

SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

Wednesday, February 3, 2021, 7:00 pm
Zoom Meeting

Members:	Christine Boothby (Trustee), Rob Campbell (Trustee), Chris Ellis (Trustee), Sonia Nadon-Campbell (Community Representative), Susan Cowin (Community Representative), Amy Wellings (Community Representative), Cathy Miedema (Association for Bright Children), Mark Wylie (Down Syndrome Association), Lisa Paterick (VIEWS for the Visually Impaired), Katie Ralph (Autism Ontario, Ottawa Chapter), Ian Morris (Ontario Associations for Families of Children with Communication Disorders), Maggie Mamen, Safina Dewshi (Ottawa-Carleton Assembly of School Councils)
Association Representatives (Non Voting):	Jennifer Titley (Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Teachers' Federation), Connie Allen (Professional Student Services Personnel), Jean Trant (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, SSP), Catherine Houlden (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Teachers), Andrew Winchester (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Alternate), Kimberly Elmer (Ottawa-Carleton Secondary School Administrators' Network), Nancy Dlouhy (Ottawa-Carleton Elementary Operations Committee)
Staff and Guests:	Lynn Scott (Trustee), Peter Symmonds (Superintendent of Learning Support Services), Janice McCoy (Superintendent of Human Resources), Carolyn Tanner, (Human Rights and Equity Advisor), Dr. Petra Duschner (Manager of Mental Health and Critical Services), Christine Kessler (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Stacey Kay (Manager, Learning Support Services), Amy Hannah (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Maya Rattray (Supervisor, Speech-Language Pathology), Nasra Aden (Student Senator), Nicole Guthrie (Manager, Board Services), Sue Baker (Meeting Reporter), Shafryne Sayani

1. Call to Order

Chair Nadon-Campbell called the meeting to order at 7:13 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.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by Trustee Boothby,

THAT the agenda be approved.

Carried

3. Delegations

There were no delegations.

4. Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report

4.1 6 January 2021

Moved by Sue Cowin,

THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee Report dated 6 January 2021 be received.

Carried

4.2 The Forward Agenda

Chair Nadon-Campbell presented the forward agenda as a draft document to guide the work of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) for 2020-2021. She noted that the Review of Police Involvement in Schools has been added to the chart at the request of Trustee Ellis as an upcoming item in the spring of 2021.

Chair Nadon-Campbell requested that the members of SEAC complete their independent review of all Standards prior to 1 March 2021.

5. Presentation

5.1 Report 20-114, Equitable Recruitment and Hiring Policy (J. McCoy)

Your committee had before it Report 20-114, Equitable Recruitment and Hiring Policy, providing a draft policy to comply with a draft Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) released by the Ministry of Education following the repeal of Regulation 274 - Hiring Practices.

Superintendent McCoy advised that for the last 7-8 years, the process of hiring teachers was directed by the Ministry of Education's Regulation 274 - Hiring Practices. The regulation required school boards to consider technical qualifications and seniority when hiring teachers. It was repealed by the Ministry in October 2020 and school boards were directed to establish their own hiring policies as outlined in a draft Program Policy Memorandum (PPM). The new hiring policy should ensure that school boards consider diversity and equity, qualifications, merit, experience of teachers from outside the District, fairness, and transparency rather than

only technical qualifications and seniority. The policy should also include mechanisms to monitor and evaluate its effectiveness. Following receipt of the final PPM and feedback from the Committee of the Whole and advisory committees, the policy will be finalized and presented to the Board for approval.

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

- Hiring of teachers will be reflective of the community as a whole;
- The District's Indigenous Equity and Human Rights Roadmap, approved by the Board last fall, includes an employment system review through an equity lens to collect identity-based data from employees. An equity survey for all employees will be conducted in March 2021 and will provide updated data from the last survey completed 10 years ago;
- The lived personal or professional experience of teacher candidates may be considered in the new hiring process;
- The policy and procedure will include language related to diversity on hiring panels; and
- Following approval of the policy, staff will consider whether and how it should be expanded to include staff other than teachers.

SEAC members were encouraged to provide any additional information to Superintendent McCoy via email.

6. Consultation

6.1 Breakout Rooms: Human Rights Policy Consultation (C. Tanner)

Human Rights and Equity Advisor Tanner advised that the purpose of the consultation on a human rights policy is to seek input on several key questions that will inform the development of the Board's human rights policy. The principles of the human rights policy will address primacy, dignity and respect, equal rights and opportunity, full participation, undue hardship, duty to accommodate, anti-oppression, anti colonialism, anti-racism, anti-discrimination, rights and responsibilities, intersectionality, competing rights, targeted universalism, effect/impact versus intent, responsive corrective and remedial action, and proactive prevention.

During the first phase of the consultation, input will be sought from students, parents and guardians, community members, and OCDSB employees to inform the principles, content and priorities of the draft policy.

