

PARTIAL - SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

Wednesday, June 10, 2020

7:00 p.m.

Zoom Meeting

Members:	Christine Boothby (Trustee), Chris Ellis (Trustee), Sonia Nadon-Campbell (Community Representative), Jim Harris (VOICE for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children), Susan Cowin (Community Representative), Rob Kirwan (Community Representative), Mark Wylie (Down Syndrome Association), Cathy Miedema (Association for Bright Children), Nicole Ullmark (Easter Seals Ontario), Katie Ralph (Autism Ontario, Ottawa Chapter), Lisa Paterick (VIEWS for the Visually Impaired), Michelle Berry (Ottawa-Carleton Assembly of School Councils)
Association Representatives (Non-Voting):	Connie Allen (Professional Student Services Personnel), Nancy Dlouhy (Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Operations Committee), Jean Trant (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, SSP), Catherine Houlden (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Teachers), Kelly Granum (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Occasional Teachers), Daniel Bersyniow-Naane (Student Senator)
Staff and Guests:	Lynn Scott (Trustee), Justine Bell (Trustee), Peter Symmonds (Superintendent of Learning Support Services), Carolyn Tanner (Human Rights and Equity Advisor), Christine Kessler (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Amy Hannah (System Principal Learning, Support Services), Stacey Kay (Manager, Learning Support Services), Dr. Petra Duschner (Manager of Mental Health and Critical Services), Nicole Guthrie (Manager, Board Services), Leigh Fenton (Board/Committee Coordinator)

1. Call to Order

Chair Nadon-Campbell called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. She acknowledged that the meeting is taking place on unceded Algonquin Territory

and thanked the Algonquin people for hosting the meeting on their land. She noted June is Indigenous Awareness month and it is always time to reflect upon and learn the history, contributions and strength of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis people.

The Chair and Superintendent Symmonds welcomed meeting observer, Advisor Carolyn Tanner, the District's Human Rights and Equity Advisor.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by Sue Cowin,

THAT the agenda be approved.

Carried

3. Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report

Moved by Katie Ralph,

THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee Report dated 13 May 2020 be received.

Trustee Boothby requested that the following change be made on folio 9:

- That the description of the abbreviation of EA be reflected as 'Educational Assistants'.

Moved by Katie Ralph,

THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee Report dated 13 May 2020 be received, as amended.

Carried

4. Action Item

4.1 Report 20-051, Special Education Plan 2019-2020

Your committee had before it Report 20-051, Special Education Plan 2019-2020, seeking the approval of the plan. Superintendent Symmonds noted that over the course of the 2019-2020 school year, SEAC has reviewed and provided input into all of the standards that comprise the plan. He acknowledged the work of the Special Education Advisory Committee to assist in developing an accessible document for parents and educators.

System Principal Hannah highlighted that the special education plan is a detailed expression of how the District will implement the Board's special education policy.

She explained that the purpose of the special education plan is two-fold: to inform the public about the manner in which the school board is carrying out its special education responsibilities; and to report to the Ministry of Education. The special education plan is also a framework to be leveraged by District Staff in which Learn Support Services (LSS) communicates the expectations and requirements essential to serving special education learners across Kindergarten to grade 12 classrooms.

Moved by Sue Cowin,

THAT the Special Education Plan 2019-2020, attached as Appendix A to Report 20-051 be approved.

During the presentation of the report, there were five Standards that were highlighted, which underwent significant revisions. They are as follows:

- The “Specialized Health Support Services in School Settings” Standard, beginning on page 37 has been updated to reflect the most current information on delivery of service, eligibility criteria to receive service, the provider who determines eligibility and level of support, and procedure for resolving disputes. Manager Kay worked with Jessica Wilson, Manager of the Champlain Local Health Integrated Network (LHIN), to ensure accuracy, as this information has changed regularly over the past year;
- The “Early Identification Procedures and Intervention Strategies” Standard includes revisions to the Kindergarten Intake Form, providing an opportunity for parents and guardians to describe their child’s special learning needs. The Kindergarten Education Team are valuable personnel in the early identification process. The Program and Learning Department (PAL) and LSS have worked together to align on the practices of Kindergarten intake practices, ongoing monitoring and intervention. The service to English Language Learners has been added in this section of the Standards;
- The “Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) Process and Appeals” Standard and accompanying Parent Guide will be further revised to accommodate the new reality of working from virtual platforms. The intent is to include this information prior to the Ministry of Education submission in July;
- The “Individual Education Plans (IEPs)” Standard has been updated with clear language on the overview of the IEP and that it is a cyclical process. Information on the storage of IEPs was added to this section. A note was added to explain that transition plans are developed as a component of the IEP; and

- The “Categories and Definitions of Exceptionalities” standard was re-written to acknowledge that the IPRC process is closely linked with special education placement decisions. There is delineation in this section that specifies the difference between a special education program and a special education service.

