

SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

Wednesday, September 9, 2020

7:00 p.m.

Zoom Meeting

Members:	Christine Boothby (Trustee), Rob Campbell (Trustee), Chris Ellis (Trustee), Sonia Nadon-Campbell (Community Representative), Jim Harris (VOICE for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children), Susan Cowin (Community Representative), Mark Wylie (Down Syndrome Association), Cathy Miedema (Association for Bright Children), Nicole Ullmark (Easter Seals Ontario), Dr. Maggie Mamen (Learning Disabilities Association of Ottawa-Carleton), Ian Morris (Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders), Lisa Paterick (VIEWS for the Visually Impaired), Nicole Ullmark (Easter Seals Ontario), Safina Dewshi (Ottawa-Carleton Assembly of School Councils)
Association Representatives (Non-Voting):	Susan Gardner (Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Teachers' Federation), Connie Allen (Professional Student Services Personnel), Jean Trant (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, SSP), Kelly Granum (Occasional Teachers), Lynn Scott (Trustee, ex-officio)
Staff and Guests:	Jennifer Jennekens (Trustee), Justine Bell (Trustee), Joy Lui (Student Trustee), Charles Chen (Student Trustee), Peter Symmonds (Superintendent of Learning Support Services), Mary Jane Farrish (Superintendent of Safe Schools), Dr. Petra Duschner (Manager of Mental Health and Critical Services), Christine Kessler (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Amy Hannah (System Principal Learning, Support Services), Stacey Kay (Manager, Learning Support Services), Leigh Fenton (Board/Committee Coordinator), Amy Wellings, Claudine Santos

1. Call to Order

Chair Nadon-Campbell called the meeting to order at 7:04 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.

Chair Nadon-Campbell announced that Rob Kirwan would be resigning from the Special Education Advisory Committee following this meeting. She recognized him for his 11 years of service, and noted that he represented students accessing special needs across the District and accomplished notable work on the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) over the years. She mentioned that a letter of transmittal will soon be presented to the Board naming Amy Wellings as the recommended replacement for a community representative on the SEAC.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by Mark Wylie,

THAT the agenda be approved.

Carried

3. Delegations

3.1 Claudine Santos, re: Concurrent Teaching Time for Remote and In-person Classes by Specialized Teachers

Claudine Santos summarized her concern as a parent and as the President of the Ontario Parents of Visually Impaired Children (VIEWS) as follows: On September 1, teachers of specialized classes in the Ottawa Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) schools were informed that they will be required to concurrently teach the in-person and online classes for their students. Mainstream students will, in contrast, have dedicated online teachers. She pointed out the inequity of this model and highlighted the risks associated with this dual instructional format, suggesting the approach may lead to inequitable supports. She is concerned that teachers will not be able to provide children with the guaranteed minimum of synchronous learning.

Trustee Boothby requested a description of the delegate's son's learning profile during the Learn at Home program in the spring. Ms. Santos responded that her son had access to regular support with a dedicated teacher however many parents in the specialized programs were not able to support their children as resources were not available to them. Many opted out of the virtual classes. Ms. Santos expressed concern that educators have voiced opposition to teaching concurrently and that some feel that this will make it impossible to meet the guaranteed standards under Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) No. 614.

Superintendent Symmonds thanked the delegate for her time and noted that the Learning Support Services team will explore this concern under item 5.1 of the agenda.

4. Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report

4.1 19 August 2020

Moved by Sue Cowin,

THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee Report dated 19 August 2020 be received.

Carried

5. Department Update

5.1 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Symmonds reported that on 25 August 2020, Professor of Social Work, Dr. David Tranter conducted a virtual education session for the parent community. The event was well attended and a recording is available through the District website. He invited Dr. Duschner to provide a summary of the session and focus on the key messages from the presentation.

