over time, the applied course model has become perceived as less academically rigorous. Students in the applied course stream are limited in the courses they can take in later grades, which, in turn, limits their access to post-secondary pathways.

Superintendent Towaji noted that in order to support the success of the work of de-streaming, the District has partnered with the lead district for de-streaming, Toronto District School Board (TDSB) as the TDSB has been successfully involved in de-streaming for multiple years. She noted that Ontario is the only province in Canada that practices streaming of students at the age of 13. The organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) encourages streaming no earlier than the age of 15. Some provinces in Canada begin streaming in grade 11. She supported the approach of delaying academic streaming until the senior level of secondary school in order to empower students to demonstrate and measure their own learning.

Superintendent Towaji reported that the District has a destreaming team that involves all departments, including LSS and is composed of educator and school administrator representatives. The five year OCDSB graduation rate in English programs is as follows: 48% (locally-developed), 69% (applied) and 94% (academic), for a ratio of 48:69:94. In the science program the ratio is 50:71:95. In mathematics programs the ratio is 48:64:94. Groups of students who are disproportionately represented in locally developed courses and applied-level courses identify as Black, racialized, Indigenous, English Language Learners (ELL), students living in low-income households, and students accessing special education needs support.

A key action underway currently is direct outreach to families. Phone calls are being made by administrators to the parents of every grade 8 student registered for an applied-level or locally developed course in grade 9 with

a script that explains the data on graduation rates in the aforementioned streams and the percentage of students who go onto post-secondary based on their grade 9 pathway. These phone calls also focus on communicating transparently the opportunities that are subsequently closed based on that single course selection in grade 9.

Instructional Coach Dreef facilitated an interactive discussion period where the committee was invited to submit live feedback on "jam boards". The questions and responses are highlighted below:

**Questions: One of the goals of de-streaming is to identify and dismantle systemic discrimination and structural inequities. Thinking about your role as an association or community representative, what opportunities for discussion have occurred or exist in your communities about this goal? How could the schools best support students and families/caregivers in the transition from elementary to secondary school that allow access to all pathways? What are your recommendations for engaging with families/caregivers/students with special education needs in the OCDSB?**

Answers:

- Students need to be challenged earlier in the curriculum if they are to meet the rigorous pace of grade nine;
- Focus on transition planning;
- Write parental guides in a way where all parents can understand the messaging;
- Supply more in-class support for educators;
- In elementary school, identify students who are not meeting expectations and provide immediate assistance to prevent learning gaps which will delay preparation for academic classes;
- Determine what engages the student and work with them to keep them interested in learning more;
- Increase the quality and opportunity of instruction;
- A special education exceptionality may describe a student but it must not define the student;
- Meet parents in places, spaces and languages where they are most comfortable;
- Destigmatize special education services;
- Use multicultural liaison officers (MLOs) to reach parents;

- Discuss modification with families;
- Enlist guidance counselors and student success teachers as early as grade 4 to speak to students about what they want to do and help them make choices that do not limit their future opportunities; and
- Produce data on trade program graduates and outcomes

Dr. Mamen shared that a specialty of hers in the field of psychology has been helping children with non-verbal learning disabilities and children who have been given a diagnosis of impairment in mathematics and written expression. In her abilities assessments of children, she has seen many who do not comprehend mathematics and the reason is not centered on a lack of teaching as Learning Disabilities Association of Ottawa-Carleton (LDAOC) have tested many failed approaches to mathematics instruction. She queried the plan for destreaming with the described children, noting that these students have already developed anxiety and phobias about the inability to solve problems in mathematics in the classroom setting. Superintendent Towaij advised that Ontario school boards are awaiting their grade 9 destreamed curriculum, building directly from the revised grade 8 curriculum from the 2020-2021 school year. Once the curriculum is released, the Program and Learning K-12 (PAL) Department will engage with the educators, including special education support teachers to create resources that will best support the needs of all students. Changes to the grade 8 math curriculum include the social emotional learning pieces of mathematics and coding. She added that the Ministry has designated significant additional funding specifically to support students accessing special education support.