System Principal Hannah noted that prior to submitting the final copy of the Special Education Plan to the Ministry of Education some budgetary information and IPRC data is still required.

Moved by Sue Cowin,

THAT the Special Education Plan 2019-2020, attached as Appendix A to Report 20-051 be approved.

Carried

5. Budget Update

Mr. Kirwan reported that there have been significant delays in the budget process due to the Ministry of Education's delay in providing the Grants for Student Needs (GSNs). He explained that the District's Finance Department is missing key elements required to populate the calculation templates and technical paperwork to perform the necessary forecasts. International student pre-enrollment is falling short of annual expectations. A budget cannot be approved by the end of June without the outstanding critical information. A new target is set to present the budget by the end of July however it was stated in the 8 June 2020 Committee of the Whole Budget meeting that the budget process and approval may not be completed until the end of August.

Trustee Ellis added that it is expected the Ministry of Education will release a return to school protocol to all school boards by the end of June.

6. Department Update

6.1 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Symmonds acknowledged the feelings in the community of tremendous anger, sadness and grief as a result of anti-Black racism in the news coverage. He noted that it is not solely an American issue but that anti-Black racism is prevalent in Canada as well.. He recognized that members of the school community are hurting and wished to reassure those members that the District stands by them and remains committed to advancing its work in equity and anti-oppression to create a respectful environment where all students have an opportunity to learn and pursue their goals.

a. Negotiations Update

The Federations have ratified the Central Bargaining Agreement. Collective agreement negotiations are scheduled to continue through the summer with the local unions.

b. Individualized Education Program (IEP) Online (IOL) Customization

Manager Kay reported that paperless customizations to the IOL systems were delivered as solutions by the vendor Project Consulting Group (PCG). IPRC, IEP documents and the alternative report cards will be sent electronically to parents and guardians. The provincial report card will be shared with families through the parent portal on the District's website. In both cases, in order to keep this information secure, parents and guardians will be required to authenticate in order to access the reports.. The District is mindful that not all parents and guardians will have access to email and a hybrid system of delivery is in place for those families who require a mailed report.

Superintendent Symmonds conveyed the importance of ensuring family data, such as email and home addresses, is revised and is accurate.

c. Alternative Reports

System Principal Kessler noted that the alternative reports completed by staff in schools do not link to the Ontario curriculum but are instead linked to Alternative Program Learning Expectations in a student's IEP. She noted that any evidence of learning on IEP goals demonstrated during the school closure period will be included in the reporting. No student, whether they are receiving the provincial report card and/or the alternative report, can expect to see a decrease in their academic standing as of 13 March 2020.

d. Update on Ministry Announcements

a. Summer Transition Program

b. Summer Mental Health Supports

On 19 May 2020, the Ministry sent the Chairs of the District School Boards an update on summer learning. School boards will be supported as summer learning opportunities are expanded, including, summer school, course upgrading, and targeted programs for vulnerable students, students with special education needs, and Indigenous students. School boards will also be provided with a one-time allocation to provide summer transition programs for students with special education needs and/or students with mental health needs. This will significantly aid in students becoming re-accustomed to being in building and re-learning the rules and routines of learning in a group.

The following funding amounts have been allocated to students accessing special education supports:

- \$165,000 awarded to assist students in the grades 6 to 8 summer learning program;
- \$189,000 awarded to enable regulated health professionals to continue their work with students over the summer;
- \$175,000 awarded to support students with high special education needs and those students who require mental health supports for summer transitions

LSS is collaborating with coterminous boards to share strategies to use the limited funding.

The District will reach out to staff for this paid work in assisting with transition and mental health supports, however these assignments are voluntary as the educators, psychologists and social workers need an opportunity to enjoy an annual vacation leave.

In response to a query, Superintendent Symmonds noted that the funds are not strictly limited to teaching staff and can be used to support students. Discussions with the unions have commenced.

e. Empower Program

Since early April, System Principal Kessler has been working collaboratively with the team at Sick Kids Hospital to respond to the learning needs of Empower reading program students. During Learn at Home, Empower teachers have been using worksheets created by Sick Kids that focus on the reinforcement and consolidation of Empower reading strategies and skills that they were learning prior to school closures.