Dr. Duschner reported that Dr. Tranter's presentation was titled, "From Worried to Well: Supporting Your Child at Home". There were over 1000 participants in the live webinar and Dr. Tranter's calm approach resulted in positive feedback from the families attending. He presented his webinar by answering the most pressing questions from the community, such as:

- How do I help build resiliency in my child for the return to school? ;
- How do I make a decision as to whether to send my child to school in-person or remotely?;
- How do I motivate my child if they are attending school in a virtual way?;
- How do I, as a parent, stay calm and strong in order to support my child?; and
- What are the kinds of factors that I should be focusing on as a parent to support well-being?

Dr. Duschner noted that Dr. Tranter provided a number of practical strategies beginning with the knowledge that parents need to be confident in the decisions that they make because as parents they know the needs of their children best. He spoke about the importance of modeling a calm demeanour and how children look to the adults in their world to know how to feel. They listen closely to what the adults in their lives are saying about the return to school.

Through working together, Learning Support Services (LSS) requested that Dr. Tranter prepare a short webinar for the educator staff and those staff participating in the Summer Transition Program. In the webinar, he talked about learning opportunities that have presented themselves amidst the pandemic and supporting students by helping them move forward in their education. He urged them to consider the new reality and look at old practices to determine where instruction can be delivered differently. He referred to his book, "The Third Path" where he listed the eight hierarchical conditions that support student well-being and academic achievement: Safety, Regulation, Belonging, Positivity, Engagement, Identity, Mastery and Meaning. Ongoing collaboration with him is planned as LSS begins to think more intentionally about implementing some of the conditions that are contained in the book The Third Path.

Dr. Duschner recounted that part of what was learned in term three of the 2019-2020 school year was the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on various members of the community. This fact has reprogrammed educators to try to better understand their students and support their learning from a stand point of ensuring equity, understanding and celebrating diversity, addressing systematic barriers and systematic discrimination in effective ways.

Superintendent Symmonds noted that this Speaker Series helped the District build a sense of community with the parents who were able to participate.

Superintendent Symmonds requested an update on the distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE). System Principal Hannah reported that LSS continues to work closely with the Occupational Health and Safety Department and Risk & Supply Chain Management Department as the key points of contact to procure and to set the guidelines and parameters for required PPE.

The District is in its final stages of PPE deployment. Secondary schools are to receive their equipment first. Elementary schools, which are practicing staggered entry start times, will receive their equipment by the end of day tomorrow. The clear masks have arrived to support the needs of deaf and hard of hearing students.

System Principal Hannah reminded the committee that keeping students and staff safe by wearing the appropriate PPE is work that is done jointly by Ottawa Public Health and provincial teams who provide the direction to school districts.

a. Summer Transition Programs

Superintendent Symmonds provided an update on the summer transition and mental health programming made possible by new government funding in June.

The continuity of mental health supports was designed to support students on existing case loads over the summer months. Part of this work was to provide an opportunity to facilitate transition back to school. In addition, training to staff was provided through School Mental Health Ontario. Thirteen psychology and social work staff members agreed to work over the summer to support existing case loads and new student referrals. The support included virtual care consultation with parents, individual counseling and, where necessary or appropriate, referral to community supports.

The summer transition program was designed to support students with high special education and or mental health needs in the two weeks leading up to the start of the new school year. Across the District, 182 staff members agreed to work as part of the program. LSS asked school teams to provide student names for eligibility based on their conversations through multi-disciplinary team meetings. Though the program was not designed to replace transition activities that are done at a school level, some students with high special education or mental health needs benefit from an additional focus on transition activities. These students were able to participate in a range of in-person and virtual activities created to help support their return to the school environment. Some barriers to participation were identified: scheduling conflicts, transportation issues and some people still had some concerns over health and safety as it related to the measures to control the pandemic. For those who attended the sessions, there were positive anecdotal reports from students, families, caregivers and staff who attested to how the program helped to alleviate some of the concerns about their return to school and that they appreciated the opportunity to be able to be in dialogue with school staff in order to help feel more comfortable with the return to school.

