



## SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

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

Members: Cathy Miedema (Association for Bright Children), Susan Cowin (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)

Staff and Guests: Suzanne Nash (Trustee), Kate Stoudt (Superintendent, Learning Support Services), Emily Balla (General Manager, Mental Health Services), Katherine Magner (General Manager, Program Services), Deborah Lyon (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Justin Shulman (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Tamara Persaud (Committee Coordinator, Governance Services)

1. Call to Order

Chair Miedema called the meeting to order at 7:05 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 Trustee Dickson,**

**THAT the agenda be approved.**

**Carried.**

Anthony Wong requested that a topic be added to the agenda regarding SEAC related endowment funds and risk based cost accounting. Staff noted that this item can be discussed under item 12. New Business on the agenda.

Vice-Chair Cowin requested that the 6 May 2025 board decision regarding the phasing out of the alternative programming be addressed during the meeting. Staff noted that this topic can be included under 7.1 Elementary Program Review (EPR) as it relates to the matter.

4. Delegations

There were no delegations.

5. Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report

5.1 2 April 2025, SEAC Report

**Moved by Lindsay Copland,**

**THAT Special Education Advisory Committee report, dated 2 April 2025, be received.**

**Carried.**

5.2 Forward Agenda

The SEAC forward agenda was provided for information.

6. Presentation

6.1 Board Priority Learning Plan (K. Magner)

General Manager Magner presented an update on the Board Priority Learning Plan (BPLP) from the 2024-2025 school year. Evidence of impact and actions taken throughout the school year regarding student learning were highlighted.

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

- The Ontario Ministry of Education (MOE) introduced Student Achievement Plans (SAP) in 2023. This framework was designed to improve student outcomes for learning and well-being. The MOE mandated that every school board in the province implement a plan that focuses on improving core literacy and math outcomes for students. The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) priorities have been adapted to reflect the District context, achievement and needs of OCDSB students;
- Other identified priorities from the MOE include preparing students for future success, pathways opportunities, and enhancing student engagement and well-being;
- Indicators for success that are monitored over time include graduation rates, credit accumulation, student attendance, graduation enrollment and job skills;

- Achievement data has indicated gaps for Indigenous students and students from underserved communities. These groups are a priority focus embedded in the BPLP. Embedding culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy in math classes and Indigenous ways of knowing and learning is also highlighted in the plan. There is a focus on professional development (PD) for educators and administrators to ensure these key areas are being addressed effectively;
- Members expressed concern that evidence of impact for students with disabilities and special needs was not included in the report. Staff noted that further information regarding special education and the BPLP can be shared to SEAC members at a future meeting;
- Members expressed that given the diverse learning needs in the OCDSB, an understanding of gaps for special education students is critical in informing decisions in regards to programing and the provision of services to students with special learning needs;
- General Manager Rahim from the Research, Evaluation & Analytics Department (READ) will be present at the 18 June 2025 SEAC meeting to share a summary of the Annual Student Learning Report. Staff noted the request for further focus during the presentation on special education;
- Members requested further data regarding the success and challenges in regards to the BPLP and special education. Information was also requested regarding the general learning programs (GLP) in comparison to the special education program and what aspects are successful with the hopes of integrating more inclusive practices;
- Staff noted principals gather and analyze site based data at the school level to narrow in on specific areas of need. They also work closely alongside the READ department to ensure necessary supports for students are being delivered; and
- It was noted that data about gifted students with special educational needs are often overlooked. Members encouraged staff to take this group and other under considered groups into account when conducting research and analytics.

## 7. Discussion Items

### 7.1 Elementary Program Review

Superintendent Stoudt shared an overview of the Board debate on the final report of the Elementary Program Review (EPR) that was held on 6

May 2025 and provided an update in regard to the upcoming EPR decisions being made at the Board meeting on 13 May 2025.

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

- The Committee of the Whole (COW) voted to pass both the school boundary and program changes but did vote down the proposal to phase out specialized program classes;
- Concern was raised regarding valuable resources being lost as the alternative program is phased out, and the need for a transition plan for students. Staff highlighted the importance of the role of principals in this transition, and are working on a change management plan to ensure student needs are identified and addressed;
- It was noted that the phase out of programs will be done gradually to ensure students currently in these programs will be able to complete them. The last cohort of students in the current program model will begin in September 2026;
- Staff noted that transition planning is required for all students, with or without an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Transition plans are designed with the needs of students in mind and include supports such as specific timetabling based on student strength, student leadership, and transportation;
- Staff shared that the 7 tenets of the elementary alternative program were developed with student-centred learning in mind, the core beliefs of these tenets are shared in all OCDSB schools, and are embedded in the PD and student supports provided;
- Members expressed concern about the current lack of accessibility to the special education and alternative supports despite the many that are offered by the OCDSB. Further concern was raised that if the alternative program is phased out that families will face more difficulties accessing programming for their children; and
- Members requested further communication with families in regards to the EPR and changes being made. Transparency and clear education pathways for students and their families remains a top priority as it is critical that families are informed of their options amidst possible changes. It was also requested that language in EPR communications to parents be clearer to accommodate the diverse demographics of families in the OCDSB.

