



SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

Wednesday, February 5, 2025, 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), 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), Waneek Horn-Miller (Indigenous Community Representative), Donna Dickson (Trustee), Nili Kaplan-Myrth (Trustee), Lynn Scott (Trustee)

Association Representatives (Non Voting): Catherine Houlden (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation)

Staff and Guests: Suzanne Nash (Trustee), Pino Buffone ((Director of Education), Jesse Mark (General Counsel Legal Services), Kate Stoudt (Superintendent, Learning Support Services), Deborah Lyon (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Claire Reynolds (Program Evaluation Officer, Learning Support Services), Christine Lanos (System Principal, School Support and Operation), Justin Shulman (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Diane Pernari (General Manager, Communications & Public Relations), Kenan Omercajic (Strategic Business Analyst), Tamara Persaud (Board/Committee Coordinator)

1. Call to Order

Chair Cathy Miedema called the meeting to order at 7:07 p.m.

2. Acknowledgement of Territorial Lands

Chair Cathy 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 Kaplan-Myrth,

THAT the agenda be approved.

Carried

4. Delegations

There were no delegations.

5. Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report

5.1 4 December 2024, SEAC Report

Moved by Trustee Kaplan-Myrth,

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

Carried

5.2 Forward Agenda

The SEAC forward agenda was provided for information.

6. Consultations

6.1 Elementary Program Review Consultation

Director Buffone and Superintendent Stoudt presented an overview of the current phase of the Elementary Program Review (EPR) with the intention of receiving feedback from the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) and garnering community engagement regarding the potential changes being proposed through the EPR.

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

- The purpose of the EPR is to identify the areas of ineffectiveness and inefficiency with-in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) with the goal of streamlining school grade configurations, restructuring programming and aligning school boundaries to create and promote community schools and encourage greater integration of students in area of opportunity. The EPR aims to modernize the approach to education while being mindful of the diverse needs of students;
- Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for students in specialized program classes must have a transition plan when transitioning from one program to another program. The plan is prepared in consultation with the student's family and includes classroom considerations and ongoing monitoring of the students progress;

- Learning Support Consultants for each specialized program classroom have a fulsome understanding of the student profiles to support transition planning and support families through changes;
- Learning Support Services has an annual funding allocation process to determine staff and resource allocations for the school year. Consideration is given for potential new school configurations through the EPR. It is the role of school principals to submit information regarding their respective schools to the central team to review and distribute available resources including staffing. The proposed model accounts for the phasing out process of some specialized program classrooms and this process will be part of an annual discussion on special education and resources;
- Inclusion, equity and accessibility remain priorities within the OCDSB strategic plan. When supporting the inclusion model, consideration must be made for the multidisciplinary teams and resources that can be reallocated to more directly support students;
- Family and community involvement remain a key theme when considering the EPR. Transparency and cooperation with families is crucial to special education and the EPR aims to ensure parents and caregivers are a part of their child's education process.
- It was proposed that, where possible, schools in the district have a designated classroom for students who require a safe space throughout the school day to promote meaningful inclusivity and accessibility while fostering education;
- It was highlighted that while some students with an Mild Intellectual Disabilities (MID) profile are supported in General Learning Program (GLP) and Primary Special Needs (PSN), there are students who fit the profile for these classes that are excelling in their community schools;
- Concern was raised surrounding the number of qualified Educational Assistants (EAs) currently supporting students across the District, if the EPR model is approved, there will be a need to increase the number of EAs supporting students in classrooms;
- Consideration must be given to the cultural, social and educational implications of integrating students into community based schools;
- The current structure of elementary programming in the OCDSB inhibits a more holistic view on program structure and delivery;
- Language acquisition is supported throughout the District and in the proposed model, French Immersion and English learning will be in

the same school to allow students the opportunity to participate in both programs and learn in mixed groupings. This will provide an opportunity to see the diversity in learning groups while taking into account the special education support within the English program that can be transferred to French Immersion classrooms;