Superintendent Symmonds acknowledged the efforts of staff who worked to organize these two programs over the summer.

b. Update on the Reopening of Schools

Superintendent Symmonds reported that opening schools this year was rife with continual changes in direction following late-breaking announcements from the Ministry of Education. Staff has been very responsive to the revisions in process. He noted that while change is unsettling for some, others find change to be invigorating. There exists an opportunity to try new methodologies and continue to monitor the challenges. Steps are in place to help staff make a shift in the way they are accomplishing their responsibilities and they are being honoured for their contributions to help make the school year successful. The District is dependent on staff to be adaptable, innovative and creative in their support for students.

Establishing a comprehensive education system that supports both in-person and remote learners was a monumental undertaking. The needs of vulnerable students have been prioritized in the re-entry to schools. The measures to control the pandemic have a differential impact on people and students with special education needs experience such a differential impact.

With the release of PPM 164 on remote learning, LSS entered into comprehensive planning to determine a model of support for students with special education needs, including virtual classrooms, both for those students in the regular classroom and those in specialized program classes to determine the needs for all students. The possibility of replicating a specialized program class model in a virtual school setting was explored. Of concern was the loss of connection from the school site and peers along with the consideration that virtual learning can pose a challenge for some students with special education needs. Further concern existed about the number of qualified staff available in both learning settings. Feedback came from families, caregivers and school staff, resulting in developing some models of instructional delivery that were feasible. The chosen model of concurrent teaching will maintain connections with the home school educator teams. Students in regular classrooms will continue to receive the support based on their Individualized Education Plan (IEP), whether they attend in-person or remotely. It was decided to keep the allocation of Learning Support Teachers (LST) at elementary and secondary the same at the school level, to ensure access to the same number of specialized supports for these students going into the 2020-2021 school year. Staffing was augmented through the Support for Students Impacted by COVID-19 funding.

Superintendent Symmonds highlighted that the accommodations and modifications in the IEPs are expected to be implemented and followed. There will be situations where accommodations may not be reasonable or practical in a virtual learning environment and in those situations school staff will work with families, caregivers and, where appropriate, the student to develop solutions that will help meet the needs of those students.

He explained that in each of the models that were examined, none of them are without challenges. While the chosen approach does provide many benefits, LSS is committed to working through any impediments. This model will maintain that connection between schools and the home or caregivers with the in-person specialized program class community along with the educators who have a relationship to those students and can best support program delivery.

If there are requests to accommodate any in-year transition from virtual learning to in-person learning, the support and model is class-based and a transition is possible. He acknowledged that for some students with special education needs, the support required to meaningfully access virtual learning could be significant. To address this, teams have been trained to

respond should applicable situations arise. School teams are being supported and have the foundational skills to operationalize the model.

In response to a comment from staff around the disruption to the in-school educator teams, Superintendent Symmonds pointed out that the dual class model keeps teams working together to develop those programs and deliver them collaboratively.

Superintendent Symmonds mentioned that the Learning Disability Specialized Intervention Program (LD SIP) and the Elementary Gifted program involve special oversight. The LD SIP is a half-day program with an opportunity for students to be integrated for the other half of the school day to help consolidate skills learned during the LD SIP program time. Direction came from the Ministry stipulating that for elementary schools, the cohort for elementary student contacts is fifty students. There are scenarios in school where limiting the contacts to fifty students is difficult if integration were to occur. Due to this consideration, the District has provided an option for schools to make site-based decisions on whether that program continues full day for the LD SIP or whether they can still facilitate the integration portion of the day, based on specific site needs and how the numbers in different classes follow.

For elementary Gifted specialized program class the ministry gap for junior and intermediate classes is 25. Based on the splits of in-person vs remote learners across English intermediate gifted classes, a decision was made to group remote learners to form a class in the virtual school.

