

SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

Wednesday, October 7, 2020

7:00 p.m.

Zoom Meeting

Members: Christine Boothby (Trustee), Rob Campbell (Trustee), Chris Ellis (Trustee), Sonia Nadon-Campbell (Community Representative), Amy Wellings (Community Representative), Susan Cowin (Community Representative), Jim Harris (VOICE for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children), Mark Wylie (Down Syndrome Association), Nicole Ullmark (Easter Seals Ontario), 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), Catherine Houlden (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation), Andrew Winchester (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Alternate), Jean Trant (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, SSP), Lynn Scott (Trustee, ex-officio)

Staff and Guests: Justine Bell (Trustee), Joy Lui (Student Trustee), Charles Chen (Student Trustee), Peter Symmonds (Superintendent of Learning Support Services), Dorothy Baker (Superintendent of Instruction), Dr. Petra Duschner (Manager of Mental Health and Critical Services), Christine Kessler (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Amy Hannah (System Principal Learning, Support Services), Katheryn Langevin (Supervisor of Psychology), Stacey Kay (Manager, Learning Support Services), Leigh Fenton (Board/Committee Coordinator), Donna Owens (Delegate)

1. Call to Order

Chair Nadon-Campbell called the meeting to order at 7:03 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 welcomed Amy Wellings, the new community representative and Andrew Winchester, the alternate representative appointed by the Ottawa-Carleton Secondary Teachers' Federation (OSSTF).

2. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by Sue Cowin,

THAT the agenda be approved.

Carried

3. Delegations

3.1 Donna Owen Re: Individual Education Plans and the Secondary School Quadmester Model

Ms. Owens noted that for the 2020-2021 school year, the Individual Education Plans (IEPs) will be issued on 26 October 2020, a timeframe that is just before completion of the first secondary school quadmester on 13 November 2020. An IEP is an important document for students accessing special education supports because it describes accommodations and modifications to access the curriculum. She highlighted a concern for Grade 9 students whose needs are least known to staff in their new schools. She requested that Learning Support Services (LSS) establish the IEPs at an earlier date, prioritizing secondary students.

Ms. Dlouhy requested information on the legislated timeline for issuing IEPs. Superintendent Symmonds replied that the timelines are set in legislation through Ministry of Education Regulation 181/98, "Identification and Placement of Exceptional Pupils". Principals are required to ensure that an IEP is developed for each student who has been identified as exceptional by an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC). In addition, an IEP may also be prepared for students who require accommodations, program modifications and/or alternative programs. In both cases, the IEP is required to be developed within 30 school days of the student's placement in a special education program. He noted there has been a delay as all timelines were impacted as a part of the COVID-19 emergency order in the province. This order was removed on 14 September 2020. A 30 day count into the 2020-2021 school year calendar arrived at the date of 26 October 2020. He advised that many transition meetings occurred in intermediate schools and the receiving secondary schools. Grade 9 teachers have access to the IEP Online (IOL) platform and, from the beginning of the year, have maintained the accommodations, modifications and alternative curriculum expectations.

Trustee Boothby queried the likelihood of teacher's awareness of a particular student's IEP if the IEPs have not yet been formalized. Superintendent Symmonds noted that each teacher refers to the class list where a previous IEP is specified for an individual student. Teachers then examine the student's current course enrollment and provide the suitable accommodations and modifications, as appropriate, to support students.

In response to a query from Mr. Harris, Superintendent Symmonds responded that he does not anticipate technical challenges moving forward as students are settled into their mode of learning. As with in-person learning, teachers will update and share IEPs as necessary.

4. Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report

4.1 9 September 2020

Moved by Sue Cowin,

THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee Report dated 9 September 2020 be received.

Carried

5. Presentations

5.1 Report 20-053, Indigenous, Human Rights and Equity Roadmap 2020-2023

Your committee had before it Report 20-053, providing the foundation for the introduction of the Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap 2020-2023 (Roadmap). Superintendent Baker reported that the document sets the direction in identifying and addressing systemic barriers that impact equitable access, opportunity and outcomes for underserved students and staff. The Roadmap operationalizes many of the priorities identified in the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan and outlines the roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities at all levels of the organization in serving students, parents, staff and community.