Dr. Mamen contended that in a classroom where a grade 6 student is counting on their fingers, has not any idea how to translate quantity into numbers, and has no understanding of the aspects of speed, time and volume, the student will not understand the basic operations in a destreamed mathematics curriculum. Superintendent Towaij responded that partnering relationships will occur with grade 6, 7 and 8 mathematics teachers with the destreamed grade 9 teachers. Ongoing supports included professional development training (PD) on a regular basis in order to ensure that the grade 9 teachers have the understanding of both the content from the prior grades. Superintendent Symmonds added that the Individual Education Plan (IEP) will continue to be offered to students who will benefit from them. The individualized approach to supporting each student will continue and grow. LSS are obliged to provide support to students who have a range of needs. The data has shown that as a result of systemic barriers, some students have been channeled into outcomes that are not by choice or appropriate for their abilities.

Ms. Houlden highlighted that there are other types of streaming in the District such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) and the Arts program. She expressed the view that there seems to be negativity attached to different learning styles. She promoted the notion of honouring the successes of students who are learning locally-developed trades, noting that this may improve graduation rates. Superintendent Towaij responded that the trades are highly valued but the concern now is that only certain Grade 8 students are only being invited to attend the tours. She echoed that the problem is not devaluing students who are selecting locally developed or applied level courses but rather that our data shows clearly in our district and in the province of systemic discrimination and systemic racism as seen in the over representation of specific groups of students, including students with special education needs, in those locally developed and applied level courses.

Superintendent Towaij shared that to date, based on the phone calls made to families of grade 8 students presently enrolled in locally developed or applied level courses, 798 families switched to an academic pathway. The most common remark made during these calls was that they were not aware of the impact of their choice. She shared the belief that parents in the District must have all the information that they need to make full and transparent decisions.

Trustee Campbell commended staff on the destreaming initiative and noted that he has been in favour for action such as this for many terms as a trustee, as he has pointed out that the students fall into categories very early in their entry into school. He queried the support for grade 9 students entering a system that upholds a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) after years of lacking the appropriate differentiated support. Secondly, he queried the implications for the French Immersion (FI) program in the destreaming initiatives, noting the lack of special education service in FI offerings. Superintendent Towaij highlighted that secondary school teachers and their elementary counterparts will all be working together to ensure students successfully proceed into academic math courses. Work is being done throughout this summer with teams of educators to prepare for the implementation of de-streaming, including significant resources and supports for educators. In response to destreaming FI, Superintendent Towaij noted that we start streaming students in year 2 kindergarten and that there is significant de-streaming work to take place in elementary, and that our first focus is ensuring success of this first cohort of grade 9 students. She emphasized that the commitment to change is evident in the District. She confirmed that significant funding has been directed to destreaming.

Mr. Morris requested that more information about destreaming be added to the forward agenda in the 2021-2022 school year.

## 7. Department Update

### 7.1 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Symmonds briefly highlighted the following points in his report:

- The announcement of incoming System Principal of Learning Support Services (LSS), Kate Stoudt;
- The statement from Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education, confirming that there will not be a return to in-person learning before the close of the school year;
- The assumption that students with intensive, complex special education needs will continue to attend in-person classes until the close of the school year;
- In response to a question by Ms. Miedema, data has yet to be compiled on the number of students who would have been in specialized program classes (SPC) but chose remote learning and therefore are being supported in regular classrooms. The Ministry announced that families would have until 1 June 2021 to make decisions on remote versus in-person learning. LSS will report on the number of students typically in SPC who have opted to learn remotely;
- The vaccination rollout plan affecting students aged 12 to 17 years;
- The first three days of school will be professional development (PD) days, making 9 September 2021 the first day of school for both elementary and secondary students. The Ministry of Education has provided guidelines on specific objectives to be accomplished in the three PD days; and
- The District is examining strategies to help educators to determine where the students are situated in the learning continuum as the courses were delivered in an unprecedented way throughout the pandemic. Educators must start from where students are on the learning spectrum and understand the growth that students have experienced over the past year.