During discussion and in response to questions, the following points were noted:

- In conjunction with Business & Learning Technologies (B<) the Itinerant Teachers of Assistive Technology (ITATs) have been mobilized to help support technology solutions for teachers who use assistive technology tools;
- Live streaming of classes is not required in the virtual learning setting;
- Teachers will be scheduling times with the students in consultation with the families to align the virtual timetables;
- Students in regular and virtual classrooms, will be supported by their Learning Support Teachers (LST) and Learning Resource Teachers (LRT) from their home school;
- LSS is assessing the current requirement for professional support staff in OVC;
- For the LDSIP model, LSS plans to return to integration opportunities. Differentiated support for transition planning from remote to in-person could be explored;
- Determining adequate Special Equipment Amount (SEA) is a process that is completed annually. Students in the specialized programs will continue to be able to access the equipment as they move into a virtual school. If parents have a SEA gap, they must write to their teams;
- The representative for Ottawa Carleton Elementary Teachers Federation (OCETF) expressed a concern that teachers were not consulted when presented with the plan to return to school. A week in advance of the start of the school year they were provided with an explanation of protocols. Superintendent Symmonds recognized that the flow of communication could have been improved; however the pace and the nature of changing information from the Ministry was extraordinary. After accruing all the information, LSS is now focused on supporting staff members in their defined roles.
- Most specialized program classes have Educational Assistant support and it is expected that those educators work as teams to support the programs for the students. During the

planning phase over the summer, specialized program classes were carefully examined for capacity and where additional staffing was required, an LRT was added to the team to support the needs of those students;

- There is one intermediate English Language gifted class in the Ottawa Carleton Virtual (OCV) school campus. The students who have opted for remote learning across four gifted sites were grouped into a class which meets the legislative capacity and they will be assigned to one of the virtual academies with a dedicated teacher to facilitate their educational program;
- For other elementary Gifted specialized program classes, significant LRT time was assigned where the split between in-person and remote learners required an elevated level of support to meet the obligations of PPM 164, as well as serve the needs of the in-person learner;
- The Ministry directive for cohorts of 50 people refers to direct and indirect student to student contact. As much as staffing numbers permit, travel between the cohorts will be limited for educators as per OPH. PPE will be worn at all times. LSS is reviewing case loads to adjust to the new reality of reducing exposure of the ITAT population in many different schools over the course of one day;
- In most cases SEA is highly individualized to the particular students. In areas where there is shared technology, LSS is considering purchasing more equipment assets along with developing cleaning protocols for the shared equipment. As all classes are opened, the team will work as quickly as possible to address any unanticipated scenarios;
- Schools have access to set up temporary clear plastic dividers if there is a reason for students and staff to be in close proximity; and
- The special education supports and services will be the same; however, how the services are accessed will be different to account for the pandemic.

c. Transportation of Students

Manager Kay reported that the update for small vehicle transportation is very positive. All routes have been assigned for both elementary and secondary students that require small vehicle transportation. She commended Ottawa Student Transportation Authority (OSTA) for adapting to two very significant changes to the District's model for the return to school: the staggered start days for students and change requests from families. School teams are clearly communicating with families to ensure that specific start days are understood. It has also been communicated that OSTA is limited in ability to accommodate some of the highly specific change requests that come in at this time of year. At times, LSS will get requests from school teams for students to attend school at specific hours or for a reduced day as part of their reintegration to school and our school based administrator teams understand that there may be some delays during the transportation start-up in accommodating these requests. LSS is working with school-based administrators on back-up plans and contingencies.

System Principal Kessler provided an update on work that is being done with the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) Kids Come First health team and CHEOs School Based Rehab Services (formerly the Local Health Integration Network) in support of medically fragile students. The LSS team worked with the organizations to create a slide presentation to assist school boards in their support of medically complex children and youth in schools. This collaboration evolved into an invitation to participate in a return-to-school virtual town hall moderated by CHEO and Kids Comes First. There were upwards of one hundred and sixty

participants. The audio recording is available on The Kids Come First section of the CHEO website. Close collaboration has been ongoing for months involving a subcommittee of the principals from the special program schools at Crystal Bay Centre for Special Education and Clifford Bowey Public School and in consultation with System Principal Hannah who oversees the Physical Support Programs.