Sick Kids also developed protocols to allow for the online delivery of Empower lessons to students and this opportunity was considered in consultation with principals and with parent input. Once the Ministry of Education made the decision to keep schools closed for the remainder of this school year, schools were offered the option to deliver Empower lessons online to small groups of students.

f. Other

Manager Kay announced that student transportation for the 2020-2021 school year on buses and vans will change as a result of the reduced capacity anticipated from Ministry guidelines. The Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA) is developing a safe plan

for bussing students. In the event physical distancing becomes a requirement on yellow buses, the impact would significantly reduce available seating capacity. If this is the case, OSTA will need to suspend the Empty Seat Program. The District will receive less service at the same cost of delivery.

Manager Kay shared the news that the Speech Language Pathology Department launched a site for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). The District employs clinicians in the specialized field of AAC. Speech Language Pathologist's, Brenda Oleszko and Christine May, have developed a website that is accessible to District staff who support students with AAC needs. This resource also assists parents in the Learn at Home program. This tool is being promoted through the principals and support staff. Manager Kay encouraged the committee members to communicate the news to their respective associations.

7. New Business

7.1 Current Challenges and Opportunities

In advance of the meeting, the committee was invited to send questions to LSS representing concerns from their respective organizations. Listed below are the questions (Q) from the committee and answers (A) from the LSS team:

Q: The OCDSB plan for Special Education students includes the offering of the Empower reading program on-line for those students who were already in process when the lockdown began. If this program has indeed been adapted for on-line presentation, can it be made available to any students within the OCDSB who are experiencing reading problems? If not, why not?

A: Delivering Empower lessons on-line limits the number of students who can participate to a maximum of three students versus six students in-person. There is no evidence of the impact of delivering Empower lessons online; SickKids has not attempted this delivery model and is unsure of the results for students. For younger students it is more difficult to focus during online lessons and requires an adult to be present for support.

Q: The “after school” plan seems to be relevant only to those with Autism and/or Developmental Disabilities. Is this the case?

A: The Ministry of Education limited participation in the After School Skills Development Program to students who have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Q: How will Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions be handled on return to school or through distance education, if that is to be continued? Will extra support (e.g., EAs, additional training, etc.) be provided?

A:

- LSS teams continue to receive and follow up on Tier 3 interventions during Learn at Home and this would continue should distance learning continue into the fall. This includes participation in Multi-disciplinary teams;
- Upon return to school, LSS teams will follow up on students for whom they have referrals and according to the highest level of need (e.g., safety, well being, self-regulation, communication, etc.); and
- Tier 1 and 2 work is mainly conducted by the in-school team and is supported by instructional coaches and learning support coaches.

Q: When will there be a Board Plan more specific in place that relates to the needs of LD students? What will that be?

A: There are currently too many unknowns at this time with far too many variables to identify a clear path forward. LSS will have to develop a plan for support and will have to be agile with a support model for the shift to a return to school. The District may or may not have to forego some of the activities typically undertaken in an effort to support exigent needs.

Q: What will be the priorities of the Learning Support Teachers with respect to return to school?

A: LSTs will be focusing on transition support for students returning to school. This includes ensuring that students have access to Special Equipment Amount (SEA) equipment, coordinating with classroom teachers to address individual education plan (IEP) accommodations, and helping to assess which students may need additional supports and/or services

Q: Why is the Board going to be issuing report cards to Elementary School students? Based on what? What about students who are assessed based on a modified program or other form of IEP that hasn't necessarily been delivered by parents? Given that the On-line participation by families has been optional, it seems at best unfair and at worst irrelevant to provide any kind of mark or even subjective comments for a child's permanent record. In addition, this adds unnecessarily to a classroom teacher's workload with many of them trying to compare apples and oranges.

A: Report cards are issued according to the Ministry of Education policy. A number of students with IEPs have been able to continue working on all or some modified goals as outlined in their IEPs. Where this is the case, evidence of learning while at home would

be included on their report card. If a student has not been able to continue working on modified curriculum expectations during the Learn at Home Phase, a statement will be included on their report card which explains this occurrence.

Q: For students placed in the Learning Disability Specialized Intervention Program (LDSIP) program this year, they did not receive the promised full year in the program. How will that discrepancy and time away be accounted for?

A: At this time, there are no plans to extend a student's placement in a specialized program class due to the closure. There is no capacity to add the number of classes that would be required to accommodate those learners. LSS will coordinate with school teams to ensure appropriate supports are in place and to support a smooth transition.

Q: What measures are in place to track the efficacy of the LDSIP program for students? What elements of programming are standardised across all LDSIP classrooms? How is this monitored and tracked? What kind of initiatives/supports/incentives can we offer to teachers teaching the LDSIP program to document and track their program successes?

