



## SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

**Wednesday, May 3, 2023, 7:00 pm  
Zoom Meeting**

- Members: Allison Bunney (Community Representative), Susan Cowin (Community Representative), Sonja Elliot (Autism Ontario, Ottawa Chapter), Johanna MacCormick (Ontario Parents of Visually Impaired Children (OPVIC)), Dr. Maggie Mamen (Learning Disabilities Association of Ottawa-Carleton (LDAO-C)), Hoda Seens (Community Representative), Terry Warner (VOICE for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children, Alternate), Donna Dickson (Trustee), Nili Kaplan-Myrth (Trustee), Lynn Scott (Trustee)
- Association Representatives (Non Voting): Connie Allen (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, PSSP), Nancy Dlouhy (Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Operations Committee), Catherine Houlden (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Teachers), Andrew Winchester (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Alternate)
- Staff and Guests: Suzanne Nash (Trustee), Peter Symmonds (Superintendent of Learning Support Services), Emily Balla (Manager, Mental Health/Critical Services), Stacey Kay (Manager of Learning Support Services), Deborah Lyon (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Kate Stoudt (System Principal, Learning Support Services), James Baker (Board/Committee Coordinator)

1. Call to Order

Chair Sue Cowin called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

2. Acknowledgement of Territorial Lands

Chair Cowin acknowledged that the meeting is taking place on unceded Algonquin Homelands and thanked the Algonquin people for hosting the meeting on their land.

3. Approval of the Agenda

**Moved by Mr. Warner,**

**THAT the agenda be approved.**

**Carried**

#### 4. Delegations

##### 4.1 Steve Legault, re Student Exclusions

Mr. Legault advised that he is a parent of a student in an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) class at the Ottawa Carleton District School Board (OCDSB). Mr. Legault shared his concerns relating to governance and accountability around exclusions for special education students and potential solutions. Mr. Legault spoke about the safety concerns within the classroom and the impact on students who are excluded and are not successful in utilizing the administrative processes to reintegrate into the classroom. Mr. Legault recommended a reporting process at each SEAC meeting with respect to exclusions, development of a policy and procedures for return to school plans, and the appointment of a special education ombudsman.

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

- Reports are regularly presented to SEAC, based on availability regarding the numbers of student exclusions;
- A policy regarding student exclusions was passed by the Board in June of 2022;
- A suggestion was made to formalize the process of partial exclusions with the use of a letter to parents;
- Work is ongoing with mental health and the Human Rights and Equity Advisor to ensure policies and procedures are being followed; and
- Development of the exclusions procedure is in the final stages.

#### 5. Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report

##### 5.1 SEAC Report 17 April 2023

**Moved by Mr. Warner,**

**THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee Report dated 17 April 2023 report be received, as amended.**

**Carried**

Trustee Kaplan-Myrth noted that there was no notation regarding a disruption by the member of the public. She asked that the disruption be recorded in the minutes.

##### 5.2 Forward Agenda

The SEAC forward agenda was provided for information.

Superintendent Symmonds asked the membership to consider items to be added to the forward agenda and to reach out via email to share their suggestions.

## 6. Matters for Action

### 6.1 Ad Hoc Policy Committee Representative

Superintendent Symmonds provided information to the members regarding the Ad Hoc Policy Committee and provided highlights from the terms of reference.

Superintendent Symmonds opened the floor for nominations. No nominations were made.

Superintendent Symmonds suggested that members consider participating as a non-voting representative and the item would be brought back at the 7 June 2023 meeting.

## 7. Presentations

### 7.1 Autism Ontario (Sonja Elliot)

Ms. Elliott provided a presentation on Autism Ontario that gave an overview of the services and supports that the charity offers.