Personalized protective equipment is in place for our most medically fragile and vulnerable students to support their learning.

d. Outbreak Management Protocol

Ottawa Public Health has provided school outbreak management guides and they are available on their website. Two protocols were collaboratively developed with the District: a symptomatic student or staff member at school and a confirmed positive case.

Where symptoms are presenting in a student they will be moved to an isolation room supervised by a staff member using PPE, a call would go to the parent or guardian to protect the student and a deep clean ordered of the area in school that was occupied by the student. Schools teams will identify whether there are other household contacts within the school and those children will also be sent home. As part of the management guide, a flow chart dictates whether the individual gets tested based on guidelines or their health care practitioner recommendations. Depending on the nature of the information, the student could be required to self-isolate for 14 days or return to school after being without symptoms for 24 hours.

Parents and OPH will inform the school of a positive test result and next steps taken by the COVID-19 School Support Team (CSST). The individual should already be in isolation at home. OPH CSST nurse will contact the principal in order to obtain the required student and staff lists. The investigation will be based on dates, duration and proximity of interactions and PPE worn in order to assess overall exposure risk. Close contacts will be reached by phone. A “Do Not Attend List” will be provided daily by OPH with staff or student names that are not to attend school. Schools must ensure compliance.

During discussion and in response to questions, the following points were noted:

- In-school students who test positive for COVID-19 will not be temporarily moved to OCV. The Ministry has mandated that all educators maintain the virtual platform so that students can continue to be supported with assignments;
- Custodial staff will be responsible for deep cleaning the surfaces where the possibly infected student had been working;
- At this time there is one isolation room per school;
- OPH has hired 36 additional public health nurses to ensure that schools have quicker access to a school-based nurse; and
- Due to the onset of allergy season, ongoing communication with the school teams and the families is critical to determine any pre-existing conditions that may cause the appearance of COVID-19 symptoms.

Superintendent Symmonds noted that Medical Officer of Health Dr. Vera Etches has stated that the main focus is putting measures in place to stop the virus from entering schools. If

successful, schools can remain open longer and educators can continue to work in the established environment for a complete return to school.

6. New Business

6.1 Question and Answer Period

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:

Can we have more information on the remote learning program? When will there be contact with the LRT/LST to go over IEPs, accommodations etc?

A:

Students with special education needs will be supported by their virtual classroom teachers who are responsible for developing the IEP. LST/LRT support will come from the child's home school in order to facilitate transitions and knowledge sharing. A conversation can begin with the student's home school LST. The expectation is that IEPs continue to be developed and implemented. In cases where accommodations cannot be delivered in a remote learning environment, school teams will collaborate with families, caregivers, and students to develop accommodations that will support student learning.

Q:

What is being done for students currently in specialized classes that opt for the full time online learning model so that they will still:

a) have access to teachers with special education training and experience either through the virtual school or through some sort of connection to their regular class;
b) have access to peers who share their specialized class placement either through what would have been their in-school class and/or combined with students that share the same placement but were from another class and/or school. If the answer to this is that they will not be grouped exclusively with students with the same exceptionality, who exactly will they be grouped with? Is this the same for all specialized classes or are there exceptions?

A:

The majority of students in specialized program classes have opted for in-person learning. Students in most specialized program classes choosing remote learning will be grouped with their in-person peers and be able to connect for synchronous learning with the educators who know them best. Synchronous learning may take the form of video, voice or text communication using one of the established platforms (VLE, Google Classroom, etc.). By maintaining connection with the in-person learners, remote learners will maintain connection to the in-person community with educator teams who know the student, have access to qualified educators to deliver the program, and have increased flexibility to transition students to in-person learning over the course of the year. In addition, there is limited disruption to in-person SPC staffing teams which provides more flexibility to organizing responsibilities at the school level.

Q:

Will any secondary gifted classes be offered through the virtual high school?

