

SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

Wednesday, December 9, 2020, 7:00 pm
Zoom Meeting

Members:	Christine Boothby (Trustee), Rob Campbell (Trustee), Chris Ellis (Trustee), Sonia Nadon-Campbell (Community Representative), Sue Cowin (Community Representative), Amy Wellings (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) Johnna MacCormick (VIEWS for the Visually Impaired, Alternate), Safina Dewshi (Ottawa-Carleton Assembly of School Councils), Maggie Mamen (Learning Disabilities Association of Ottawa-Carleton), Katie Ralph (Autism Ontario), Ian Morris (Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders), Cathy Miedema (Association for Bright Children of Ontario)
Association Representatives (Non- Voting):	Jennifer Titley (Alternate, 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), Nancy Dlouhy (Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Operations Committee)
Staff and Guests:	Justine Bell (Trustee), Lynn Scott (Trustee), Peter Symmonds (Superintendent of Learning Support Services), Mary Ann Farrish (Superintendent of Instruction), Carolyn Tanner (Human Rights and Equity Advisor), Dr. Petra Duschner (Manager of Mental Health and Critical Services), Colin Anderson (System Principal), Joan Oracheski (Manager, Research, Evaluation and Analytics Division), Christine Kessler (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Amy Hannah (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Kathryn Langevin (Supervisor of Social Work), Stacey Kay (Manager, Learning Support Services), Sandy Owens (Manager, Business and Learning Technologies), Nicole Guthrie (Manager of Board Services), Leigh Fenton (Board/Committee Coordinator)

1. Call to Order

Superintendent Symmonds called the meeting to order 7:02 p.m.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by Trustee Ellis,

THAT the agenda be approved.

Chair Nadon-Campbell requested that item 7.1, Annual Report on Student Suspensions, be moved to item 3.1 under Presentation.

Moved by Trustee Ellis,

THAT the agenda be approved, as amended.

Carried

3. Presentation

3.1 Report 20-085, Annual Report on Student Suspensions (2019-2020) (M. Giroux)

Your committee had before it report 20-085, presenting the annual report on student suspensions in 2019-2020.

Manager Oracheski noted that suspension information has been consistent over the past several years. For 2019-2020, the overall student suspension rate was 2.2%. Through examining groups of students, students with special education needs are 2.5 times more likely to be represented in suspension data, compared to their representation in the overall student population. The disparities are highest for students with a behaviour exceptionality, who are 27 times more likely to receive a suspension compared to students without special education needs. The highest rates of over representation in the suspension data were observed for students reporting addiction and, or, mental health disabilities and those identifying as Indigenous. When compared to other groups of students, the relative risk of suspension was higher for these same groups of students.

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

- To-date, the intersectionality data between groups have not been analyzed;
- Strategic actions to build capacity linked to lowering suspension rates and supporting a change in practice are connected to both the Safe

Schools department and the Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap;

- A bias-aware progressive discipline model is in place;
- System Principal Anderson is conducting sessions with principals and vice-principals on considerations for alternatives to suspension and re-examining the reason for a suspension. Administrators should take into consideration an individual's circumstance and offer support to the student to improve their behaviour;
- Trustee Ellis expressed the opinion that in cases of students accessing support for behavioural needs, an important component to avoiding a situation that may lead to a suspension discussion, is to ensure that adequate resources are in place to support the student in the school environment;
- Ms. Miedema noted that the use of the phrase "excluding gifted" creates additional barriers for students in the gifted program. She requested that this observation be noted for consideration in future reports. Trustee Campbell noted that he did not agree that it was not appropriate to exclude a grouping with a below average suspension rate within the categories of abilities in special education. The gifted category may unduly weight the reporting of the group, as a whole, and therefore the analysis may not reflect the extent of the overrepresentation of students accessing special education in the overall suspension rate. Ms. Miedema stressed that the deaf and hard of hearing students or those with physical disabilities are less likely to be suspended as well; however they are a part of the study. She observed that information about gifted students is often segregated from students with other exceptionalities;
- Dr. Duschner noted that early adversity can create challenges in developing and achieving optimal self-regulation, making children and youth vulnerable to a range of negative, lifelong health and mental health difficulties. Educators can provide a more intentional and targeted focus on understanding self-regulation to be able to support cognitive and emotional regulation skills and their integration;
- The Ministry of Education has allocated funding to promote early intervention in student behaviours from kindergarten to grade 3. Learning Support Services (LSS) is working with teaching staff to assist in the development of refined insight on understanding implicit bias and how the bias affects the educator and child interaction, subsequently demonstrated in child behaviour;
- Transition planning is completed year-over-year with special education students and the Learning Support Teachers (LRTs) and Learning Support Consultants (LSCs). Transition planning is embedded in the Individual Education Plans (IEPs). In addition, there are certain types of plans that exist to support English Language Learners (ELLs) and those that support the well-being of students. Written copies of the

