



SPECIAL BOARD PUBLIC MINUTES

Wednesday, February 26, 2025

Board Room

Administration Building

133 Greenbank Road

Ottawa, Ontario

Trustees Present: Justine Bell (electronic communication), Donna Dickson, Lyra Evans (electronic communication), Julia Fortey, Jennifer Jennekens, Nili Kaplan-Myrth, Cathryne Milburn, Suzanne Nash, Amanda Presley, Lynn Scott

Staff Present: Sharanya Sivasathiyanathan (Student Trustee, electronic communication), Ezio De Stefano (Student Trustee, electronic communications), Jeffrey Zhang (Student Trustee, electronic communication), Pino Buffone (Director of Education), Brett Reynolds (Associate Director, Academic), Jesse Mark (General Counsel, Governance & Legal Services), James Proulx (Executive Officer of Technological Support Services), Shawn Lehman (Superintendent of Employee Services), A.J Keene (Superintendent of Education), Andrea Rahim (General Manager, Research Evaluation and Analytics), Sandy Owens (General Manager, Business & Learning Technologies), Michael Guilbault (Content Creator, Digital Multimedia Technician), Darren Gatley (General Manager, Governance Services), Kathy Mak (Board/Committee Coordinator)

1. Call to Order -- Chair of the Board

Chair Scott called the public meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

2. Acknowledgment of Territorial Lands

Chair Scott acknowledged that the 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 Presley, seconded by Trustee Kaplan-Myrth,
THAT the agenda be approved.

Chair Scott requested that item 5.1.18, Oral Delegation Max Barnett, re Alternative Program, be moved to 5.1.4.

Moved by Trustee Presley, seconded by Trustee Kaplan-Myrth,

THAT the agenda be approved, as amended.

Carried

4. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were filed.

5. Delegations

Chair Scott reviewed the meeting process and decorum for the Special Board meeting to hear delegations on the Elementary Program Review (EPR).

5.1 Oral

1. Alicia Vrieswyk, re EPR

Alicia Vrieswyk voiced her concern about the number of supports available to students, the mental well-being of students integrating into their community schools, the impact on the overall classroom environment, and suggested the District focus on providing accessible education opportunities for all students.

2. Courtney Fontaine, re OCV Elementary School

Courtney Fontaine expressed the need to maintain specialized programs to ensure students with developmental and learning complexities can develop socially and academically.

3. Danica Ainger, re Neurodivergent Student Struggle in Mainstream

Danica Ainger recounted her child's experience in mainstream classrooms noting the lack of resources to support her son, the effect of dysregulation on the classroom environment and peers, and the negative impact on his mental well-being.

In response to a query from Trustee Presley, Danica confirmed the school her son attended had two (2) educational assistants (EA) available for the school with a population of 300 students and he is often removed socially due to his dysregulation.

4. Max Barnett, re Alternative Program

Max Barnett provided a first-hand experience of the alternative program and highlighted the positive way the program impacted his life socially and academically.

5. Jennifer Blair, re Special Education Class

Jennifer Blair expressed concern regarding the elimination of specialized classes and noted the potential disruptive and harmful behaviour that may be exhibited by students integrating into mainstream classrooms due to insufficient support in place.

6. Kate Dudley Logue, re Alternative Schools

Kate Dudley expressed concern regarding family struggles due to the lack of EA support in school for students with modified schedules. She expressed the opinion that educators are hesitant to voice their concerns at the risk of being reprimanded and suggested trustees reach out to educators to gain authentic feedback on the proposed models.

Trustee Lyra Evans suggested Kate Dudley email the report from Ontario Autism Coalition, Special Education Survey to Governance Services. Kate clarified that this report can be found electronically on the Ontario Autism Coalition website.

In response to a query from Trustee Kaplan-Myrth, Kate noted that due to the lack of support, parents often will make accommodations to pick up their child from school throughout the day.

7. Krista Craven, re Alternative Elementary Programs

Krista Craven noted the positive impact Riverview Alternative Public School has on her child, praising it for its educational environment and culture, focus on outdoor learning, and diverse student body.