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

- The Roadmap is aligned with the goals outlined in the District's 2019-2023 Strategic Plan;
- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada Calls to Action, specifically the 'Education for Reconciliation' portion of the TRC, are embedded in the Roadmap;
- Support for the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent is stated at the beginning of the Roadmap;
- In 2020, with the launch of the Identity Based Data Collection Project - *Valuing Voices: Identity Matters*, it was possible to specifically identify systemic barriers that exist and foster plans to address disproportionate access, opportunity and outcomes for Indigenous, Black, minoritized, 2SLGBTQ and special education students. These plans include the need for heightened staff awareness, increased representation of minoritized and racialized identities in the faculty and capacity building to develop the organization's strength to support all students;
- In the Roadmap, particular attention was placed on describing the identity of students served and the various school communities engaging in public education;
- The Roadmap cultivates the practice of accountability by outlining specific actions, reports, and communication structures by which to measure progress in the areas of governance and leadership with transparency;
- In the creation of the Roadmap and in consultation with LSS, the challenges associated with program pathways were identified. One of the goals for programming and support for students is to develop and implement a District inquiry in select schools to address equitable access, opportunities, learning, and outcomes: Student Achievement Through Inquiry (SATE);

- Trustee Ellis noted the intersectionality that is evidenced in students accessing special education, creating overlapping systems of discrimination and disadvantage. The gifted exceptionality is generally underrepresented in marginalized communities whereas the behavioural exceptionality tends to be overrepresented. The story of human rights as it relates to special needs is lacking. He suggested in a future version of the document that this distinction be captured;
- Superintendent Symmonds highlighted that disability, as it relates to human rights, is protected under the Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms and the Ontario Human Rights Code. Established in Canada are extensive Ministry of Education regulations and policy/program memoranda (PPMs) as they relate to special education. These existing documents set out a standard that school boards are expected to meet or a directive with which they must comply. LSS submitted input into development of the Roadmap at various opportunities; and
- While the Indigenous and Black perspectives are highlighted in the Roadmap, the history of minoritized students, including special education students, are described in the portion of the document which promotes the student profile served by the District.

6. Matters for Action

6.1 Appointment of a Representative for the Committee of Whole Meeting

Chair Nadon-Campbell reminded the voting members that a SEAC representative for the Committee of the Whole remains vacant and requires a volunteer.

7. Department Update

7.1 Superintendent's Report

a. Memo 20-126 Re-opening Plans for Special Education Delivery

Your committee had before it Memo 20-126, describing the delivery of special education programs, particularly specialized program classes (SPC). Superintendent Symmonds stated that the principals of every school continue to be updated on expectations surrounding the delivery model. He reported that students and staff are on a growth pathway and are demonstrating greater comfort levels with the structure of the classrooms. LSS continues to offer resources to assist educators in delivering the best programs possible for students. Virtual learning is a new realm and staff is experimenting with innovative ways to successfully teach online. A network of teachers is sharing best practices and technology tips related to meeting the needs of students in the blended model. Teachers are becoming increasingly comfortable with Learning Management Systems (LMS). Additional technology purchases include cameras and Bluetooth headsets to help facilitate communication with virtual learners for the SPCs. These will be distributed shortly, along with guidelines around their use. Issues related to replacing absent staff continue to be a challenge faced by the District.

Ms. Houlden recognized that there is no manual to support and deliver programming to special education learners during these unprecedented times. LSS, teachers, Education Assistants (EAs) and families are all doing their very best to ensure students receive the

best education possible whether the choice has been made to attend school in-person or remotely.

In order to provide informed input, secondary school specialized program class teachers were independently surveyed by Ms. Houlden to gain insight about their experience with the blended model. They have strong, caring relationships with not only students but also their families. Almost all parents and guardians have been patient and understanding as the school community tries to navigate through this together and for that the teachers are grateful.

Unlike their regular program counterparts, the students in the blended model system classes are not receiving the same educational support and access to qualified teacher instruction. From the feedback in the survey the claims are that there is a vast difference in access to synchronous learning in specialized program classes throughout the Board:

- Sites with larger numbers of system class students have been able to adjust timetables/programming to avoid the blended model. Teachers at those sites are able to deliver appropriate programming and meet the needs of both their in-person and virtual students;
- Schools with fewer system classes are set-up to use the blended model and despite teachers and EAs using their lunches, preparatory and personal time, the same level of support and instruction time is unmanageable; and
- System classes for students with greater independence challenges (Dual Support Program (DSP), General Learning Program (GLP) and Developmental Disabilities Program (Semi-Integrated DDP) are not able to adequately access their learning with the limited support available through the blended model.

Ms. Houlden expressed the view that the hybrid model is resulting in an inequity of instruction and learning support for some of the highest needs students. She would like to see more support and guidance from LSS to work towards greater equity across the system. Also, additional staffing and resources are required at sites which use the hybrid model in order to ensure system class students receive equal access to qualified teacher instruction, as do regular program students.

Superintendent Symmonds responded that he and his team are aware that some classroom educators struggle with the blended model. The teaching support staff allocation at the classroom level remained the same as in years previous, despite some of those classes having fewer students from those families who had opted for a remote learning environment. The blended model has been selected by several other school boards across the province. LSS is continually increasing capacity to meet the needs of those students. He empathized with the challenge of working under a new model; however, advantages exist with transitions from remote learning back to in-person with the caring, compassionate educators with whom the students have developed relationships. He acknowledged that it will take increased capacity to continue to grow and to deliver a comprehensive program for those students.