plans are stored in the Ontario Student Record, which is a document that moves with the student through the school years;

- The process for suspensions and exclusions each occur in separate circumstances. An exclusion is used when the safety is at risk for staff or other students;
- Trustee Campbell expressed the view that the high rate of suspensions in the behaviour exceptionality of special education merits a District root cause analysis; and
- Ms. Allen encouraged the minimization of transitions between spaces and multiple adult interactions for students who are triggered by regular changes in the instructional day.

4. Matters for Action

4.1 Committee Appointments

a. Chair

Mr. Jim Harris nominated Ms. Sonia Nadon-Campbell for the position of Chair.

Moved by Sue Cowin,

THAT the nominations be closed.

Carried

Ms. Nadon-Campbell was declared Chair of SEAC by acclamation.

At the request of Ms. Nadon-Campbell, Superintendent Symmonds remained the acting Chair for the duration of the committee appointment process.

b. Vice Chair

Ms. Sonia Nadon-Campbell nominated Mr. Jim Harris for the position of Vice Chair.

Moved by Trustee Boothby,

THAT the nominations be closed.

Carried

Mr. Harris was declared Vice Chair of SEAC by acclamation.

c. Board

The SEAC representative for the Board was not determined.

Ms. Nadon-Campbell requested the item be added to the 6 January 2021 agenda.

d. Committee of the Whole

Mr. Jim Harris nominated Ms. Sonia Nadon-Campbell for the position of Committee of the Whole representative.

Moved by Trustee Ellis,

THAT the nominations be closed.

Carried

Ms. Nadon-Campbell was declared Committee of the Whole representative of SEAC by acclamation.

e. Committee of the Whole - Budget

Ms. Cathy Miedema nominated herself for the position of the SEAC representative to the Committee of the Whole, Budget.

Moved by Trustee Ellis,

THAT nominations be closed.

Carried

Ms. Miedema was declared the SEAC representative to the Committee of the Whole, Budget, by acclamation.

f. Parent Involvement Committee

Mr. Ian Morris nominated himself for the position of the SEAC representative to the Parent Involvement Committee.

Moved by Sonia Nadon-Campbell,

THAT nominations be closed.

Carried

Mr. Morris was declared the SEAC representative to the Parent Involvement Committee, by acclamation.

g. Advisory Committee on Equity

Ms. Susan Cowin nominated herself for the position of SEAC member representative to the Advisory Committee on Equity.

Moved by Trustee Ellis,

THAT nominations be closed.

Carried

Ms. Cowin was declared the SEAC member to the Advisory Committee on Equity, by acclamation.

h. Indigenous Education Advisory Council

Ms. Sonia Nadon-Campbell nominated herself for the position of SEAC member representative to the Indigenous Education Advisory Council.

Moved by Trustee Boothby,

THAT nominations be closed.

Carried

Ms. Nadon-Campbell was declared the SEAC member to the Indigenous Education Advisory Council, by acclamation.

i. Advisory Committee on Extended Day and Child Care Program

The SEAC representative for the Advisory Committee on Extended Day and Child Care Programs was not determined.

Chair Nadon-Campbell noted that the item will be added to the 6 January 2021 agenda.

Ms. Nadon-Campbell assumed the Chair.

