



SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

Wednesday, April 3, 2024, 7:00 pm
Trustees' Committee Room
133 Greenbank Road
Ottawa, Ontario

Members: Cathy Miedema (Association for Bright Children), Susan Cowin (Community Representative), Allison Bunney (Community Representative), Hoda Seens (Community Representative), Sonja Elliott (Autism Ontario), Lori-Ann Bradley (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder/Ontario Network Expertise (FASD/ONE), Jess Whitley (Inclusion Action in Ontario), Anthony Wong (Ottawa Carleton Assembly of School Councils), Lindsay Copland (VOICE for Children Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing), Donna Dickson (Trustee), Nili Kaplan-Myrth (Trustee), Lynn Scott (Trustee)

Association Representatives (Non Voting): Connie Allen (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, PSSP), Catherine Houlden (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Teachers), Nancy Dlouhy (Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Operations Committee)

Staff and Guests: Suzanne Nash (Trustee), Donna Blackburn (Trustee), Peter Symmonds (Superintendent of Learning Support Services), Stacey Kay (General Manager, Learning Support Services), Kate Stoudt (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Deborah Lyon (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Maya Kishida (Program Manager, Speech Language Pathology), (Mellissa Applewaithe (Board/Committee Coordinator)

1. Call to Order

Chair Miedema called the meeting to order at 7:09 p.m.

2. Acknowledgement of Territorial Lands

Chair Miedema acknowledged that this meeting is taking place on unceded Algonquin Homelands and thanked the Algonquin Nations for their stewardship of these lands since time immemorial.

3. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by Jess Whitley,

THAT the agenda be approved.

Carried

4. Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report

4.1 6 March 2024, SEAC Report

Moved by Trustee Kaplan-Myrth,

THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee report, dated 6 March 2024, be received.

Carried

4.2 Forward Agenda

The SEAC forward agenda was provided for information.

5. Presentations

5.1 Elementary Program Review (P. Buffone, Director of Education)

Director Buffone provided an overview of the process that led to Report 24-052, Elementary Program Review, which the Board of Trustees approved at the Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting on 2 April 2024.

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

- Following one-to-one meetings with trustees and senior staff, the District will begin a program review at the elementary level, which emerged as a priority area during initial discussions;
- The District plans to undertake a consultation process between April and June 2024 to inform a conceptualized review framework for presentation to trustees in the fall of the 2024-2025 school year;
- It was noted that special needs students tend to experience too many school or program transitions;
- It was noted that a disproportionate number of students with special needs are streamed into the English system;
- It was noted that transportation can present a barrier to program accessibility for all students;
- It was suggested that providing a feedback mechanism for the parents and families of special education students would assist the District in reaching more families within the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB);

- It was noted that specialized programming provides support for the teaching of life skills to autistic students;
- A concern was raised regarding how an inclusive environment would provide support for the variety of comorbidities and developmental delays that can exist for learners on the autistic spectrum;
- A concern was raised regarding how the mainstream classroom could support special needs students at their individual skill levels;
- It was noted that an inclusive model may require safety plans to be in place for all students in a mainstream classroom; and
- It was noted that gifted students have unique needs and benefit from learning with peers in a specialized environment.

Chair Miedema noted that the conversation would continue at a future date and requested that members send her further comments by email.

5.2 Supports for Students with Deaf/Hard of Hearing Needs

System Principal Lyon provided a presentation on Support for Students with Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH) Needs.

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

- The OCDSB provides two D/HH specialized program classes which support students with profound hearing loss and whose method of communication is American Sign Language (ASL);
- Learning Support Services (LSS) plans to examine the programs in conjunction with the Elementary Program Review; and
- LSS is collaborating with People, Culture and Leadership to work on a skill-specific recruitment strategy due to the lack of staff in the province who are trained in either ASL or the needs of DHH students.

5.3 Supports for Students with Blind/Low Vision Needs

System Principal Stoudt provided a presentation on Supports for Students with Blind/Low Vision Needs.

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

- The OCDSB delivers the Blind/Low Vision program in partnership with the Ottawa Catholic School Board (OCSB);

- Approximately 50 to 60% of Blind/Low Vision needs students are served under OCDSB programming;
- The program offers an itinerant teacher model for students based on their functional vision assessments. Some received direction support with Braille instructions, others would be monitored; and
- OCDSB students have access to attend a provincial school for students with Blind/Low Vision needs.

6. Department Update

6.1 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Symmonds provided his report and noted the following:

- The recently announced provincial budget includes an investment of \$18 million for the 2024-2025 school year to support the most vulnerable students;
- Approximately \$8 million is intended for dedicated resources to assist students with special education needs in navigating the school system;
- \$10 million is for the provision of increased classroom support for those students with the highest level of need;
- The budget provides increased funding to support students who are accessing the core programs of the Ontario Autism Program;
- The budget represents an investment of \$65 million for dedicated educators to work in small groups or individually with students from Kindergarten to grade 3; and
- Speaker, author, and autism consultant Judy Endow will lead a virtual session for families and staff on “Autistically Thriving: Living a Self-Determined Life Based on Autistic Neurology” on 4 April 2024.

7. Committee Reports

7.1 Board

There was no report from the Board.

7.2 Committee of the Whole

Trustee Nash provided a report on the 2 April 2024, Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting.

It was noted that Board Services will circulate Report 24-052, Elementary Program Review and Report 24-040, Progress Update on Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap to SEAC members.

7.3 Committee of the Whole, Budget

Anthony Wong provided an update on the 19 March 2024, COW Budget meeting.

In response to a query on whether any school boards in Ontario or Canada have established endowment funds, Superintendent Symmonds requested that the question be emailed to himself and Chair Miedema for redirection to the finance department.

8. New Business

Lori-Anne Bradley provided an update regarding Bill 172.

Sonja Elliot requested that SEAC members requiring autism resources to support World Autism Awareness Month contact her.

9. Upcoming Meeting Dates

The upcoming meeting dates were provided for information.

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:53 p.m.

Cathy Miedema, Chair, Special
Education Advisory Committee