SEAC members were divided into four groups with each group considering one question. Following the group work, facilitators reported on the discussions as follows:

Group 1 Question: *Thinking about your experience with OCDSB, what do you see as the most important human rights issues for the District to address? Why?*

Prompts: Are there any identities that you think experience discrimination within OCDSB? In what ways are they experiencing discrimination? How can the OCDSB prevent this discrimination from happening?

System Principal Kessler facilitated the conversation and provided the following input:

- Socioeconomic status (SES) is a barrier to education that may disproportionately impact several groups including, but not limited to, newcomers to Canada, refugees, students with intellectual disabilities, students and parents with mental health issues; students of colour, Indigenous students, and parents and caregivers with disabilities who rely on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP);
- SES relates to the ability of families to advocate for their children and participate in conversations to have their voices heard;
- There may be more barriers to participation at schools with a higher number of low-income families which can result in less parent representation;
- The system favours families who have the personal and financial resources to understand and navigate the system;
- The policy would address intersectionality (the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage) and the disproportionality of outcomes;
- There are a multitude of rights to consider when leading a school; and
- To embed human rights in all District schools and practices it will require reflection and a change in culture.

Group 2 Question: *Grounds protected from discrimination under the Ontario Human Rights Code include race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, record of offences, marital status, family status and disability. Are other factors that should be considered? Why?*

Prompts: What are some of the other reasons people may experience discrimination? Should these reasons be protected from discrimination by the new OCDSB human rights policy? Why or why not? For example, what about socioeconomic status? Language? Political Beliefs? Other

System Principal Hannah facilitated the conversation and provided the following input:

- It is important to provide clarity and understanding of what is meant by each of the "grounds protected from discrimination". For example "disability" is more than only a physical disability, such as learning and behavioural disabilities
- Should intellectual disabilities or mental health issues be included in the definition of disability? If so, they need to be identified in a respectful manner to allow persons with a disability to see themselves included in the definition;
- It may be challenging for staff to engage with parents/guardians who have intellectual disabilities or mental health issues;
- The language with respect to mental health issues in the Human Rights Code is antiquated and may not be user friendly in today's world;
- Language proficiency overlaps with ancestry and place of origin and also includes literacy. For example a student may be a member of a dominant racial group but the family may not yet have competency in English or French;
- The Human Rights Code references the parent-child relationship in Family Status. Should it also include children living in care with a guardian which could impact the family's ability to engage in the system;
- Socio-economic status can impact ability to access resources; and
- There is intersectionality among protected grounds.

Group 3 Question: *When someone has a human rights concern, there are many ways it can be addressed. How do you think OCDSB can receive and respond to a human rights concern in a way that makes a person feel safe, is accessible and is effective? What needs to be considered for the process to work well for everyone?*

Prompts: How can we build trust in the process? How can we help people feel safe? What kind of process would work for students, staff or families? How can we make it accessible for Indigenous peoples, or people with

disabilities, for people who don't speak English or French? Other people? What kind of supports should we consider providing?

Human Rights and Equity Advisor Tanner facilitated the conversation and provided the following input:

- Barriers to accessing a human rights complaints mechanism or accommodation include culture and mistrust;
- There is a need to have multiple ways to raise an issue. For example, a principal, a trusted adult, a child help line, or anonymously;
- Anonymity for complaints or complaints to a person removed from the situation were consistently raised as being necessary for feelings of safety and to build trust;
- Ideally, the complaint mechanism would be removed from the school;
- There is a need to make service providers aware about the complaints mechanisms so that they can help their clients to access it;
- The process must be streamlined, easily understood, and applied;
- It needs to be published in a variety of different languages;
- There is a requirement for interpreters and advocates to help navigate the system. For example, a Board navigator, or links to SEAC members for advice;
- Complainants, even if anonymous, should be contacted and informed about the progress of the complaint, steps taken, as well as the outcome. This is important for trust;
- People fear retaliation and retribution and these must be addressed to build trust;
- Current system that we have for accommodation for disabilities is geared to people who know the system. We really need to make it more simple and straightforward. Communication needs to be clear, in multiple languages, and without jargon or acronyms that may be intimidating;
- Newcomers may experience difficulty understanding how to lodge a human rights concern and may not immediately trust the process because of their personal experiences;
- The process of investigating complaints must be handled by an arm's-length department of the District in order to build trust and confidence in the process; and
- Barriers may include a fear that complaints will be easily dismissed.

Group 4 Question: *How can we help make sure that everyone understands their rights and responsibilities under the human rights policy?*

Prompts: What is the best way to help students, families and staff understand their rights and responsibilities under the new policy when it comes out? What type of educational materials should we prepare? What types of engagement and outreach would be most effective in sharing information about the policy?