5. Delegations

There were no delegations.

6. Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report

6.1 4 November 2020 SEAC Report

Moved by Katie Ralph,

That the 4 November 2020 report be received.

Trustee Ellis suggested that on folio 6, first paragraph, the words "powerful program" be replaced with "Empower reading program".

Dr. Mamen noted that on folio 3, the last sentence should refer to the set date for a findings report as 13 April 2021.

Moved by Katie Ralph,

That the 4 November 2020 report be received.

Carried

7. Presentation

7.1 Report 20-084, The Development of a Human Rights Policy (C. Tanner)

Your committee had before it Report 20-084, reviewing the plan to develop a human rights policy.

Human Rights and Equity Advisor Tanner briefly reviewed a presentation of the District's commitment to human rights and equity. The office of a Human Rights and Equity advisor advocates for human rights based approach to education. There are three fundamental principles to a human rights based approach: equality and non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, and transparency and accountability. She noted that as human rights are fundamental to children, and are particularly highlighted for students with special needs, the proposed consultation plan will benefit from further input from SEAC.

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

- Trustee Ellis encouraged the development of a strategy to connect with families who face barriers to participating in the school community;
- Ms. Houlden noted the District serves a diverse socio-economic population. She expressed concern about equity issues with different implementations of some school programs. There is a disparity between the OCDSB's level of District promotion of programs which serve, statistically, students from higher SES households versus those from lower SES households. She suggested a comparison study on the level of District promotion for the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme versus the Vocational Programs;
- Ms. Houlden expressed the view that when considering a human rights policy, consultations with people who have developmental disabilities is a necessary exercise;
- Human Rights and Equity Advisor Tanner noted that should a complaint procedure be initiated online, a mechanism can be built to allow a trusted friend or school mentor to assist with the submission of the form;
- To effectively collect input from the special education community, Mr. Harris suggested a future breakout exercise with SEAC to address a specific question on human rights; and
- Ms. Dewshi encouraged a consultation with the Ottawa-Carleton Assembly of School Councils (OCASC), as the parents who participate

on the school councils share a network of connections within the community.

Human Rights and Equity Advisor Tanner noted that she is impressed with some of the initiatives that the Durham District School Board (DDSB) has established during the process of creating a human rights policy. The DDSB launched an awareness campaign, including video clips featuring international languages, directing families to their website where a Thoughtexchange survey inviting the community to comment on the development of a human rights policy and the consultation plan. She envisions a similar wide-reaching consultation for the OCDSB. She noted that related to human rights is the 2020-2021 District consultation for the Police Involvement in Schools, and there are a large group of students participating in the steering group which may help focus on aspects of the development of the human rights policy.

8. Department Update

8.1 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Symmonds provided an update on COVID-19: As of 8 December 2020, there were 36 active cases for students, three active staff cases and two closed classes. Across the District, since the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, there has been a total of 229 resolved cases. He noted that it is evident that the precautions of the school community have contributed to a low number of infections. Ottawa Public Health (OPH) conducts ongoing reviews, referred to as student index cases, and they perform contact tracing for positive test results. It has been determined that students are typically exposed at home. Generally many students are asymptomatic or experience relatively mild symptoms. While members of the household wait for pending test results the importance of isolation is paramount to keeping the community safe.

He reported that the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) and grade nine math assessments will be conducted in quadesters two, three and four. For the two schools with octomesters, the standardized testing will occur in segments five, six, seven and eight. The testing is available to students attending the brick and mortar schools. It will be an online assessment with some built in text-to-speech features. Google Read and Write is also available as a support as well as some other accessibility types of software, for example for students with blind low vision can use ZoomText for accessibility. He noted that accommodations received during the EQAO must be consistent with the accommodations in place for assessments as noted in their IEP leading up to EQAO.

Ms. Houlden noted that some of the accommodations that students have do not necessarily need to be based on an IEP. Superintendent Symmonds confirmed that, for example, extended time has been removed

from the IEP for many years to limit IEPs being sought for the expressed purpose of extra break allowances.

a. Report 20-110, Update on Supports from Students with Giftedness (Elementary) (P. Symmonds)

Your committee had before it Report 20-110, providing an update on support from elementary students with giftedness.