A:

Secondary gifted courses will be offered when there are sufficient numbers of students similar to in-person scheduling. There is no guarantee the options will be available at the virtual school. The challenge at secondary is the varied number of courses and configurations offered. In all cases, accommodations and modifications noted in the IEP are expected to be provided.

Q:

What is the percentage of students opting for online learning that were placed in specialized programs? If possible, broken down by elementary/secondary and specialized class placement type.

A:

As of 2 September 2020, the following data is available:

Panel	# in-person SPC students	# of remote learning SPC students	% of remote learners
Elementary	969	346	26%
Secondary	439	112	20%

*does not include students who remain in the unknown category or are in secondary Gifted programming.

The District is not in a position to provide the data by specialized program class type due to other time pressures. Note that the data continues to be updated as we get more information on student/family/caregiver decisions regarding their chosen learning model.

Q:

How many LST, LRT, and EAs resources are being assigned to the 6 virtual elementary schools and 1 virtual secondary school? How does the ratio of students to resources compare to the in-person schools?

A:

LST and LRT (at elementary) allocations to schools remained untouched. School-based teams will provide support to the remote learners (e.g., remotely delivering Empower, or joining a remote class for a period of time). LST/LRT staff who know students are in a favourable position to quickly assist remote teachers in developing accommodations and modifications that best support student learning in a remote setting. LSS is concerned about the potential for delay in developing quality IEPs as new remote learning teams get to know their students. We are currently examining the reallocation of EAs. While EAs are assigned for safety, behaviour, and medical reasons, the demands for this kind of support are different in a virtual setting. In some cases, EAs provide specific support to students with deaf or hard of hearing or blind low vision needs. Those staff will be available to support students in the virtual school.

Q:

When does the board plan to communicate the possible windows for families to change delivery models? The communication thus far has been vague and hints at semester breaks but parents are hearing rumours that we have apparently committed for the full year and they are concerned that they are locked in after being led to believe that there would be specified times to potentially switch.

A:

LSS is trying to establish accurate numbers on how many students are choosing virtual versus in-person learning. That has been the priority so far. It is true that there may be designated times that changes can be made, such as at the end of a semester. Depending on space, program requirements, course schedules and other factors, there may be delays or circumstances which affect the timing and/or school availability. For example, required courses may not be available or were timetabled for a different part of the year for a student seeking to shift from virtual to in-person learning. The plan is to support students and families and aid with transitions under these circumstances.

Q:

On the District website there is a page that pertains to the gifted program at the elementary level. In the past, the page specified that the WISC had to be performed within a certain time frame (2 years 11 months?). I no longer see that language and I'm wondering if the policy has changed?

The policy has changed. The change improves practice because it is better for students. Rather than using time as the basis for determining the validity of a psychological assessment, the validity of an assessment (and need for a re-assessment) will be based on the data available and the professional judgement of the psychology staff member. This allows for a more holistic examination of the student's functioning in order to determine the most appropriate next steps to support. Factors such as age of assessment, engagement, life circumstances, current school functioning along with other factors are considered in this process. If a re-assessment is deemed necessary based on a review of factors, it will be completed, but students will not routinely be re-assessed because of the date of their previous assessment.

Q:

Where is the Province with respect to Intensive Behaviour Intervention (IBI) and Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) for children with autism? What is happening with the funding for therapies? The existing plans were extended when the pandemic started, but where is that now?

A:

In terms of IBI and ABA therapy, the situation is status quo with the province and will remain so until April 2021. Existing therapy plans continue to be funded, with some now in place for the last 3 or 4 years. For those children not in the grandfathered group, therapy funding continues to be available for families through the Ministry application process.

Q:

What is happening with newly diagnosed children? Are they receiving any IBI or ABA therapy? Are children being diagnosed or is that to some extent being downloaded to school boards to identify and suggest medical diagnosis?

A:

Children are still being diagnosed through CHEO's diagnostic hub and community based professionals. The families of newly diagnosed children need to apply to the Ministry to request therapy funding which they then use to purchase services.

