

SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

Wednesday, May 4, 2022, 7:00 pm
Zoom Meeting

Members:	Christine Boothby (Trustee), Rob Campbell (Trustee), Chris Ellis (Trustee), Sonia Nadon-Campbell (Community Representative), Susan Cowin (Community Representative), Uzma Ihsanullah (Down Syndrome Association), Terry Warner (VOICE for deaf and hard of hearing children, Alternate), Cathy Miedema (Association for Bright Children), Dr. Maggie Mamen (Learning Disabilities Association of Ottawa-Carleton), Mourad Graidia (OCASC, alternate rep)
Association Representatives (Non Voting):	Jennifer Titley (Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Teachers' Federation), Jean Trant (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, School Support Personnel), Catherine Houlden (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Teachers), Andrew Winchester (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Alternate)
Staff and Guests:	Lynn Scott (Trustee), Peter Symmonds (Superintendent of Learning Support Services), Nadia Towajj (Superintendent of Program and Learning), Stacey Kay, (Manager, Learning Support Services), Brent Smith (System Principal, Program and Learning Elementary), Amy Hannah (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Kate Stoudt (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Emily Balla, Mental Health Lead (Learning Support Services), Connie Allen (Speech/Learning Pathologist, Learning Support Services), Callia Bickmore (Student Senate Representative), Rebecca Grandis (Senior Board/Committee Coordinator), Mellissa Applewaihe, (Committee Coordinator, Board Services)

1. Call to Order

Chair Nadon-Campbell called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. She acknowledged that the meeting is taking place on unceded Algonquin Territory and thanked the Algonquin people for hosting the meeting on their land.

Chair Nadon-Campbell noted that 5 May 2022 is a day of memory for murdered and missing indigenous women and welcomed Student Senate Representative, Callia Bickmore to the meeting.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by, Trustee Boothby

THAT the agenda be approved.

Carried

3. Delegations

There were no delegations.

4. Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report

4.1 Report , 6 April 2022

Moved by Ms. Miedema

THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee Report dated 6 April 2022 be received.

Carried

4.2 Forward Agenda

The SEAC Forward Agenda was provided for information.

Superintendent Symmonds noted that members should consider items to be included in the forward agenda for the 2022-2023 school year and forward these to himself and Chair Nadon-Campbell.

He noted that de-streaming remains a work in progress and hopes to provide an update to SEAC in June or September.

5. Presentations

5.1 Right to Read Inquiry (B. Smith, S. Kay)

Superintendent Symmonds reported that Learning Support Services (LSS) and Program and Learning (PAL) have been collaborating to collectively develop educational tools to support student learning.

Superintendent Symmonds, Superintendent Towajj (PAL), System Principal Brent Smith (P&L) and Manager Kay (LSS) shared the presentation on the Right to Read Inquiry providing the following highlights:

- Ontario Human Rights Commission has a mandate to protect Human Rights in Ontario and to promote the Human Rights Code;
- The Right to Read Public Inquiry is an independent public inquiry. It was commissioned to ensure Human Rights are protected for all students with disabilities within the Ontario public education system;

- OCDSB actively participated in the inquiry by providing District documentation, resources and data. It is one of eight school boards selected to participate;
- Students below are disproportionately impacted by reading challenges:
 - First Nation, Inuit, Black and other racialized communities;
 - Students with special needs;
 - Low income and ESL households; and
 - Households where parents have low reading/learning abilities.
- Students are supported in their reading level as early as possible. Levels range the tiered approach to intervention;
- OCDSB Cross-Departmental Literacy Team is at the centre of 14 operational key components to support students;
- The inability to read has negative long-term life outcomes for students such as access to post-secondary education and employment prospects;
- OCDSB works on the basis that all students have a fundamental right to read. OCDSB is unique in its investment to increase educator knowledge through a partnership with Dr. Deb Glaser, a leading voice on structured literacy and additional investment and commitment to the Top Ten Tools; and
- Over 324 educators signed up for the first top ten tools course offered and 564 educators from K-12 signed up for the second course offered within 48 hours.

During discussion and in response to questions, the following information was provided:

- OCDSB is guided by recommendations from the Ministry of Education (MOE). The Ministry has a focused team concentrated on the recommendations in the Right to Read inquiry report;
- OCDSB is proactive in areas where knowledge and expertise inform action, such as early screening, structured literacy and increased focus on phonetic awareness. In these cases action(s) will be planned/implemented before receiving an MOE recommendation;
- The District aims to steer programming consistently by focusing on key areas and using proven strategies to ensure students learn to read instead of using pictures as reading cues;