A:

- LD SIP core program elements include: explicit instruction of learning strategies, use of Assistive Technology (AT), and support for self-advocacy;
- An interim report was brought forward last year and staff had anticipated conducting a follow up report in 2020-2021. Owing to the pandemic, LSS will re-examine the plan in order to provide meaningful information for discussion; and
- LSS had planned professional development training with the teachers of the LDSIP classes (especially in the area of social emotional learning) and also identified the need to provide assistance to classroom teachers who were welcoming students from the LDSIP into their classes during the times of integration. These plans were impacted by an inability to find occasional teachers, labour disruptions, and the closure.

Q: Quite a number of schools run informal social groups as a way to support specific identified students, including those with LD. This type of social group (lunch buddies, Lego group, Art group, etc.) has been beneficial to those who have participated. Will this type of group continue and if not, will there be anything to replace the inclusion and skill-building benefits learned in such groups?

A:

- Schools make individual decisions on the programs they operate during non-instructional times. While many schools do offer these kinds of programs, they are not mandated as part of the responsibilities of a school;

- During the school closure period, many Educational Assistants (EAs)s are still organizing social skills groups, and body breaks with students to skill build remotely; and
- LSS is exploring virtual delivery of adapted or modified PEERS, Art of Play and Art of Conversation programs for students.

Q. What specific support is being given to our students with Autism and Down Syndrome?

A. Specific support has been given through regular contact with families who had already been referred to LSS teams, Support for establishing routines at home (e.g., visual schedules) and communication support from Speech Language Pathologists.

Q. Please provide a general description of what kind of services are being provided to Special Education children.

A. Students with special education needs are being supported by classroom teachers, early childhood educators (ECEs) and EAs. Per the Ministry direction, IEPs are followed where possible and in areas where accommodations cannot be reasonably applied in a Learn at Home phase, school teams are collaborating with students and parents/guardians to develop reasonable accommodations to support learning. In some situations, central team members are providing direct support to students for example Itinerant Teachers of Assistive Technology (ITAT) support student use of technology during the Learn at Home as are Deaf/Hard of Hearing or Blind or Low Vision itinerant teachers.

Q. What concerns are we hearing from parents and students and how are we able to address them?

A. Parents of high needs students are concerned about the lack of respite services in the community and LSS continues to look for ways to support families and advocate on their behalf - especially through the work of social workers. Parents of high needs students with challenging behaviours are being supported by various LSS teams including Itinerant Educational Assistant (IEA) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Team members and board-certified behavior analysts (BCBA). However, during this phase of learning, the constraints on community supports are having a significant impact on some students and families.

Q: Many teachers are giving bonus work in not only Math, Science, Geog/History, and Literacy as a means to "boost" or "improve" grades, but also in other subjects.

The concern is that the only students who can take advantage of the opportunity to improve their grades are those who are in a situation where they can do the bonus work. In other words, not every student, whether due to socio-economic

issues, disability, special education needs, or lack of parental support, has the opportunity to improve their pre-March Break grades.

For the very same reasons that grading assignments for Learn from Home online education was deemed to be inequitable and it was decided that students could not lower their pre-March Break grades by either not working from home or doing "poorly" on assignments; so too is the practice of improving grades by means of bonus projects. Not everyone is able to take advantage of the "opportunity" to improve grades and do bonus work.

How can we ensure that students with Special Education needs are not denied this opportunity or being left behind?"

A. The work that is being given to students is part of the Continuity of Learning with the Learn at Home phase of the closure. Not every student can participate in the Learn at Home phase and it is certainly a challenge for some students. LSS has been able to focus on professional learning for staff and improving capacity when it comes to meeting the needs of students with special education needs.

The District has been intentional in efforts to reach every student and family. School principals and school teams have been reaching out to families with offers of support in an effort to help students benefit as much as possible during this phase. The District has distributed over 10,000 pieces of technology and over 2,000 hotspots to ensure that students have access to the tools they need to engage in Learn at Home.

A number of cross-departmental professional learning sessions have been and continue to be offered. LSS has collaborated with the Program and Learning (PAL) department on many sessions like supporting Learning Support Teachers (LSTs) in their use of Leveled Language Intervention as a tool to support gap closing.

There are many students with special education needs who are accessing the same levels of opportunity as their counterparts without special education needs. However, there are students and families for whom Learn at Home is not working and for a variety of reasons beyond just those with special education needs.

In response to further questions from the committee the following comments were noted:

- The Research, Evaluation and Analytics Division (READ) is actively considering ways to track the Learn at Home engagement level;
- The assistance of a parent is beneficial to the student in a remote learning setting; and
- Throughout the summer the committee will be informed on progress towards the plans for reopening in September.

8. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:57 p.m.

Sonia Nadon-Campbell, Chair, Special Education Advisory Committee