8. Laura Altorio, re Alternative Programs

Laura Altorio recounted her eldest child's mental health decline and social anxiety in a community school, and the positive change in academic success and confidence once her child attended an alternative program. She suggested the District take advantage of the successes of alternative programs to draw families into the District.

In response to a query from Trustee Kaplan-Myrth regarding the implementation of the alternative school philosophy into mainstream schools to ensure accessibility to all students, Laura expressed the view that it would require a cultural shift and a large amount of training for educators.

9. Laura MacKenzie, re Alternative Programs

Laura MacKenzie provided a first-hand experience of her child benefiting from the alternative program and noted the improvement in attendance, confidence and the peer relationships formed, and

urged the Board to reconsider the elimination of the alternate program.

10. Lindsay Zarboni, re Special Education

Lindsay Zarboni recounted her son's decision to attend the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) due to the outstanding support that was provided and she praised the quality of support provided by early childhood educators (ECE). She noted her son's integration into mainstream programs and the deterioration of his behaviour, attributing this to social exclusion and lack of support.

In response to queries, Lindsay clarified that her son does not have direct support in Grade 1 due to the low number of EAs in his school.

11. Tia Wathra, re Special Education

Tia Wathra discussed her daughter's experience in the local community school noting that staff requested that her daughter reduce her school day due to staff shortages. She noted her daughter's personal growth, the positive difference in the education quality and attention to detail from educators in special classes, and urged the District to retain the special education classes.

12. Nicole Genyn, re Alternative Programs

Nicole Genyn discussed her son's mental health decline in mainstream school, her personal misconceptions of the alternative program, and the first-hand experience of the benefits of being in the program. Nicole noted her son's increased confidence and mental health improvement since attending the program.

In response to a query from Trustee Kaplan-Myrth, Nicole clarified that her son often was excluded and discriminated against.

13. Nicole Robert, re Special Education Classes

Nicole Roberts shared her son's experience transitioning into a mainstream class from a primary special needs (PSN) class and noted his dysregulated behaviour due to the sensory environment. She added the PSN class provided an environment to enable her son to learn at his grade level.

14. Pamma Watson, re Alternative Schools

Pamma Watson praised the alternative program for its focus on student learning, equity, and well-being. She noted the program's successes and suggested the District promote alternative schools

to increase student enrolment and adjust student transportation to ensure there is greater access for families.

In response to a query from Trustee Nash, Pamma suggested the District collaborate with other school boards to combine bus routes, provide walking options or provide busing to low income families to promote enrolment in alternative schools.

The meeting recessed at 7:39 p.m. and resumed at 7:49 p.m.

15. Sarah Boardman, re Elementary Program Review (EPR)

Sarah Boardman discussed the importance of maintaining the alternative program and referenced data indicating that students are achieving better academically. She added that the elimination of the program will harm vulnerable students and families who require the support.

16. Sarra Chalabi, re Elementary Program Review (EPR)

Sarra Chalabi was not in attendance.

17. Shabana Beg, re Alternative School Programs

Shabana Beg shared her child's experience in a community school and noted the negative peer influence and prejudiced environment. She compared community and alternative schools, highlighting the inclusive nature and focus on student curiosity as part of the curriculum. She suggested the District maintain alternative schools and model community schools on alternative schools.

In response to a query from Trustee Kaplan-Myrth, Shabana noted for mainstream schools to adopt the model from alternative school, an open communication must be established and will require a number of years to be fully implemented.

18. Tara Robertson, re ASAC

Tara Robertson was not in attendance.

19. Melissa Kay, re PSN Class

Melissa Kay shared her daughter's positive experience at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) school highlighting her development and skills learned. She urged trustees to consider the number of EAs that will be required to support students with higher needs if they are integrated into mainstream classrooms with the same level of attention and quality of education as PSN classes.

20. Larisa Gedz, re Alternative Schools

Larisa Gedz drew from her daughter's experience and discussed the importance of allowing students the ability to decide on the school they would like to attend. She praised the strong sense of community and shift in focus from grades to learning and social interactions. Larisa urged the Board to maintain alternative schools and allow students the opportunity to choose the type of education they would like to pursue.