Superintendent Symmonds reported that at the Board meeting on 30 October 2018, Trustees passed a motion that staff be directed to implement a pilot program which utilizes both the OCDSB Guide for Supporting Gifted Students in the Regular Classroom (The Guide) and the OCDSB Interest Academy.

The pilots commenced in spring 2019 with initial orientation and training for staff from the three schools who were invited to participate. Each school received a copy of The Guide. Included with the guide was specific information related to the second pilot, the OCDSB Interest Academy. As school teams reviewed the information in the guide and were familiarized with the scope of the two pilots, team members from LSS received anecdotal feedback from school staff about both resources. The determination was that the resource was not as successful or helpful as planned and a new way forward was considered.

System Principal Hannah highlighted that an LSS focus this year was examining different ways to connect together. With the 2019-2020 labour disruption and the impact of the COVID-19, there was limited ability to engage in professional learning with the teams. The methodology behind approaching school teams with The Guide has shifted with the current best-practices to stop the spread of the COVID-19. For sanitary reasons the paper binder resource guide is no longer circulated as an instructional aide. An online tool is being developed to serve as a resource for improving the instructional core and teaching specialized differentiation, useful for all special education students. A soft launch for the tool is planned for 2021. Clear directions on initiating the process of an IEP will be stored on the tool to maintain consistency of practice across the District.

System Principal Hannah reported that gifted elementary students from different parts of the city are learning in the Ottawa-Carleton virtual (OVC) schools. In collaboration with Program and Learning (PAL), the pilot plan will be updated to include the creation of OCV remote learning style. Moving forward, staff recommended that the OCV pilot this cross-curricular project in a variety of its classes; both in the regular English or Early French Immersion program and expand the age range for students, to include grades 4 to grades 8.

Similar to the previous pilot evaluation plan, the evaluation will be exploratory in nature and will include mainly formative evaluation activities. Qualitative and quantitative data collection tools examining implementation issues from the perspective of staff, students and parents/guardians will be administered. Staff training sessions will be offered in January 2021.

System Principal Hannah highlighted that in order to further explore the elimination of barriers of access for all students and support underrepresented populations, LSS has begun to investigate the possibility of the use of a universal screening tool. The exploratory exercises currently include: literature reviews, an environmental scan of other school districts in the province, and, the review of possible screening tool options. She noted that further recommendations on the use of the tool are targeted for the spring.

Trustee Boothby requested information on the supports for the in-person gifted students, who will miss the pilot for the Interest Academy. System Principal Hannah responded that an updated memo to SEAC is scheduled for release in January. More information will be presented on the soft launch of the quality programming indicators (QPI) planned for February. Field testing with regular classroom gifted students is planned to seek information on the effectiveness of key strategies as it relates to cross-curricular inquiry-based learning.

Trustee Boothby provided feedback on three factors that should be considered as a part of a QPI online resource to foster a standard for instruction and differentiation for all learners with giftedness: EQAO testing is not an accurate measure for evaluating gifted students, the measurement levels of engagement and measurement of student well-being.

b. Report 20-115, Specialized Program Class Referral Information 2020-2021

Your committee had before it Report 20-115, providing information regarding the specialized program class (SPC) referral and placement process for the 2020-2021 school year.

Superintendent Symmonds noted in 2019-2020 a decision was made to delay the reporting of this information until December going forward, in order to allow for a more accurate reflection of the number of referrals, placements and students waiting for placement. Manager Kay highlighted that starting from the launch of the 2020-2021 school year, the District opened an additional fourteen SPCs across the elementary and secondary panel. Eight additional classes were opened for both elementary and secondary

classes. There are concerns about continuing to open a significant number of classes and the impact that this potentially has on students, families and systems. LSS is examining different ways to provide intensive support in a way that aligns with current best practice and ideas of modern classrooms, as well as equitable support and ensuring positive academic outcomes and well being. She outlined that with the school closure as a result of COVID-19, LSS was not able to collect information specific to professional assessments. LSS has begun work to understand the impact of the school closure on professional assessments and will provide additional recommendations.