Manager Kay facilitated the conversation and provided the following feedback:

- A variety of methods to provide information on the human rights policy may include;
 - software applications;
 - hyperlinks;
 - videos and other multimedia solutions;
 - student assemblies;
 - part of an induction program for new staff;
 - engage parents and guardians on how to write and submit complaints;
 - provide access to community and staff for resources;
 - links to curriculum;
 - make accessible from different access points;
- Review the policy annually to ensure understanding for staff who are interacting with students; and
- Ensure the policy is a "living policy" that is updated as required.

Human Rights and Equity Advisor Tanner thanked everyone for their participation in the group discussion.

Superintendent Symmonds invited SEAC to send any additional input to Human Rights and Equity Advisor Tanner.

7. Matters for Information

7.1 Demo: Online Tool for Learning Support for Students with Special Education Needs

Superintendent Symmonds advised that, at the January 2021 meeting, SEAC discussed Memo 21-001, Learning Support for Students with

Special Education Needs, providing an overview of the content and the planned release process for the online resource supporting Learning Support for Students with Special Education Needs. System Principal Hannah advised that the purpose of the online resource is to assist all educators to provide personalized and precise support to students with special needs. The components of the online resource will focus on the following topics: Class Profiles, the Tiered Approach to Intervention, Individual Education Plans, Transition Plans, Assessment and Evaluation, Assistive Technology, Specialized Program Class Information, and key look-fors by Exceptionality. It will be field tested beginning in February 2021 and launched in the fall of 2021. This resource is intended to remain in a perpetual draft format and will continue to be updated as required.

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

- It is expected that there will be links to alternative curriculum;
- The Program and Learning Department is working on sequencing for functional literacy and numeracy; and
- It was suggested that the database be made available to parents and association partners to help support their children's learning at home. System Principal Hannah advised that once the database is launched internally, staff will consider what aspects could be made available to the public through the District website.

8. Department Update

8.1 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Symmonds provided the following updates:

- Students who were attending in-person learning prior to the lockdown returned to in-person learning on Monday, 1 February 2021;
- On 2 February 2021, Ottawa Public Health (OPH) reported that approximately 85% of Covid-19 cases are contracted outside of school; however, masking, physical distancing, and hygiene protocols are still required. Although approximately 25 percent of Covid-19 cases are asymptomatic, it is still necessary to isolate while waiting for test results;
- The District has submitted information to the Ministry of Education's Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE) and it is hoped that, in addition to the District's network of partners in other school districts, the Ministry will assist with the online sharing of practices to support students with special needs who require additional human resources to support both online and in-person learning; and

- The Ministry fund for the safe return to school amounts to approximately \$800 million. In addition to personal protective equipment (PPE), and access to technology, it is hoped that funding will soon be made available for programs on mental health and special needs similar to those programs that were offered in the summer of 2020. Specifically, the 2020 summer programs included a two-week transition program leading up the start of the school year, as well as summer courses for professional staff. This is different from the District's Summer Learning Program for students with autism and developmental disabilities.

a. Tip Sheets on Auditory Difficulties and Vocal Hygiene in the Classroom

Superintendent Symmonds noted one of the negative impacts on students and staff of wearing masks and face shields: a hindrance to hearing and understanding during communication between staff and students.

Supervisor Rattray advised that two tip sheets on auditory difficulties and vocal hygiene in the classroom were developed to assist students and staff with voice fatigue and strain in the classroom. The tip sheets raise awareness and provide strategies for educators and students with hearing difficulties. Principals will distribute them to their staff with a note that questions can be directed to Learning Support Services (LSS).

In response to a query regarding the use of voice amplification methods in the classroom, principals will be advised to encourage staff to consult with their doctors to determine if accommodation is required.

8.2 Special Education Plan (Standards)

Superintendent Symmonds recalled that as per Memo 20-139, SEAC members were asked to review a series of specific standards from the 2019-2020 Special Education Plan independently and provide feedback to LSS. The aim of this review is to publish a 2020-2021 Special Education Plan containing standards that are easily understood by all parents and guardians.

a. Early Identification Procedures and Intervention Strategies

System Principal Hannah noted that last year's additions/clarifications with respect to English as a Second Language, early intervention, and monitoring have been incorporated into the Standard. In addition, LSS staff are working

with the Program and Learning department to provide additional information in the "Welcome to Kindergarten" section.