Trustee Ellis requested that Ms. Houlden relay to her colleagues, the appreciation from trustees and senior staff for their efforts in designing a viable support system for these special education students. He noted that a recommendation to the Board could come from SEAC should additional resources be required.

Trustee Boothby reflected on the additional burden on teachers. She requested clarification on the protocol for central administration to connect with the teachers and principals to collectively decide on additional forms of support, both technological and for mental health, during the roll-out of a completely new style of instruction. Superintendent Symmonds responded that System Principals regularly connect with secondary principals to receive feedback and identify areas requiring further support. Learning Support Consultants (LSC) are tied to each of the specialized program class areas. They have organized support networks and resource libraries for the hybrid model. There is a separate LSS team that is responsible for Specialized Equipment Amount (SEA) technology. He recognized that the blended model is in the implementation phase and LSS is focusing all of their efforts into making the model a success moving forward.

In response to a query by Trustee Boothby, Superintendent Symmonds noted that LSS is preparing for a potential increase in virtual learners should families decide to switch to remote learning amid the increase in positive cases of COVID-19. Staff are exercising caution at overloading the virtual classrooms.

In response to a query by Ms. Cowin, Superintendent Symmonds committed to follow-up with Jack Donohue Public School in regards to the Learning Resource Teacher (LRT) support for special education virtual students.

Trustee Campbell sought further comment from LSS on Ms. Houlden's statement that many educators are working beyond the confines of a normal working day to accommodate the demands of a hybrid model. Superintendent Symmonds noted that some teachers are putting in extra time to support their students with special needs in the blended model. He hoped that this would not be a long term occurrence as educators gain confidence and capacity in working in this model. He noted that a Back to School in Virtual Learning Survey was sent to the entire school community, seeking input on identifying opportunities to better support students. Staff is awaiting the analysis of these results to better understand some of the common challenges. Trustee Campbell stipulated that the added imposition on staff required a timely resolution.

Ms. Allen highlighted that LSS has provided as much support as possible in the elementary special education program classes including increasing support from speech language pathologists who are visiting multiple schools and working virtually with remote learners.

Ms. Gardener stated that she was pleased that the Back to School Survey was launched. She noted that the comments Ms. Houlden put forth were aligned with feedback from elementary school teachers. She reiterated that teachers are experiencing a great amount of stress at this time and she is concerned with the mental health balance in the teaching community. Teachers are neglecting their preparatory time because there is not adequate coverage. She does not agree that there is enough funding and support in place to serve children adequately. She questioned the use of the phrase "innovate practices" in the current model of instruction when ultimately there is a requirement for more educators to assist with the workload.

Superintendent Symmonds concurred that there is a tremendous amount of stress in the education system of today and it is a challenge to develop new practices and different approaches. LSS, along with Business and Learning Technologies (B and LT) are continually creating resources to try to support educators in delivering programs for students both in the regular program and in special education programs. Itinerant Teachers of Assistive Technology (ITATs) and LSCs provide additional support. A wide variety of

professional support staff, in areas of psychology, social work or speech language pathology, is employed to help assist staff members in meeting the needs of students. Teacher innovations continue to emerge. He visited an Learning Disabilities Specialized Intervention Program (LD SIP) class where teachers are streaming the lessons for remote learners. They are awaiting Bluetooth headsets so that they can communicate seamlessly with the remote learners via Google Meet. Elementary teachers are using Google sites to support learners and finding creative ways to ensure that they are engaged and that families are well supported. He submitted that the blended model is both unique and unfamiliar and LSS is working to build capacity to spread awareness of best practice and to help people understand that there are different ways to approach instruction and make pedagogical decisions in meeting the needs of those remote learners.

A discussion ensued about the necessity to examine the data presented in the findings of the Back to School survey to determine if there is ample support to make a recommendation to the Board for additional resources.

b. Other Matters

System Principal Kessler reported that the Empower Reading Program has commenced for in-person students. There have been significant challenges as a result of the reorganization. One of the first steps was to determine the location of the Empower trained teachers and reassess training needs for the fall. Training and mentoring obligations are clearly stated in the Memorandum of Agreement with The Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto (SickKids) and monitored jointly by SickKids and the District's Empower Reading program coordinator. Some students were unable to finish the Empower program last year as a result of the provincial closure of schools. SickKids developed additional resources to provide a review for those students to help them complete the program. In response to a query by Ms. Houlden, System Principal Kessler explained that there are a number of assessment tools that SickKids provides as well as in-school assessments, should a concern be raised about the level of achievement attained in the remote learning setting. Every school that has an Empower-trained teacher has access to Sick Kids mentor coaches who are experts in helping to assess students on the need for re-teaching.