- Clear targets for reading and foundational reading skills for the 2022-2023 school year will be reflected in the Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement and Well-Being;
- Six additional literacy coaches have been hired to reach the goal for all schools to have completed screening by November 2022 with the highest priority schools taking precedence and completing screening by the end of June 2022;
- In a response to a query on the readiness of K-2 students due to the impact of COVID-19 and lack of in-person learning, it was reported that the collaborative work between the Literacy Team and PAL has set a foundation for success with a focus on Scarborough's Reading Rope and the play and activity component to provide an entry point for all learners;
- The youngest learners have been affected the most throughout the pandemic as many families kept children at home which has had social, literacy and numeracy impacts. To address this and prepare students for September, the District is hosting three significant summer programs:
 - K-6 Programming and Support in Literacy and Numeracy Skills offered primarily to Safe Schools and Ministry targeted schools;
 - K-9 Intensive Reading Intervention Summer Program; and
 - Kindergarten Reading Program.
- In response to a query on support provided for adolescent students in specialized programs, it was noted that:
 - System class teachers have had a significant presence in coach support sessions offered;
 - Lexia, the reading intervention application selected was carefully chosen to ensure that it was contextually appropriate for older students. The allocation of Lexia licences to composite sites such as OTSS and Sir Guy Carleton has been doubled. It is possible for schools with a high number of system classes to request extra licences. Lexia licences provided are for use at all grade levels; and
 - There has been a high uptake on both rounds of training offered on the Top Ten Tools from elementary level specialized program classes.
- It was suggested that adolescent students with a lower grade reading level should have access to summer programming;

- The funding from the Ministry is received in a specific grant form at the beginning of the year with an expiry date of typically twelve to eighteen months. New grants may be received for the upcoming year. LSS and PAL actively identify funding opportunities within other departments and collaborate in partnership with those departments to access a portion of the funding;
- To assist development, Early Learning students in French Immersion will be provided with resources that align with those provided to English students; French phonetics are often different so resources are being created that can be used in either French or English;
- Screeners are not appropriate for all students due to the level of English support required, but the same methods used for English students such as encoding/decoding, working with phonics before letters and developing a strong foundation in the first language are adapted and used;
- Research suggests that intervention in a first language transfers to support success in the second language. The District is working cross-departmentally to address the number of students that leave French Immersion;
- The District is partnered with key French as a Second Language (FSL) researchers to ensure current research knowledge on cross-lingual learning and to implement practices aligned to those findings;
- The District is aware that there is an increasing requirement for reading intervention and support across all grade levels due in part to the pandemic. 900 Educators from 147 schools will be participating in the Top Ten Tools support with approximately 30% being FSL educators;
- In accordance with the Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap, the District should ensure that all students can read. The current structure around the Grade 10 Literacy Test requires revision to ensure reading competency at graduation; and
- Significant funding has been received for tutoring and LSS is working to build partnerships with external agencies to provide students with tutoring opportunities.

5.2 Mental Health (Emily Balla)

Mental Health Lead (LSS) Emily Balla presented on Mental Health.

During discussion and in response to questions, the following information was provided:

- Research has proven that school-based interventions are ideal for the promotion of mental health. Where interventions are delivered universally or targeted by school staff, it can reduce students' experience of mental health problems. Programming which is embedded into daily practices yields the highest benefits;
- Following the Open Minds Mental Health Strategy, the Ministry of Education created the Mental Health Lead role in 2011. The role is responsible for the implementation of a three-year mental health and addiction strategy and for developing and reviewing policies and procedures around mental health practices;
- The Mental Health Lead collaborates closely with other district leads, managers of community organizations and School Mental Health Ontario, designs, delivers and oversees training for staff and parents and sits as a Board representative in various sectors to identify service gaps and how to address them as a collective;
- Mental Health Ontario has created a tiered system, the Aligned and Integration Model (AIM) to support students; and
- The Mental Health and Addiction Strategy was developed in 2019 and is in the last year.

Highlights of mental health work this year include:

- 16 stress level courses have been delivered at the elementary level and 17 courses at the secondary level to provide tools for recognizing and dealing with stress;
- COVID-19 had an impact on the outgoing Mental Health and Addiction Strategy, but did not hinder progress;
- A Wellness program focused on Mental Health Literacy for students has been held in 82 classrooms;
- Meaningful youth engagement with clear, culturally appropriate pathways is key to support. A Youth Action Committee on Mental Health was started in the 2021-2022 year;
- A webinar series on The Third Path (a relationship-based approach to student well being and achievement) was attended by over 600 staff;
- Over 500 staff have been trained on The Third Path;
- A book club with administrators is currently in progress, led by the Mental Health Lead and an Equity Lead to assist them in connecting the Equity framework and The Third Path framework;

- Parent partnership is essential to success. Conversations continue to look into the delivery of parent sessions to assist parents to support their children. Creating parent partnerships will be an ongoing consideration in the development of the new Mental Health and Addiction Strategy;
- The creation of a steering committee is in process to examine and reflect on events of the past two years and plan the next steps. The committee will draw on local data in addition to District data to inform this process;
- COVID-19 had an impact on progress but did not prevent work from being completed;
- Itinerant Educational Assistants provide class-wide and student-specific support for kindergarten, elementary and secondary educator teams and students. 6 additional assistants joined the Secondary Team this year. As a result, 700 students have benefited by attending Wellness Matters presentations, a mental health literacy program which addresses mental health, stigma, and pathways to mental health cares; and
- The theme for Mental Health Week (2 May to 8 May 2022) is "Empathy." Schools have received announcements and lesson plans with a theme for each day of the week. Parents are also receiving information on the themes and how to incorporate them into their daily activities with their children.