During discussion of the document, the following points were noted:

- Clarify that parents/guardians should share professional assessments for their child when registering their child for kindergarten;
- Include any information on whether a child's enrollment may be delayed in order to complete a transition plan, obtain additional resources, or put a safety plan in place;
- With respect to monitoring and evaluation of intervention strategies, collect information on key system level indicators used to determine a consistent model of support for students with special needs;
- Principals are responsible for assigning staff and ensuring they understand the requirements of a behaviour and/or safety plan that requires a staff member to assist a student. If the staff member is reassigned or absent, the Principal reassigns the duty to another staff person or emergency educational assistant;
- Provide the same information to parents as is provided to educators, while recognizing that some parents may be at a disadvantage if they are unfamiliar with navigating the system (i.e., tiered intervention, acronyms, etc.), not proficient in English or French, or unaware that their child's suspension may be related to a learning problem; and
- Clarify that many interventions and/or services at tiers one and two may be provided by the classroom teacher rather than a multi-disciplinary team professional or a formal Intervention, Planning and Review Committee (IPRC) process.

Any additional comments on early identification procedures and intervention strategies may be provided to System Principal Hannah.

b. Educational and Other Assessments

System Principal Hannah advised that the Educational and Other Assessments standard provides clarity on the various assessments that can be offered by the District. During discussion, the following points were noted;

- Assessment information can only be shared with outside agencies and other professionals with written parental consent or with written consent from the student if they are 18 years of age or older;
- Assessment information is collected under the authority of the Education Act, and will only be used to plan and evaluate a student's program. The information is confidential and access will be limited to those employees who have an administrative need;
- Psychological assessments are conducted by psychologists and psychological associates who are registered members of the College of Psychologists of Ontario or psychoeducational consultants who are supervised by psychologists;
- JB+ is a French language reading assessment tool that begins in grade one;
- A parent can request an assessment by talking to the child's teacher. Should the educator notice a need for assessment, the educator will raise it with the Learning Support Teacher (LST) and multi-disciplinary team. If there is no evidence of a need for assessment at the school level, the teacher will closely monitor the child's progress;
- Parents may be advised that an in-school assessment may have a two or three year wait time and they may be encouraged to consider a private assessment. A private assessment is not often a viable option for those families experiencing a lower SES.;
- Multicultural Liaison Officers (MLOs) may assist parents in navigating the process;
- Professional development may be provided to staff to help understand and consider cultural and linguistic biases;
- The Ontario psychological guidelines for the diagnosis of learning disabilities features a section on cultural differences;
- With respect to human rights and equity of access to service, some schools, depending on their location, may have a high need for resources and/or specialized classes, while other schools, located in areas of higher socioeconomic status, may have fewer students requiring assessments; and

- Smaller class sizes for kindergarten would provide more time for educators to work with parents to obtain appropriate resources for students with special needs.

Superintendent Symmonds thanked the committee for their input. He noted that Student Senator Nasra Aden left the meeting early and wished to convey her appreciation to SEAC for allowing her to participate in the meeting.

9. Matters for Action

9.1 Appointments - Board Representative

Chair Nadon-Campbell called for a volunteer to observe meetings of the Board and report back to the SEAC. There were no volunteers.

10. Committee Reports

10.1 Board

There was no report from the Board.

10.2 Committee of the Whole

Amy Wellings reported that the 12 January 2021 meeting of the Committee of the Whole recommended that free sanitary products be provided in school washrooms. The recommendation was approved by the Board.

The Committee also discussed the Facilities Renewal Program and Facilities Condition Index. Most of the District's facilities are accessible. Those facilities that are not fully accessible have temporary accommodations in place or make arrangements with neighbouring schools.

The Specialized Program Referral Process was not addressed due to lack of time.

10.3 Indigenous Education Advisory Council

Chair Nadon-Campbell advised that some teachers have received human rights training on culture in Indigenous communities. The new human rights policy will address training for all District staff.

10.4 Advisory Committee on Equity

There was no report from the Advisory Committee on Equity.

10.5 Parent Involvement Committee

Ian Morris advised that the Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) spent much of their time at the January meeting discussing the PIC by-laws and the election of a Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee.

Martyn Reid and Diana Mills were elected Chair and Vice-Chair.

Human Rights and Equity Advisor Tanner attended the meeting for a discussion on human rights.

The District's allocation for Parents Reaching Out (PRO) grants this year was less than last year's allocation. The funding will be used by PIC for a speaker series, and each school council will receive \$500 to cover the cost of bringing in speakers.

10.6 Advisory Committee on Extended Day and Child Care Programs

Trustee Ellis advised that the Committee discussed the status of the Extended Day Program and noted that the District did not close any programs due to Covid-19.

10.7 Committee of the Whole Budget

The first Committee of the Whole Budget was held on 2 February 2021.

Cathy Miedema advised that the Committee was informed that there is a revenue shortfall and the Extended Day Program is operating at a deficit.. Although in the early planning stages, the budget for 2021-2022 does not include massive reductions. The District was advised that it may not receive any extra funding from the Ministry next year for Covid-19.

11. New Business

There was no new business.

12. Adjournment

Chair Nadon-Campbell thanked everyone for their participation in the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:52 p.m.

Sonia Nadon-Campbell, Chair,
Special Education Advisory
Committee