System Principal Hannah provided an update on SEA. The new SEA application process is in the roll-out phase and 37 applications have been received and processed from across the District. The process is proving to be a significantly faster way to obtain the necessary equipment. She reported that 62 of the SEA claims equipment (physical equipment) had been moved into the requesting schools. LSS is continuing to respond to schools confirming any missing SEA technology equipment. These pieces are being replenished for school sites. The ITATs have been training the students and staff in the in-person schools and with the Ottawa Carleton Virtual (OCV) schools in kindergarten to grade 12.

Trustee Ellis sought confirmation that SEA is funded by the province to provide equipment to those students identified to meet certain criteria. System Principal Hannah indicated that the definition was correct, noting the criteria is that the equipment be deemed essential for students to access the curriculum. There is an application process for both technological and claims. Equipment ranges from a standing frame to a device enabling the student to communicate with eye gaze technology.

Manager Kay reported that though there has been extensive media coverage about some of the challenges Ottawa Student Transport Authority (OSTA) is facing with respect to the yellow school bus driver shortage. The District has been fortunate in that the driver shortage has not affected small vehicle transportation at this time. OSTA is working with their providers and has been able to meet the demands of students who access specialized transportation.

Dr. Duschner acknowledged the diligence of education staff and the professionalism as they welcome back students. The educators are working hard to develop relationships with students which build trust and feelings of safety. Many students are settling well and are happy to be back at school. From a mental health perspective, she reported that LSS has been successful in recruitment for the areas of psychology and social work. The District is at a full staff complement which means that psychology and social work staff is assigned to each of the schools sites. They have been busily meeting with their schools to identify student needs and develop plans in terms of how best to support students. A challenge is the novelty of the OCV and work with the administrators is ongoing to determine virtual support. She noted that the District is concerned that there are students who are not attending school. Ways to re-engage these students are being thoroughly considered.

Superintendent Symmonds thanked the members of LSS for their updates and for the time they are investing to support the entire District. He reported that in an announcement by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) received 7 October 2020, The Right to Read Inquiry is in the data analysis phase. Due to the disruption caused by the pandemic, the final report is planned for spring of 2021. As October is Learning Disabilities Awareness Month and Dyslexia Awareness Month, the OHRC plans to release a short video.

He noted the Back to School Survey intends to gather feedback from students, parents, guardians and staff in all modes of learning, in person or virtual. The exercise is part of PPM No. 164 that provided monitoring and evaluation parameters around the delivery of remote learning. The responses will assist the District to improve and enhance service delivery to support students and learning. The survey is open until 16 October 2020 and it is accessible from the home page of the District webpage.

7.2 Special Education Plan (Standards)

a. Transportation

Manger Kay reported that she has reviewed the requirements of the Transportation Standard and the document fulfills the requirements of the standard and is relevant to current practices in specialized and accessible transportation. OSTA provides the District's transportation services and the standard makes reference to their website, which provides the policies and procedures that govern the work that OSTA does to serve and provide transportation for the students. The Transportation Standard meets the requirements at both the federal and provincial level.

She noted one change on the second page of the standard, third paragraph reads, "The Board provides transportation for special needs students enrolled in the Summer Learning Program or Care and Treatment (CTCC) programs, also known as Section 23 programs. The use of Section 23 programs will be removed as it is a dated reference.

Trustee Campbell commented that locating and sourcing the assertions in the standard may be not only useful but necessary as they no longer exist in either the procedure or policy regarding transportation, as District transportation policies is obsolete. Further clarity as to where to find the source documents and to read the statements in context may be important for parents who wish to fully understand their rights and recourse details. He advised noting explicitly that all transportation policy making authority has been delegated to OSTA. Manager Kay noted that she will research the explicit references on OSTA's website.

8. Committee Reports

8.1 Advisory Committee on Equity

A representative was unable to attend the ACE meeting on 24 September 2020.

8.2 Indigenous Education Advisory Council

As the newly-appointed Indigenous Education Advisory Council representative, Chair Nadon-Campbell plans to attend the next meeting on 22 October 2020.

8.3 Parent Involvement Committee

The representative was unable to attend the PIC meeting on 21 September 2020.

8.4 Committee of the Whole

There is a current vacancy for a Committee of the Whole representative.

8.5 Extended Day and Child Care Program

The first Extended Day and Child Care Program meeting of the 2020-2021 school year is scheduled for 12 November 2020.

8.6 Board

The representative was unable to attend the Board meeting on 22 September 2020.

9. New Business

There was no new business raised.

10. 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 8:54 p.m.

Sonia Nadon-Campbell, Chair, Special Education Advisory Committee