Superintendent Symmonds reported on the staff recommended budget for 2021-2022 school year with some of the key elements as they relate to LSS:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) student support for the Dedicated Space Project at First Avenue Public School through an allocation to fund a third of the salary for an applied behaviour analysis (ABA)



coordinator full time employee (FTE), previously funded by a Priorities and Partnership Funding (PPF);

- Funding for six itinerant educational assistants (IEA). Currently the staff complement for IEA is ten in elementary, seven in secondary and four in early learning. The six new IEA will be dedicated to secondary schools to reinforce tier one levels of support in the promotion of mental health and well-being. LSS professional support staff can then refocus support on tier two and tier three support services;
- The job status for the District's occupational therapist will shift from contractor to FTE to expand on the level of services;
- The LSS team is anticipating that when the OHRC Right to Read Report is released, there will be recommendations around timely access to assessment, screening and evidence-based interventions. This is part of the reason the team has advocated for an additional 1.0 FTE speech language pathologist and 1.0 FTE psychologist;
- The addition of 2.0 FTE social workers to service the increased need for consultation and direct service. The importance of providing culturally sensitive and responsive care is critical. Through the 2020-2021 budget allocations, funding was provided to recruit and hire two identity specific social workers. For the coming 2021-2022 school year, two more social workers will be in place to provide support while maintaining the two identity specific social workers for students who identify as Indigenous or Black and building the capacity for support using an equity lens; and
- The addition of a 1.0 FTE teacher and 2.0 FTE educational assistants for another semi-integrated developmental disability class in a geographic location that is closer for some students who have travelled over 25 kilometres in the past to attend school. By having two classes, one transition is eliminated for students and instruction in the elementary panel can occur up until grade 8 in one location.

In response to a query by Mr. Warner, Superintendent Symmonds noted that deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) students would not be excluded from the summer transition programs. LSS requested that all multi-disciplinary teams comprehensively evaluate and assess the overall level of need for students wishing to access the summer programming. Given the limitations on funding, there is not a capacity to extend participation from all students accessing special education needs. System Principal Hannah shared that the itinerant teachers of DHH are part of the voices at the table determining the thresholds for high special education needs to be recommended for the program.

Ms. Miedema requested further information on tracking the number of families who have declined a placement in a special education class due to the requirement to travel long distances. Superintendent Symmonds agreed to explore data collection on these potential occurrences. Ms. Miedema identified the difficulty of tracking this data and suggested that recording any declined placements would be an ideal starting point.

a. Update on Special Education and the Ottawa-Carleton Virtual Campus

Superintendent Symmonds reported that additional Learning Support Teachers (LST) in the secondary panel and Learning Resource Teachers (LRT) in the elementary panel have been allocated for special education supports for the Ottawa-Carleton Virtual (OCV) campus. Due to the delay in finalizing the enrollment numbers in either the in-person or remote modes of learning, there is a requirement to revisit education assistant (EA) allocations to ensure that students have the necessary support. LSS is monitoring the needs of each student accessing special education needs support to ensure adequate staffing is in place for the beginning of the school year in September 2021.

b. Summer Special Education and Mental Health Supports

Superintendent Symmonds reported that School Mental Health Ontario is updating resources to assist educators in the fall of 2021 to promote the mental health and well-being of students. Updates include an educator resource map, information sheets to support remote learning, special education and equity. The resources will be circulated to educators in the District for the launch of the 2021-2022 school year.