- A Program Manager for Educational Assistants (EAs) has been hired to support and initiate professional development for EAs to further equip them with the skills needed to support students with a range of abilities. It was highlighted that the role of EAs depends on the needs of students;
- Ensuring that services and programs for students are accessible and comprehensible remains a priority throughout the EPR, as many families are unaware of the options available within the District. It was proposed that the ways of accessing specialized services be promoted to identify all pathways for families seeking support;
- It was encouraged that allocated time be dedicated to planning and collaboration between teachers, EAs and school administration to better support students;
- Repositioning school boundaries will allow for clearly defined boundaries to each school and showcase the range of programming each catchment offers;
- The EPR is not intended to be a money saving or school/class closing measure but a process in which the OCDSB can review all inefficiencies and reallocate resources equitably;
- Concern was raised regarding how assessment for learning and student needs will be managed as currently, there is a waitlist to assess students with specific needs. Staff noted that models for assessment will be brought forward in consultation at a later date; and
- 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.

Chair Miedema called a recess at 9:18 p.m. and the meeting resumed at 9:33 p.m.

7. Department Update

7.1 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Stoudt reported the following:

- Feedback for the EPR is being accepted on the Engage OCDSB website until March 25th. Appreciation was extended to members who have already submitted their feedback;
- The resource fair to support Transitional Planning for Youth with Intellectual Disabilities will be held on 13 February 2025. Students and their caregivers will have the opportunity to meet a variety of service providers in the Ottawa region and learn about programs available for Youth with intellectual disabilities, such as service coordination, Developmental Services Ontario (DSO), and community day programs;
- The new OCDSB website has been launched with new areas of the site dedicated to special education programs and services as well as a link to the Mental Health page;
- A new parent resource is now online from School Mental Health Ontario called "By Your Side". It is intended to be a hub for various resource topics surrounding understanding mental health at home and school;
- The Affirm Parent/Caregiver Information Program for parents and caregivers of students who identify as 2SLGBTQ+, is a six week virtual support group, hosted by identity specific social workers to build community and connection beginning on 24 January 2025;
- Learning Support Services and Program Services are providing support sessions to identified students and their families to meet with guidance counselors and social workers to develop reengagement and/or transition plans to reintegrate into school. The fall 2024 session included attendance strategies;
- Report cards will be sent home on 11 February 2025 for secondary schools and on 12 February 2025 for elementary schools;
- Kindergarten information nights are being held across the District during February 2025 to inform families of academic options for their students and provide an opportunity to visit facilities and meet staff; and
- Toonie Tuesday will be held on 25 February 2025 to raise funds for the Education Foundation of Ottawa to support local families in need.

7.2 Memo 25-006 - Data Review to Inform the Specialized Program Class Referral Information 2024-2025 Report

Superintendent Stoudt advised that the Ministry requires SEAC to conduct a data review of information regarding specialized program class referrals and the professional assessment wait list. This has been added to the Special Education Plan retroactively and an overview of potential changes, challenges and previous results of the review was provided. Members were encouraged to reach out to Superintendent Stoudt should they have feedback.

8. Committee Reports

8.1 Board

There was no report from the 28 January 2025 Board meeting.

8.2 Committee of the Whole

Trustee Scott reported there were updates on student learning, focused on analysis from the Education Quality and Accountability Office's (EQAO) results and other measures from the last year. She also noted that a report on student well-being is in development.

8.3 Committee of the Whole, Budget

Trustee Scott shared information on the revised estimates to the 2024-2025 Budget. It was noted there is a \$4.2 million deficit, and staff are tasked with finding areas to reduce expenses and manage a tight budget. The full revised estimates budget report is posted on the OCDSB website.

9. New Business

Chair Miedema made note of the Resource Fair for Transition Planning for Youth with Intellectual Disabilities which will be held on 26 March 2025 at 5:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. at the Confederation Education Centre.

Chair Miedema shared that the Chair of the Ottawa Catholic School Board has reached out to the Ministry of Education to request more funding and urged the OCDSB to also advocate for more funding through a letter. Should members have any questions or anything to add to the letter, they are encouraged to reach out to Chair Miedema as soon as possible.

10. Upcoming Meeting Dates

The upcoming meeting dates were provided for information.

11. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:51 p.m.

Cathy Miedema, Chair, Special
Education Advisory Committee