



## **SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT**

**Wednesday, October 9, 2024, 7:00 pm**  
**Trustees' Committee Room**  
**133 Greenbank Road**  
**Ottawa, Ontario**

Members: Cathy Miedema (Association for Bright Children), Sonja Elliott (Autism Ontario), Lori-Ann Bradley (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder/Ontario Network Expertise (FASD/ONE)), Jess Whitley (Inclusion Action in Ontario), Mike Marta (Learning Disabilities Association of Ottawa-Carleton), Waneek Horn-Miller (Indigenous Community Representative), 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): Catherine Houlden (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation), Suzanne Nash (Trustee)

Staff and Guests: Jesse Mark (Executive Officer, Corporate Services), Kate Stoudt (Acting Superintendent of Learning Support Services), Kenan Omercajic (Strategic Business Analyst), Deborah Lyon (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Christine Kessler (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Emily Balla (Program Manager, Learning Support Services), Stacey Kay (General Manager, Learning Support Services), Tamara Persaud (Committee Coordinator, Board Services)

1. Call to Order

Chair Cathy Miedema called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

2. Acknowledgement of Homelands

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 Trustee Dickson,  
THAT the agenda be approved.**

**Carried**

4. Delegations

4.1 Nicole Robert, re Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan

Nicole Roberts shared her view on the Ottawa Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) policies regarding autism and classroom support. Nicole Roberts expressed the desire for more cultural safety, social interventions and environmental accommodations for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

4.2 Danica Ainger, re Educational Assistants

Danica Ainger expressed the need for additional educational assistant (EA) support in elementary classrooms for students with ASD. She advocated for students who require a safe space and support during the school day in order to promote learning, social interaction, and consistency for students on the autism spectrum.

5. Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report

5.1 4 September 2024, SEAC Report

Moved by Jess Whitley,

THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee report, dated 4 September 2024, be received.

Trustee Scott requested that Trustee Blackburn and Trustee Nash be removed from the guest attendance and added under non voting representatives.

**Moved by Jess Whitley,**

**THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee report, dated 4 September 2024, be received, as amended.**

**Carried**

5.2 Forward Agenda

The SEAC forward agenda was provided for information.

6. Presentations

6.1 Mental Health Strategy (Emily Balla)

Program Manager, Emily Balla of Mental Health Services provided an overview of the Annual Mental Health and Well-Being Action Plan for

2024-2025. She noted that the Action Plan is focused on creating partnerships with students, staff, families/caregivers and communities to ensure a sense of belonging in schools and classrooms, to build skills to foster positive mental health and well-being, and to bridge identity-affirming clinical mental health services, when required.

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

- Program Manager Balla highlighted the complexity of needs at this time and the importance of intentionally focusing on student voice and leadership. She noted that emphasis was placed on garnering student voices to inform the mental health strategy and action plan this school year;
- Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) 169 was released by the Ministry of Education in July 2023, providing direction to all Ontario school boards on student mental health services, multi-tiered interventions, accountability measures, and enhancing mental health literacy;
- Clear themes emerged through research conducted by LSS of students' desire to have conversations about mental health within the classroom, clear pathways to mental health services, the need for culturally responsive care and increased opportunities for student leadership; and
- Many actions have been taken to move the Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan forward including the roll out of Ministry mandated mental health modules created by School Mental Health Ontario (SMHO).

#### 7. Elementary Program Review Update and Feedback

Executive Officer Mark and Strategic Business Analyst Omercajic provided an update on the Elementary Program Review (EPR) and requested feedback from SEAC members through the online platform, ThoughtExchange.