System Principal Hannah provided an update on the summer transition program for students with special education needs, kindergarten to age 21. She noted that the program offered in summer of 2020 was slightly different as it catered to students with high special education needs and high mental health needs. For the summer of 2021, mental health support will be provided in another program with separate funding and guided by Dr. Duschner. Summer programs are scheduled for the two weeks in advance of the start of the school year. These programs are held to facilitate opportunities for students who have support from the LSS multi-disciplinary staff during the school year and are involved in tier three level supports. As the 2020-2021 school year comes to a close, LSS will have a better sense of the participating students and schools, and those who will be involved in serving them in this work.

Manager Kay described that similar to last year's summer transition program, there will be a range of transition activities that will be available to students based on their individualized needs. Some activities will be virtual and some in-person however the majority of the in-person opportunities will likely be scheduled for the final week before the start of the school year.

Dr. Duschner highlighted that the Ministry of Education is prioritizing the mental health of students through additional funding for services. Social work and psychology staff from LSS will be providing ongoing counseling support for students who are currently on their caseloads. The District will be in a position to accept new referrals from families over the summer. The referral mechanism will be through an email address and targeted towards students in grades 6 and 9 who could benefit from participating in stress management and coping skills groups. The sessions will be offered twice a week for a four week period. Some of the LSS mental health staff will be helping to reengage and transition students with mental health needs during the last two weeks of August 2021.

Dr. Duschner reported that LSS is in the process of completing a video for parents and caregivers on supporting mental health over the summer. Drop-in sessions will be offered in August 2021 where parents can attend focused discussions on preparing their children for a mentally healthy return to school.

System Principal Kessler outlined that an After School Skills Development Program will be offered over the summer. Accessing unspent funds from the program that was held during the regular school year, LSS is able to operate virtual social skills programming for ASD students in mid-August 2021 for kindergarten to grade 12 students.

## 8. Committee Reports

### 8.1 Board

There was no report from the Board.

### 8.2 Committee of the Whole

Chair Nadon-Campbell highlighted that at the Committee of the Whole meeting on 11 May 2021 Director Camille Williams-Taylor spoke highly of staff engaged in the work at Clifford Bowey Public School and Crystal Bay Centre for Special Education.

### 8.3 Committee of the Whole, Budget

Ms. Miedema reported that there was a Committee of the Whole Budget meeting on 26 May 2021 and 1 June 2021. She noted that the materials were sent out 4 hours before the meeting last evening and therefore she did not have any time to review the documents in advance. She noted that Superintendent Symmonds had fulsomely reviewed the staff recommended budget allocations for special education in his superintendent's report.

8.4 Advisory Committee on Equity

There was no report from the Advisory Committee on Equity.

8.5 Indigenous Education Advisory Council

Chair Nadon-Campbell reported that the District hired two additional Indigenous graduation coaches to support the Indigenous students in secondary schools.

8.6 Parent Involvement Committee

Mr. Morris reported that in the 12 May 2021 Parent Involvement Committee meeting, a subcommittee was struck to develop a communication strategy to connect with all parents in the District. He suggested that SEAC consider following a similar route to effectively communicate with families accessing special needs support.

8.7 Advisory Committee on Extended Day and Child Care Programs

Mr. Warner shared his plans to continue to advocate for early identification of children who may require special education support in the extended day and child care programs.

9. New Business

9.1 Update on the Police Involvement in Schools Consultations

As the appointed representative for SEAC on the steering committee for the review of police involvement in schools, Dr. Mamen submitted a written report on her experience as a member of the committee (Appendix A).

She noted that when the program was being introduced two decades ago, her professional expertise was sought for methodologies to train the school resource officers (SRO), preparing them for direct interactions with youth.

In response to a question by Trustee Boothby, Dr. Mamen stated that the recommendations were not presented to the steering committee in advance of being sent in the Committee of the Whole agenda package because the trustees were provided the opportunity to read the results of the consultation first.

Trustee Campbell requested that the Board of Trustees receive a copy of Dr. Mamen's report.

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:10 p.m.

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Sonia Nadon-Campbell, Chair,  
Special Education Advisory  
Committee