8. Department Update

## 8.1 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Stoudt reported the following:

- Appreciation was expressed for the ongoing collaboration with SEAC regarding the EPR; for their ongoing commitment to advising the District on special education matters, and the information continuously shared for the work ahead;
- It is Mental Health Week. The Canadian Mental Health Association's (CMHA) theme this year is "Unmasking Mental Health." This serves as an important reminder of our shared responsibility to challenge the stigma surrounding mental health, illness and addictions. Thanks was extended to General Manager Balla for organizing a mental health week series of daily activities for schools and families on the OCDSB website; and
- The Parent Conference was held on 3 May 2025, named "Prepared and Positive Mental Health Forum". OCDSB Program Manager Melissa Chung presented on the importance of school attendance and supporting families struggling with school avoidance. A community information fair was also held at this event in which families had the opportunity to engage with local services and organizations.

## 8.2 IPRC - What to expect (D. Lyon)

Learning Support Services Principal Lyon provided an update on the identification, placement and review committee (IPRC). She highlighted what to expect when a student is referred to an IPRC meeting, when families have requested a referral, and the committee decision making process.

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

- According to Ontario Education regulation 181/98 "Identification and Placement of Exceptional Pupils", all school boards are required to establish an IPRC and have a legal responsibility to make decisions regarding identification and placement of exceptional students into special education programs and services;
- IPRC requests can be made through school principals (in collaboration with school staff), or a parent and/or student can make a request through their school administration;
- Members expressed concern that the categories of exceptionality that students are identified with are very broad, and not diagnostic in nature. It was also noted that many students may have

overlapping needs in several categories. It was noted that it is important when assessing students to be as specific as possible in determining a course of action to ensure academic success for the student. Staff noted that this feedback has been presented to the Ministry as an issue, however these categories are legislated. It was noted in the 2023-2024 IPRC parent guide and highlighted in the discussion the importance of engaging families in this process; and

- Members expressed the need for clear timelines and a guide for parents that lays out the complex IPRC process in a clear way that can ease concerns of families as they collaborate with schools to address student needs.

### 8.3 EQAO - What to expect for Students with Special Needs (J. Shulman)

Learning Support Services Principal Shulman provided an update on education quality and accountability office (EQAO) assessments for students and provided an overview of assessment for students with special needs including accommodations.

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

- The committee was informed of data from past EQAO assessments and information regarding communication between schools and families should students require accommodations or exemptions;
- The value of EQAO and the use of results data to inform decisions in regards to student achievement were noted;
- Concern was raised that EQAO results for gifted students are not included. It was requested that this feedback be shared to ensure all demographics of students are included in the data;
- Members noted the difficulties for families in receiving assessment support, and the barriers associated with this process; and
- Updates to the EQAO delivery model were noted including the use of chromebooks. Administration of the assessment has evolved to better suit the strengths of students and staff;

## 9. Action Item

### 9.1 Appointment of SEAC Representative to the Policy Review Committee

A volunteer was requested to be appointed as the SEAC representative to attend Policy Review Committee meetings, report to SEAC on related topics, as well as bring SEAC's important voice to the table when making policy decisions.

There were no volunteers at this time. Chair Miedema and Superintendent Stoudt encouraged those interested to send an email indicating their interest.

Staff was requested to determine whether a person sitting on the Policy Review Committee can represent more than one advisory committee.

10. Committee Reports

10.1 Board

There was no report from the Board.

10.2 Committee of the Whole

There was no report from Committee of the Whole.

10.3 Committee of the Whole, Budget

Trustee Kaplan-Myrth encouraged members to pay attention to information coming from the upcoming budget meeting on 28 May 2025 in regards to special education.

11. Forward Agenda

The SEAC forward agenda was provided for information.

12. New Business

Sonja Elliot from Autism Ontario noted monthly updates from the organization. The Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA) has begun planning for the introduction of 45 mini-buses for September 2025 with a new service delivery model to enhance student safety. Data has also been requested regarding student attendance surrounding exclusions from the student attendance presentation from the 2 April 2025 SEAC meeting.

Due to time limitations, Anthony Wong requested that a topic be added to a future agenda regarding risk based cost accounting as it relates to SEAC's funding.

13. Upcoming Meeting Dates

The upcoming meeting dates were provided for information.

14. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:36 p.m.

Cathy Miedema, Chair, Special  
Education Advisory Committee