



SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

Wednesday, September 11, 2019, 7:00 pm

Trustees' Committee Room

133 Greenbank Road

Ottawa, Ontario

Members: Christine Boothby (Trustee), Rob Campbell (Trustee), Lyra Evans (Trustee), Rob Kirwan (Community Representative) Mark Wylie (Down Syndrome Association), Cathy Miedema (Association for Bright Children of Ontario), Andrea Nelson (Learning Disabilities Association of Ottawa-Carleton, Alternate), Safina Dewshi (Ottawa-Carleton Assembly of School Councils), Jim Harris (VOICE for deaf and hard of hearing children), Susan Cowin (Community Representative), Sonia Nadon-Campbell (Community Representative), Jean Trant (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, SSP), Ian Morris (Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders), Sean Popal (Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders), Nancy McLaren Kennedy (Professional Student Services Personnel), Wulf Heidecker (Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Teachers' Federation)

Staff and Guests: Lynn Scott (Trustee), Peter Symmonds (Superintendent of Learning Support Services), Stacey Kay (Manager of Learning Support Services), Dr. Petra Duschner (Manager of Mental Health and Critical Services), Amy Hannah (System Principal of Learning Support Services), Christine Kessler (System Principal of Learning Support Services), Olga Grigoriev (Superintendent of Instruction), Julie Cyr (Manager of Early Learning), Leigh Fenton (Board/Committee Coordinator)

1. Call to Order

Chair Kirwan called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by Christine Boothby,

THAT the agenda be approved.

Chair Kirwan requested that item 5.3 Memo 19-098, Update Regarding Ontario Autism Program move to item 6.2.

Moved by Christine Boothby,

THAT the agenda be approved, as amended.

– Carried –

3. Delegations

There were no delegations.

4. Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report

4.1 12 June 2019

Moved by Christine Boothby,

THAT the report from the 12 June 2019 SEAC meeting be received.

Members requested that the following changes be made:

- That Rob Kirwan be added to the list of members present;
- That the second to last bullet on folio eight be revised to read "System Principal Kessler advised that the LD SIP Model has been changed to promote balance in the student's timetable...";
- That the reference to Dr. Maggie Mamen on folio nine be revised to reflect the correct spelling of her last name;
- That the first bullet on folio three be revised to read: "Principals may use in-school sanctions but there are no in-school suspensions."

Moved by Christine Boothby,

THAT the report from the 12 June 2019 SEAC meeting be received, as amended.

– Carried –

4.2 Review of Long Range Agenda

During discussion the following items were added to the long range agenda:

- Trustee Lyra Evans requested a review of Lockdown procedures. An increasing number of students are identified with anxiety; lockdown drills are not helping students' mental health. Superintendent Symmonds highlighted that the procedures were formed in partnership with the Ottawa Police Service and are based on Guidelines for Developing and Maintaining Lockdown Procedures for Schools in Ontario. Board Services support staff will distribute the link to the related OCDSB PR.521.SCO Safe Schools Procedure;
- Communication Disorder Assistants;
- The Storefront Update timeline was revised to February 2020;

4.3 Motion/Action Tracking Report, Business Arising

The Motion/Action tracking report was provided for information.

A note was made to remove A. Hannah and add S. Kay as the "action agent" for item 3 Location of Specialized Program Classes and item 4 Wait Lists.

Manager Kay reported that the committee was provided with the location of all specialized classes in Memo 19-054 and Memo 19-066. A forthcoming memo will provide the current locations of all specialized classes, including the geographic zones. She confirmed that a memo on the location of classes will be produced annually.

Learning Support Services (LSS) staff produced Report 19-091 to fulfill the information requested from the board motion of 30 October 2018. The information contained within this report regarding professional assessments will also be reported in Standard 6 "Educational and Other Assessments" of the Special Education Plan.

5. Action/Discussion/Information Items

5.1 The Role of the Early Childhood Educator

Superintendent Grigoriev introduced Julie Cyr as the new Manager of Early Learning.

During Manager Cyr's presentation and in response to questions the following points were noted:

- The District follows the practices defined in the Early Childhood Educators Act (2007), with a focus on children twelve years of age and younger;
- Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) support a continuum of learning from an understanding that children are competent, curious, capable of complex thinking and rich in potential;
- ECEs work collaboratively with special education teachers, examining program expectations, along with children's learning needs to prepare the children for the highest level of independence;
- Aside from Kindergarten, ECEs may work in community institutions and organizations, co-creating safe environments that promote a sense of belonging, well-being and inclusion; and
- In the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) Practice Guideline literature, supporting full participation of Children with Disabilities is outlined. An inclusive practice must consider the current social contexts, the lived experiences of both the children and their families and the diversity of development of the children.