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

- The Learning Disability Specialized Intervention Program (LDSIP) program is offered at the junior panel for grades five and six and in the intermediate panel for students in grades seven and eight. It is a one year program with an option for a second year. Trustee Ellis noted the prior closure of some LDSIP classes and emphasized that waiting lists can be problematic for the students as they may "age-out" before they are admitted;
- Where there are waitlists, parents are given the option to place their children in classes outside their geographic area, pending available space;
- New placements are based on need;
- Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) requests are being routinely addressed;
- When LSS becomes aware of students on a waitlist, specific decisions are made to target support at those school sites, such as deploying the ASD team to build a program with the classroom teacher;
- Though LSS has the capacity to increase staffing with Emergency Educational Assistants (EEAs), there is an ongoing challenge to hire available Educational Assistants (EAs);
- Ms. Houlden expressed the view that SPCs are struggling to provide service and more resources are required. At this time, schools have been allocated 40% of their budgets. Funds provided at the end of June to support the establishment of a new system class are no longer accessible and any purchases made with those funds have been charged to the 2020-2021 budget. Superintendent Symmonds noted that LSS supports

classes through funding and in addition schools have separate budgets to support students with special education needs and can make decisions on allocations at the school-level; and

- Ms. Allen referred to the diverse support and ongoing professional development of support teachers working with students on the waitlist for SPCs on the multidisciplinary teams. These teams also support staff.

8.2 Special Education Plan (Standards)

a. The Board's Special Education Advisory Committee

System Principal Hannah noted that the contact information for the Board's Special Education Advisory Committee is updated annually. She asked that the committee members provide Coordinator Fenton with information on changes to their contact information.

b. Equipment

System Principal Hannah reported on the enhancements made to the process of acquiring Special Equipment Amount (SEA) for students. The online template processes requests expeditiously. Previously, a recommendation of an assessment report was required. Today only a recommendation from an appropriately qualified professional is required. LSS leverages the Multidisciplinary Team to review requests to ensure they meet the needs of the student.

Trustee Boothby suggested that further language be added to clarify the school involvement in acquiring SEA for students. She noted that clarification on allowance for SEA to be sent home might be helpful to families who encounter socio-economic barriers. She noted the need to include language in the standard on the process, procedures and availability for OCV students accessing SEA to learn remotely.

9. Committee Reports

9.1 Indigenous Education Advisory Committee

There was no report from the Indigenous Education Advisory Committee.

9.2 Advisory Committee on Equity

There was no report from the Advisory Committee on Equity.

9.3 Parent Involvement Committee

Dr. Mamen reported that there were no items contained on the PIC meeting's agenda that were of specific concern to SEAC.

9.4 Advisory Committee on Extended Day and Child Care Program

Trustee Ellis reported that the Advisory Committee on Extended Day and Child Care Program proceeded as an informational meeting as quorum was not achieved. There has been a significant decline in registration. As per policy P.035.SCO, the District shall offer the Extended Day Program at any school site where three or more students have registered and paid for the program.

9.5 Committee of the Whole

Chair Nadon-Campbell noted that she raised the letter from the Thames Valley District School Board SEAC describing the challenges of teaching and learning when the quality of auditory information is compromised with the full coverage of the mouth and nose. In response to the concern, she learned that educators may approach their supervisors for guidance and apply for these funds through SEA. She requested that the committee consider next steps to advance concerns from the school-community around the matter. This discussion was deferred until 2021.

Chair Nadon-Campbell reported that a delegation from Decoding Dyslexia Ontario presented in the Committee of the Whole meeting of 8 December 2020. A SEAC discussion ensued on competing interests for advocating certain styles of reading.

9.6 Board

There was no report from the Board.

10. New Business

10.1 Forward Agenda Planning

Forward agenda planning was deferred until 6 January 2021.

11. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:17 p.m.

Sonia Nadon-Campbell

Chair, Special Education
Advisory Committee