



SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

Wednesday, March 5, 2025, 7:00 pm
Trustees' Committee Room
133 Greenbank Road
Ottawa, Ontario

Members: Susan Cowin (Community Representative), Allison Bunney (Community Representative), 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), 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), Peter Davidson

**Non-Voting
Representatives:** Melcha Wolanski

Staff and Guests: Suzanne Nash (Trustee), Justin Shulman (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Kate Stoudt (Acting Superintendent of Learning Support Services), Emily Balla (General Manager, Learning Support Services), Deborah Lyon (Principal, Learning Support Services), Claire Reynolds (Program Evaluation Officer, Learning Support Services), Gaylene McCuthcheon (Psychologist, Learning Support Services), Melissa Chung (Program Manager, Social Work), Tamara Persaud (Committee Coordinator, Governance Services)

1. Call to Order

Vice-Chair Cowin called the meeting to order at 7:08 p.m.

2. Acknowledgement of Territorial Lands

Vice-Chair Cowin 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

There were no delegations.

5. Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report

5.1 8 January 2025, SEAC Report (Unofficial)

Moved by Sonja Elliot,

THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee report, dated 8 January 2025 (Unofficial), be received.

Program Evaluation Officer, Claire Reynolds, requested that section 6.1 of the minutes be corrected to read "Two inclusion teachers were hired to support inclusion and a program evaluator was hired to review the General Learning Program (GLP)."

Moved by Sonja Elliot,

THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee report, dated 8 January 2025 (Unofficial), be received, as amended.

Carried

5.2 5 February 2025, SEAC Report

Moved by Trustee Dickson,

THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee report, dated 5 February 2025, be received.

Mike Marta requested that section 6.1 of the minutes include another bullet that reads, "It was raised that inclusion/integration is fine provided supports remain in place to the same degree for the individual students. If support levels are reduced, this will be viewed as simply a cost-cutting exercise. Staff noted that with respect to SPCs, this is not a cost-cutting exercise. Any drawing down of SPCs will be offset by supports given to the students."

Moved by Trustee Dickson,

THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee report, dated 5 February 2025, be received, as amended.

Carried

5.3 Forward Agenda

The SEAC forward agenda was provided for information.

6. Presentations

6.1 Supporting Student Attendance (M. Chung)

Program Manager of Social Work Melissa Chung, provided a presentation on supporting student attendance and re-engagement as they align with the Annual Mental Health and Well-Being Action Plan goals and the *Education Act*.

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

- It was highlighted that the goals of the Annual Mental Health and Well-Being Action Plan in regard to student attendance include developing and distributing resources to engage students and their families, and partnering with surrounding schools boards and community agencies. Furthermore the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board's (OCDSB) objective is to deepen understanding of best practices, protocols, and programs to support students who display significant attendance avoidance;
- The *Education Act* indicates that children between the ages of 6 and 17 are required to attend school up to June of the year they turn 18 and all schools are required to report student absences. Parents or guardians have a duty to ensure children of compulsory school age attend school regularly and punctually and notify the school if the child will be absent;
- Student attendance is negatively impacted by medical and mental health needs, family needs at home, financial instability, and stress related to learning, social issues bullying, and/or difficulty in relationships;
- OCDSB data outlines lower attendance rates for multilingual learners, 2SLGBTQ+ and Indigenous students;
- Intervention is implemented in tiered levels. Tier One indicates the use of everyday strategies to provide a welcoming and engaging environment for students. Tier Two involves school communication with the family regarding attendance and facilitating a supportive conversation while simultaneously exploring school-based strategies for the individual student. Tier Three is implemented when a student has missed 30% of the school year (56 school days), and a referral is made to the Attendance Counsellor;
- Operationally, each OCDSB school has a safe arrival system to ensure students who have transferred from another school board

are accounted for. This is attached to a student's Ontario Student Record (OSR), and follows them even if the student moves out of province to ensure all students are supported through academic transitions;

- The OCDSB employs identity-specific social workers to aid with attendance counselling, such as those on the Indigenous Education Team who have with a unique perspective on historical trauma and culturally informed responses;
- Re-engaging students remains a priority for the District. The approach has shifted to include finding ways for students to earn credits for extracurricular activities, and finding more holistic ways of encouraging students to have authentic learning experiences; and
- Understanding prolonged absences, with focus on Kindergarten to Grade 8, is included in the intervention strategy to ensure that students and families are supported to prevent future absences.

7. Department Update

7.1 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Stoudt reported the following:

- Emily Balla was welcomed as Acting General Manager and Mental Health Lead of Learning Support Services;
- The Transition Fair will be held alongside coterminous boards for students with developmental disabilities and their families on 26 March 2025 at Confederation Education Centre;
- The OCDSB has launched its new website. The mental health and community links on the site were highlighted with resources for both students and parents;
- A professional development (PD) will be held on 28 March 2025 for learning support teachers on early math intervention for students with modified math programming in school. The PD focuses on the tiers of intervention and building upon skill level; and
- The Elementary Program Review (EPR) consultations begin on 6 March 2025. All are welcomed to attend in person or virtually and more information is available on the OCDSB website.

7.2 Autism Acceptance and Awareness Month

Principal Lyon provided an overview of the upcoming events and programming occurring in the month of April to highlight Autism

Acceptance and Awareness month. This year's theme is "Everyone Belongs: Supporting Inclusion and Well-Being in our District." Schools are asked to raise their Autism Ontario banners and resources and events will be available to students and their families. Professional development for educators and staff will be scheduled in April, on an array of topics regarding the autism spectrum including elopement intervention, declarative language, the power of plan, and supporting transitions among many others.

Brookfield High School is introducing a new video project this month highlighting the voices of students on the autism spectrum and the staff who support them. This project aims to provide supportive strategies educators use to create a sense of belonging and engagement with students. The video will be available on the OCDSB YouTube page and on social media in April 2025.

On 10 April 2025, Dr. Grant Bruno will be guest speaking on decolonizing autisms and incorporating Indigenous perspectives in special education. He will explore practical tips for integrating holistic models into western approaches in the education system. More details will be made available closer to the presentation date.

8. Committee Reports

8.1 Board

There was no report from the Board.

8.2 Committee of the Whole

There was no report from the Committee of the Whole.

8.3 Committee of the Whole, Budget

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

9. New Business

Trustee Kaplan-Myrth requested that members of SEAC hold a formal discussion and motion at the 2 April 2025 meeting to determine whether or not this advisory committee supports the EPR. Members were encouraged to come prepared with feedback on the EPR and be ready to make a decision that will be brought to the Committee of the Whole on 8 April 2025.

Members expressed the need to add the potential changes to alternative programs as a discussion item to the 2 April 2025 meeting agenda as concern was raised about 39 alternative programs being phased out through the EPR process. SEAC may present their view of these changes to stakeholders and trustees at the Committee of the Whole meeting.

10. Upcoming Meeting Dates

The upcoming meeting dates were provided for information.

11. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:04 p.m.

Sue Cowin, Vice-Chair, Special
Education Advisory Committee