- The ECE shortage is province-wide. The Ministry of Education is examining deficit challenges. The CECE is investigating better ways to hire and retain staff;
- ECEs have the ability to work with children with special needs in a collaborative setting with community services;
- ECEs receive general training in colleges to be able to work with children in special education programs in their scope of practice, however these educators do not have the specialized training provided to Education Assistants (EAs);
- Additional French language support by ECEs is needed; and
- ECEs at the District will be surveyed to determine what professional development (PD) they deem paramount. The results are to be collated and analyzed to determine further PD.

Superintendent Grigoriev echoed a concern about additional training for all staff, from teachers to EAs to principals. A variety of modules are under review. Over the summer there were three days of ECE training, where a broad cross-section of workshops were held, including courses relating to students with special needs.

Ms. McLaren Kennedy, reported a gap between the supports provided to students throughout the day in a multi-disciplinary team versus the extended day program (EDP) where crucial information is not relayed to educators by school staff. Instead, family communication is solely relied upon. Manager Cyr agreed that more work is required to create a seamless day for students as there is an expectation from the Ministry stipulating all school boards support exceptional pupils in the EDP by responding to individual abilities and interests.

5.2 Integration and Support for Special Education Students

Superintendent Symmonds indicated that a trend in the comments from the 12 June 2019 SEAC meeting group exercise affirmed the complexity of the subject of inclusion. Further analysis brought LSS to re-examine the OCDSB Model for Special Education. With the input of the committee, a particular focus could be: how inclusion is considered, classroom support and monitoring of inclusion, and the impact on student achievement and well-being. He stated that opinion on complexity of inclusion centered upon equity, ideas of fairness, competing demands in the classroom, impact on other learners and availability of resources to support students. At present the goal is to work together to develop a framework to bring the voices around the table into alignment so that a greater understanding can be achieved when using the same language.

5.3 Memo 19-098, Update Regarding Ontario Autism Program

Your committee had before it Memo 19-098, Update Regarding Ontario Autism Program.

Superintendent Symmonds reported that while the recommendations and advice from the panel is scheduled to be released by the end of the summer, it is anticipated that the new Ontario Autism Program (OAP) will be in place by April 2020. He described the state of uncertainty that many of the families are left within, questioning future funding and the stability of the program.

System Principal Kessler, clarified that for those families who had existing services in place, the services will be extended, whereas families seeking new services are being directed to the OAP website portal to navigate the system. The new families are being asked to purchase the services thereby creating two models of service delivery. She spoke about her interest in the regulation of Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) therapists under the recent entrepreneurial drift in program services. The costs average \$40,000.00 per annum.

Mr. Mark Wylie, noted the lagging waitlist for programming has not been addressed. Trustee Lyra Evans asked if the waitlist is triaged. System Principal Kessler responded, in her experience working with Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO), typically there is not a triage system. A child may be seven years of age by the time they reach the top of the waiting list and concerns exist around the timing of more intensive therapies.

6. Department Update

Superintendent Symmonds provided the committee with the major work planned for LSS this year. He reported that Bill 48, *Safe and Supportive Classrooms Act*, 2019, has passed, which has established policies and guidelines respecting service animals in schools. LSS is tasked with ensuring procedure PR 686 SCO - Use of Service Dogs for Students is aligned with the policy and program memorandum issued on 9 September 2019. Other projects include the pilot of supporting gifted students in the regular classroom, the OCDSB Interest Academy Pilot, continuing work on quality program indicators which were expanded by the team to include the full continuum of special education programs and services, using committee consultations for the revision of the draft of the mental health strategy, and the operational review.

6.1 Special Education Plan (Standards)

a. Standard 2, The OCDSB Model for Special Education (Discussion)

System Principal Hannah, introduced the Special Education Plan and the standards within.

During the discussion on Standard 2, The OCDSB Model for Special Education the following points were noted:

Trustee Lyra Evans expressed the view that student integration is based on a promise of access to supports. She questioned whether the capacity for support is appropriate for the current need. Tiered interventions may not be as effective as a congregated classroom system. With fewer staff members, coupled with larger class sizes, she suggested the model be re-evaluated.