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

- Autism does not fit a mold but is a spectrum and can exist with a co-condition with multiple exceptionalities that are exclusive from one another;
- A large number of families are not aware of the supports that are available, needs exist for a more open dialogue;
- A suggestion was made to ensure that placements are available to students along with supports;
- It was noted by multiple medical doctors that they observe patients who are turned down for special programs or that diagnosis are not made until late in development and are often misconstrued as other conditions;
- Waitlists exist both at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) and in the OCDSB for assessments that are in excess of two years;
- The OCDSB does have a team of Psychologists, and other professionals, to provide supports;

- Concerns were expressed regarding the need for assessments at early ages;
- Staff advised that the OCDSB does provide the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) assessment is available and support staff receive training;
- There have been numerous changes with respect to Ontario autism program that have caused students and families to seek assistance in the community for Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) and Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI) therapies; and
- There are 3,000 to 4,000 students that require placements in schools in which the Ministry of Education has not yet created a transition plan from therapies to schools.

## 7.2 Mental Health Strategy Consultation (E. Balla)

Mental Health Lead Balla provided a presentation on Mental Health Strategy for consultation and to build a plan that is meaningful and that supports students.

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

- It was suggested that the gaps in services relating to identifiable groups is an issue that exists province wide;
- It was noted that due to a lack of resources, students are not receiving support until they are in crisis;
- Staff are working to build collaborative partnerships to gain resources and to build capacity among all staff in the District;
- It was noted that new changes to the grade 7 and 8 curriculum will incorporate mental health;
- It was noted that students in rural areas face challenges due to limited access to resources or lack of awareness of how to access resources;
- It was noted that students in crisis have pathways available through CHEO with respect to urgent care and risk assessments; and
- Youth Action Committees are having conversations through social media to assist students in learning about the resources that are available to them.

\*\*\* Following a break at 8:55 p.m., Chair Cowin called the meeting back to order at 9:07 p.m. \*\*\*

## 8. Department Update

### 8.1 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Symmonds reported that a large number of Priority Partnership Fund (PPF) grants had been applied for and that he continues to wait on their status. He noted that conversations have been ongoing with respect to transfer payment agreements and the finer details of these funds.

Superintendent Symmonds reported that the staff recommended budget will be completed at the end of May 2023 and presented at the Committee of the Whole, Budget meeting on 6 June 2023. He added that the membership may want to have a conversation at the 7 June 2023 SEAC meeting to provide feedback to subsequent Committee of the Whole, Budget meetings.

Superintendent Symmonds reported that the changes to the SEAC policy regarding the addition of two Indigenous organization representatives had been approved by the Board. He advised that staff were working with the Indigenous Education Council (IEC) to identify interested representatives.

Superintendent Symmonds reported that tutoring funding, that was set to expire at the end of March 2023, had been extended until the end of June 2023. This funding has allowed the District to continue its partnership with the Learning Disabilities Association of Ottawa-Carleton (LDAO-C) until the end of June 2023.

Superintendent Symmonds reported that the Ministry has introduced a mandatory mental health curriculum for students in grades 7 and 8. A mental health literacy addition will be added to the grade 10 careers curriculum. Elementary level modules will align with the physical education and health curriculum. The grade 7 and 8 additions will be implemented in September 2023 and the grade 10 additions will be implemented in September 2024.

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

- The Art of Play program had received significant uptake in schools. Funding for the program is now part of the Grants for Student Needs (GSN) and are no longer part of the PPF funding; and
- There are 28 schools participating in the Art of Play program. Due to the high level of interest, additional toys and bins were required.

### 8.2 Special Education Plan (Standards)

Superintendent Symmonds noted that staff had been taking input into consideration as it related to the Special Education Standards. He added

that a report would be provided in June 2023, at which time a motion for review would be required to put it before the Board. Superintendent Symmonds noted that the Board would review the report at the end of June 2023 and it would be posted to the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) website in July 2023.

9. Committee Reports

9.1 Board Meeting

There was no report from the Board.

9.2 Committee of the Whole Meeting

There was no report from the Committee of the Whole.

10. New Business

There was no new business raised.

11. Upcoming Meeting Dates

Meeting dates were provided for information.

12. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:23 p.m.

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Sue Cowin, Vice-Chair, Special  
Education Advisory Committee