6. Department Update

6.1 Superintendent's Report

COVID-19 Update

Superintendent Symmonds reported that:

- Mask requirements have been reintroduced for students, staff and visitors to OCDSB buildings;
- The number of class closures decreased a little in the previous week which could indicate a downward trend or a plateau; and
- The ability to replace staff consistently in schools continues to present a challenge that exacerbates classroom closures.

SEAC Budget

Superintendent Symmonds advised that staff continue to work to finalize the budget for presentation to the Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting

on 25 May 2022. He anticipates sharing more detail at the next SEAC meeting on 1 June 2022.

Dr. Bettina Love

Superintendent Symmonds noted that in celebration of Education Week and Mental Health Week, students and families are invited to attend a virtual conversation with Dr. Bettina Love on 5 May 2022. Dr. Love will be discussing the struggles and possibilities of commitment to an abolitionist goal of educational freedom that moves away from notions of reform and beyond "the educational survival complex."

Chair Nadon-Campbell noted that COVID-19 tests are available to students, but are not automatically distributed. Students need to request the tests.

a. Storefront Update (oral) (K. Stoudt)

System Principal Stoudt provided an update on Storefront.

During discussion and in response to questions, the following points were noted:

- The Storefront program provides training in the development of independence and employment skills for students aged 18-21 with mild intellectual and developmental disabilities. The program assists students with the transition from secondary school to post-secondary school life;
- The two-year program recently expanded the eligibility criteria for the 2021-2022 school year to include students aged 18 to address the increasing disengagement noted by staff in some students at this age;
- The program provides work experience with student support from one full-time teacher and one full-time educational assistant (EA);
- 12 students were enrolled in the program for the 2021-2022 school year.
- 3 students will be leaving the program this year, one of whom has obtained paid employment;
- 12 students will be enrolled for the 2022-2023 school year;
- Students from the General Learning Program (GLP) and elsewhere can be referred to the program. Their eligibility is assessed by examination of the cognitive, intellectual, social, emotional and behavioural profiles;

- Students are referred to Storefront by schools in consultation with families and there is currently a small waitlist;
- Students spend half a day in the classroom focusing on workplace training such as:
 - WHMIS;
 - Self-advocacy in the workplace;
 - Interactions with employers;
 - Understanding the supervisor role and relationship;
 - Computer skills;
 - How to plan and navigate the journey to work using different modes of transport; and
 - How to apply for government-issued ID and other documentation.
- Students spend the second half of the day gaining practical work experience. During the second year in the program, the work experience offered shifts to reflect the individual interests of the students and can provide a pathway to permanent employment;
- Work placements have been secured in kitchens, clothing stores, automotive departments and more;
- Students attended a career fair at the Shaw Centre to highlight the benefits of the program;
- Several students took part in a tour of the Adaptive Learning Program and the AAADD program (Academic Assistance for Adults with Developmental Disabilities) at Algonquin College;
- It is important to prepare for staff succession planning by documenting best practices and sharing internal knowledge; and
- Should staffing changes be required (e.g., as a result of retirement), appropriate staff would be selected by the administrative team at Ottawa Technical Secondary School (OTSS). Capacity in the program is limited due to the nature of the role and the requirement for teachers to participate in support of student work placements. Work is currently in progress to investigate how to provide better support in community services and workplace programs to students who would not be seeking post-secondary opportunities.

7. Committee Reports

7.1 Committee of the Whole

There was no report on the Committee of the Whole.

7.2 Committee of the Whole, Budget

There was no report on the Committee of the Whole Budget.

7.3 Advisory Committee on Extended Day and Child Care Programs

Mr. Warner reported on a presentation given by Manager Cyr. Highlights from the presentation include:

- OCDSB RECES support children with exceptionalities, but lack of training leads to issues with the early identification process. The Advisory Committee on Extended Day and Child Care Programs (EDCCP) is addressing the issue by looking at how to mitigate current constraints affecting this;
- EDCCP intends to have all 66 EDP sites licenced by 1 September 2022 to meet Ministry requirements. Licencing is a prerequisite to the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) funding for daycare;
- It is likely that the funding for daycare will not translate to \$10 per day for all families;
- Higher costs will not affect the Snack Programs offered; and
- EDCCP, Chief Financial Officer Carson and Board staff are working hard to advance the committee support.

8. New Business

There was no new business raised.

9. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9.36 p.m.

The next SEAC meeting is on 1 June 2022.

Sonia Nadon-Campbell, Chair,
Special Education Advisory
Committee