Using the chart on Special Education Supports in the OCDSB (folio 36), the following editions were suggested:

- Trustee Boothby noted that the columns appear to be listed in a hierarchical format and advised that the classroom teacher should be the first support to enlist, rather than the principal;
- Trustee Campbell suggested including a process or guideline to accompany the list of supports;
- Mr. Morris suggested the word "collaboration" be written after 'Parent(s)/Guardian(s)' under school-based supports;
- Mr. Harris asked for a compendium or annex for the parent or guardian that explains their role within The Board's Model for Special Education. Superintendent Symmonds responded that a Parent Guide is available and it might be important to consider accessibility for parents;
- Chair Kirwan considered the value of an upcoming review of the SEAC handbooks as a parent aide;
- Add the word "Professional" in front of Discipline Supervisors; and
- ABA was not defined on the acronyms list

In response to a comment made by Trustee Boothby, where there was a need for the "timeliness" of assessment when referring to the special education policy's description of a variety of learning supports, the outcome was that a review of Policy P.096.SES Special Education Programs and Services was advisable, a policy which was last revised in 2013. Superintendent Symmonds noted that staff would investigate the process of a review.

Ms. McLaren Kennedy upheld that the schools have allocations of social workers and psychologists and these professionals are operating at workload capacity to deliver timely assessments. As needs present themselves, the triage changes. If the language changes to promise "timely" assessments across the District, increased qualified personnel would be required to account for the promise.

In response to a query from Chair Kirwan regarding a return to system classes, staff advised that the direction is not away from

specialized classes but toward a comprehensive continuum of placements that include specialized classes. A majority of special education students perform well in regular class placements. Trustee Campbell stated that it is very difficult to determine whether needs are being met effectively or not as key performance indicators do not exist per exceptionality.

Ms. Dewshi, queried the committee's ability to put forward a motion to increase the ratio of EAs in the classroom to allow for greater integration of students with exceptionalities. Superintendent Symmonds explained that there are no set ratios for EAs, there are situations in specialized classrooms where a general ratio was developed but depending on the students in the class, the allocations may change. EAs are not a part of the school regulations that refer to class size, for example, one teacher to a maximum of six autistic students.

Trustee Scott volunteered that the District does have the Special Education Policy. This policy does not specify ratios, how many special education classes there will be or for what programs. The policy describes the District's expectations and within the framework of that policy, staff has developed a variety of practices and procedures. They requirements of The Education Act and the regulations under the Act are met. LSS make budget recommendations to the board. Staffing becomes a budget issue rather than a matter of policy.

Superintendent Symmonds recalled that in last year's budget deliberations, a variety of recommendations were moved forth, including an increase in the number of EAs, board certified behaviour analysts, and social/emotional learning teachers. A sizable investment in augmenting resources to be able to provide the supports for special education students in the district is evident. There are 18,000 students with Individual Education Plans. He cautioned that the impetus to make a change must come from statistical data from program reviews.

Ms. McLaren Kennedy contended that it is important to keep people a part of the community and be aware when using language like specialized classrooms which creates an "otherness" that is not inclusive. She urged the committee to consider whether, to the best of the abilities of District staff, there has been effective management of the existing policy and a move to increase the effectiveness of the system that is in place today. Realizing the potential of the current operating policy is preferable to deviating in another direction and beginning anew.

Chair Kirwan assured the committee that the standard describing The Model for Special Education will come back to the table for further discussion.

b. Standard 5, The Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) Process and Appeals (Discussion)

This standard was deferred; however Chair Kirwan reminded the committee that there is a legal obligation for SEAC to review these standards annually.

c. Standard 16, Transportation (Independent Review)

Ms. Elmer requested a follow-up with the Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA) to ensure that students requiring special transportation are on a formal list through an updated database.

7. Committee Reports

7.1 Advisory Committee on Equity

There was no report from the Advisory Committee on Equity.

7.2 Parent Involvement Committee

There was no report from the Parent Involvement Committee.

7.3 Board

There was no report from the Board.

7.4 Committee of the Whole

There was no report from Committee of the Whole.

8. New Business

Mr. Wulf Heidecker, announced the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has created a website analyzing the Ministry of Education's funding for school boards this year and its cuts affecting the finances of each of the province's 72 school boards. Mr. Heidecker reported a \$407.00 drop in per student funding in the District.

Chair Kirwan announced that after eleven years sitting as Chair, he will be stepping down. His intention is to continue as a community representative for the balance of the term and is willing to support the new chairperson, as required.

Ms. Andrea Nelson, noted that the LDAO conference will be held this year at Sir Robert Borden High School on October 25 and 26 with keynote speaker Dr. Leonard Sax.

9. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:10 p.m.

Rob Kirwan, Chair, Special Education Advisory Committee