Q:

Are we expecting/seeing more children (particularly in JK/SK/Gr 1) who have not had any IBI or ABA, or their IBI and/or ABA has been severely affected/reduced, therefore needing much higher supports from their schools? Do we have enough supports for these children such as additional SLPs, psychologists, Board Certified Behaviour Analysts (BCBAs) and Registered Behavioural Technicians (RBTs)?

A:

Data from ASD Intakes suggests the number of kinder learners diagnosed with ASD entering the District remains steady over the past two years. The biggest variable is the number of older children who move into the region and who have high needs, mainly from the Toronto area. The greatest need is for classroom based support like EAs. A number of EAs have RBT training and the course was offered again in the spring through Sonderly/Geneva Centre.

Q:

Are we intending/do we think we need to open more ASD classes at the elementary level?

A:

The District continues to welcome students with increasing complex needs attending school. Currently the District operates 35 elementary ASD specialized program classes. Since the 2013-14 school year, the District has opened 20 additional elementary ASD specialized program classes.

LSS is concerned about the ongoing increases to specialized program classes as there are increasing accommodation issues across the district. Schools with space tend to be in the inner core of the city or in English-only or RAISE schools. From an equity perspective, this causes significant concern. In the meantime, we continue to build the capacity of regular classroom teachers, EAs and Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) to meet the needs of students with autism. Throughout the Learn at Home phase of the school closure, LSS provided many workshops to educators to enhance their abilities to support students.

Expanding our elementary specialized program classes also has signalled a potential bottleneck as students age through the system. While there are 150 elementary specialized program classes in 66 schools across the District, the model at secondary is further pressured by a substantially smaller number of school sites meaning that each high school would have to host a significant number of specialized program classes in order to maintain the same number.

The District will have to examine the number and nature of specialized program classes at both elementary and secondary levels in order to find a sustainable way forward.

Q:

What is happening with the pilots - programs like Art of Play, PEERs and the in-school therapy program?

A:

LSS is offering adapted PEERs online to students in the two ASD Credit Support Programs. Planning for the delivery of Art of Play is on hold until funding is confirmed. Dedicated Space and our partnerships with community ABA providers will continue this fall and an initial meeting was held with the outgoing principal of First Avenue on August 26th. Contracts with service providers are being adjusted to reflect the need for compliance with District health and safety protocols. ABA Coordinator, Leanne Forrest, is part of a planned transition meeting with the outgoing principal and the new principal.

Superintendent Symmonds thanked the committee for all contributions.

6.2 SEAC Meeting Schedule 2020-2021

Chair Nadon Campbell announced that the SEAC meeting schedule is attached to the meeting package.

7. Letters from Association Representatives

7.1 Easter Seals Ontario, Nicole Ullmark

Your committee had before it, a letter from the Easter Seals representative on SEAC.

Ms. Ullmark summarized her concerns by expressing the view that medically fragile students have been underserved at this point in time as far as being offered a choice in learning remotely or in-person. Parents have not been told whether their children are going to be receiving any nursing support or therapy support and therefore the options are limited on how these students will receive an education.

Superintendent Symmonds acknowledged that virtual learning does pose a differential impact on families within the special education umbrella. For some students, access to virtual learning will require a family member or caregiver to sit beside them and manage some of the tasks. The District is not in a position at this time to assign EA's to work inside a student's home.

System Principal Kessler noted that there is always room for improvement on communication. Manager Kay has been in touch with the LHIN and broader support and services are in place for in-person students. The LHIN should be communicating with principals in schools to confirm case management. LSS is looking at the assignment of educational supports to elementary and secondary virtual schools, because those supports and services are part of students accessing learning opportunities and the curriculum. The educational support for virtual learning is a part of the structure of how schools are being staffed. She thanked Ms. Ullmark for bringing the concerns forward.

8. Adjournment

Chair Nadon-Campbell stated that further specific feedback on any of the subjects discussed can be sent via email to both her and Superintendent Symmonds.

The meeting adjourned at 9:26 p.m.

Sonia Nadon-Campbell, Chair, Special Education Advisory Committee