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

- Executive Officer Mark summarized the previous steps taken in the Elementary Program Review and the current status of the consultation phase of the review. Emphasis was placed on the need for feedback from the OCDSB advisory committees to navigate the production of potential models;

- The OCDSB has conducted literature reviews regarding inclusive education, and French as a second language in the elementary programs to inform practical considerations before new models are proposed;
- Strategic Business Analyst Omercajic noted that SEAC members can continue to contribute to the ThoughtExchange for two weeks following the meeting in order to provide ample opportunity to share their thoughts on the current findings of the EPR;
- LSS noted that three Indigenous coordinators have been hired, one of whom is working at the Odell Friendship Centre and LSS is working closely with the Indigenous Education team to ensure that the OCDSB is being mindful when working with Indigenous students;
- Members expressed concern regarding the inclusive education report and potential bias in the research perspectives. It was noted that the report only includes one type of education model but should be diversified to include research on different classroom models and special education services to gain a more all-encompassing view of inclusive education;
- SEAC members requested that the practices of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) be taken into consideration when conducting research for the EPR, as the TDSB has well-established special education and inclusion programs, as well as the largest elementary school population in the province; and
- In the Winter of 2025, a proposal will be presented to the Board of Trustees, for approval of proposed changes in models.

Chair Miedema called a recess at 8:56pm.

The meeting was called back to order at 9:03pm.

## 8. Department Update

### 8.1 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Stoudt reported the following:

- Christine Kessler was welcomed as the interim System Principal of Learning Support Services. She will be acting principal until December 2024;
- Changes have been made to Specialized Equipment Allocation (formerly Special Equipment Amount) funding guidelines. The special equipment allocation has been changed from a per pupil amount to a formula funding amount that is based on average daily enrollment. OCDSB will be given a lump sum. The claims based component has changed significantly as well. Singular items over

\$5,000 are the only things able to claim, this will be offset by the formula funding;

- After School Skills Development (ASSD) programs will be held in the fall of 2024, including the Art of Play program and PEERS (Program for Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills). Both programs support students on the autism spectrum to promote social skill needs and improve classroom interactions;
- An update was provided from Program Services regarding literacy screeners. In the Spring of 2024, a Ministry mandate required that all students between kindergarten and grade 2 be screened using one of the Ministry mandated screening tools. The OCDSB is using Acadiance. About 75% of all students have been screened and Reading Intervention Teachers (RITs) are being deployed to schools in five week cycles to support students who are below the benchmark; and
- The OCDSB Family Conference will take place on 2 November 2024, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at Woodroffe High School to help support students' educational journeys. Sam Demma, a noted youth entrepreneur, author and inspirational speaker, will be the keynote speaker. OCDSB parents, caregivers, students, staff and community members are invited to register on the OCDSB website.

## 8.2 Special Education Plan (Standards)

System Principal Lyon summarized the essential work being done in the Special Education Plan and provided an overview of the two new standards.

### a. Early Identification Procedures/Intervention Strategies

The purpose of this standard is to provide the details of the Board's procedures and intervention strategies to the Ministry and to the public. It highlights the requirements for student registration in OCDSB schools.

### b. Equipment

The purpose of this standard is to share with families that the District provides individualized equipment for students with special needs. The central LSS team is working to align the formula-based component and the claims-based component.

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

- Funding for equipment can also be used for staffing supports such as speech and language pathologists, communicative

disorder assistants, occupational therapists etc, in the District; and

- Students are being proactively screened in collaboration with parents and caregivers, as well as support staff. Educators also employ early identification tools to assess student's abilities in the classroom. Based on observations from educators, meetings, interventions are scheduled with parents/caregivers to share observations and strategies to promote academic success. Annually, in January the OCDSB holds a Kindergarten open house in which the screening and identification process begins, in order to provide each student with necessary support and promote a smooth transition into school.

9. Committee Reports

9.1 Board

There was no report from the Board.

9.2 Committee of the Whole

Trustee Scott provided an update from the 10 September 2024 and 8 October 2024 Committee of the Whole meetings. She noted that the Elementary Program Review is in the consultation phase and emphasized the importance of receiving feedback from the advisory committees.

9.3 Committee of the Whole, Budget

There were no Committee of the Whole, Budget meetings in September.

10. New Business

There was no new business.

11. Upcoming Meeting Dates

The upcoming meeting dates were provided for information.

12. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

---

Cathy Miedema, Chair, Special  
Education Advisory Committee