21. Colleen Ovens, re Alternative Schools

Colleen Ovens compared her child's experience in community school to alternative schools and noted the academic and emotional development in the alternative program. She noted the strong relationship between the school and students, the collaboration among students, the promotion of inquiry-based learning, and the partnership between family and educator that develops student confidence and motivation that results in a sense of belonging and success.

22. Crofton Steers, re Alternative Programs

Crofton Steers shared the positive impact alternative school has on his daughter and highlighted the collaboration among students, the focus on learning instead of grades, and the non-competitive environment. He suggested the District promote alternative programs and consider effective methods in increasing student enrollment.

In response to a query from Trustee Lyra Evans, Crofton suggested the alternative program should be updated to resonate with the greater community.

Trustee Presley called a point of order noting that the Alternative School Advisory Committee (ASAC) has offered to create promotional videos for alternative schools; however this requires additional time as this is not the priority for the Communications team.

Trustee Scott clarified that the point of order is not required but will be allowed due to the important information being provided.

In response to a query from Trustee Kaplan-Myrth, Crofton noted that education should not be standardized and highlighted the importance of allowing students the choice in the kind of education they would like to pursue.

23. Julie McIsaac (represented by Jenn Wallner), re Alternative Programs

Jenn Wallner discussed the importance of alternative schools as it provides an inclusive and accessible program for students. She noted the focus on understanding students' needs over grades, the holistic learning style and non-competitive nature of the program. Jenn urged the District to reconsider the elimination of alternative programs and acknowledged the value alternative programs bring to the District.

In response to a query from Trustee Kaplan-Myrth, Jenn noted that families in Ontario favor the competitive model in schools; however, students should have the choice to attend an alternative school where the environment prioritizes learning instead of competition.

5.2 Written

1. Rebecca Davidson, re Alternative Program

Rebecca Davidson provided a written submission recounting the positive way the alternative program has impacted her child's education and noted the harm that would be caused if the District removes alternative programs.

2. Adam Barnett, re Alternative Program

Adam Barnett provided a written submission discussing his child's struggles in mainstream school and the positive success and impact the alternative program had on his child.

3. Brecken Hancock, re Alternative Program

Brecken Hancock provided a written submission discussing the reasons why alternative programs were chosen over mainstream classes, the quality of educators and quality of education provided to students.

4. Katherine Occhiuto, re Alternative Program

Katherine Occhiuto provided a written submission noting the positive impact the alternative program has on the well-being of neurodiverse and alternative learners and urged the District to retain the alternative program to ensure there is inclusion and equity for all students.

5. Shawn Altorio, re Alternative School

Shawn Altorio provided a written submission discussing the complex learning styles of students and the alternative program's ability to adjust to the varied learning styles ensuring students can thrive in the program. It was noted that integrating students from

alternative programs into mainstream programs without the necessary support will result in additional classroom disruptions.

6. Katie Graham, re Alternative Program

Katie Graham provided a written submission expressing concern regarding the elimination of the alternative program and noted the EPR does not cater to students with diverse learning styles; however, the alternative program provides success and a sense of belonging and community to students that is far more important than the geographical location of a school site.

7. Jenn Wallner, re Alternative Program

Jenn Wallner provided a written submission noting the potential generational impact the District will have if the alternative program is eliminated.

8. Miles White, re Alternative School

Miles White provided a written submission noting the importance of alternative programs and urged the District to retain the program.

Chair Scott and Director Buffone thanked the delegates for their time and noted that the Board will consider possible solutions to address the concerns that were raised.

Director Buffone clarified that the CHEO school program is not part of the District's sites and, therefore, not considered as part of the EPR.

6. Matters for Information

There were no matters for information.

7. Adjournment

Chair Scott noted that additional information regarding school boundaries and school grade configurations will be posted on the District website on 28 February 2025 as part of the agenda for the Committee of the Whole meeting on 4 March 2025.

The meeting adjourned at 10:28 p.m.

Lynn Scott, Chair of the Board

