

SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

**Wednesday, March 3, 2021, 7:00 pm
Zoom Meeting**

- Members:** Christine Boothby (Trustee), Rob Campbell (Trustee), Chris Ellis (Trustee), Sonia Nadon-Campbell (Community Representative), Terry Warner (VOICE for deaf and hard of hearing children, Alternate), Cathy Miedema (Association for Bright Children), Mark Wylie (Down Syndrome Association), Katie Ralph (Autism Ontario, Ottawa Chapter), Dr. Maggie Mamen (Learning Disabilities Association of Ottawa-Carleton), 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, Alternate), Jean Trant (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, SSP), Catherine Houlden (Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, Teachers), 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), Michael Carson (Chief Financial Officer), Dr. Petra Duschner (Manager of Mental Health and Critical Services), Christine Kessler (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Amy Hannah (System Principal, Learning Support Services), Reg Lavergne (System Principal of Instruction and Innovation), Joan Oracheski (Manager, Research, Evaluation and Analytics Division), Stacey Kay (Manager, Learning Support Services), Kevin Gardner (Manager, Financial Services), Nicole Guthrie (Manager of Board Services), Charles D'Aoust (Coordinator, Budget Services), Leigh Fenton (Board/Committee Coordinator), Dr. Cheryl Plouffe (OCDSB Psychologist), Nour Kaddoura (Student Senator), Cathleen Bryden (Delegate),

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 welcomed Student Senator Nour Kaddoura to participate in the meeting.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by Katie Ralph,

THAT the agenda be approved.

Carried

3. Delegations

Ms. Cathleen Bryden presented a delegation on in-person access to special needs programming for the 2021-2022 school year. As a single parent of a student in the congregated gifted program, whose child is enrolled in the Ottawa-Carleton Virtual (OCV) Campus, she noted her opposition to the District announcement stipulating that in the 2021-2022 school year, specialized program classes will return to in-person delivery only. The approach may force parents to choose between in-person learning or placing their child with an exceptionality into the regular classroom setting. She queried the District's work to support the outcome of the emphasis on the in-person education plan and to demonstrate the pathway from a public policy and ethical perspective. Her concern was that the newly announced plan poses a barrier to access education and it contradicts the District's values of inclusion and equity. She noted that she will provide a written letter addressing her concerns to the Superintendent of Learning Support Services.

Trustee Boothby inquired over the likelihood of success for Ms. Bryden's elementary school child in a regular classroom in OCV with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and accommodating supports. Ms. Bryden indicated that they have had prior years of experience where these methods of support were not sufficient.

4. Review of Special Education Advisory Committee Report

4.1 3 February 2021 SEAC Report

Moved by Christine Boothby,

THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee Report dated 3 February 2021 be received.

Carried

4.2 Forward Agenda

The Special Education Advisory Committee forward agenda was presented for information.

5. Presentations

5.1 Report 21-014, Analysis of Disproportionality and Disparity in Grade 10 Credit Accumulation (M. Giroux)

Your Committee had before it Report 21-014, presenting data on student achievement, which includes analysis using demographic data from the *Valuing Voices – Identity Matters! Student Survey* conducted in 2019-2020 to identify student success based on grade 10 credit accumulation and the differences in credit accumulation rates across groups of students, based on demographic characteristics.

Analyzing credit accumulation data informs the District's Improvement Plans for Student Achievement and Well-being, serves as a key metric in monitoring progress at the District and school level, and helps to target interventions for individual students through re-engagement, credit rescue, and credit recovery for assistance towards graduation.

With the introduction of the *Anti-Racism Act (2017)*, *Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism (2018)*, additional analyses are required to calculate disproportionality and/or disparity to better understand the magnitude of overrepresentation and underrepresentation of particular identities in a particular program or service, as well as differences in outcomes between groups of students. This change in reporting practice offers an opportunity to explore the implications of decisions made at each step of the process and bring in community perspective through the representatives who sit on the Technical Advisory Group (TAG).

Staff continues to be guided by the QuantCrit Framework. Through this framework, results may be interpreted differently depending upon experiences that individuals have had and the worldview they hold. As results and interpretations are presented, Manager Orcheski encouraged the membership to think about alternative interpretations to the results that are being presented.

To address community concern regarding data suppression for small groups of students, three years of grade 10 credit accumulation data was pooled and merged with the Valuing Voices survey data. The information presented provided an overview of grade 10 credit accumulation specific groups of students based on Trillium data. For the district as a whole, this yielded an overall grade 10 credit accumulation rate for the 3-year period (2017-2018 through 2019-2020) of 81%. District rates have been comparable to provincial rates over this time period. Preliminary data for quadmester 1 shows high credit completion rates for students in grade 10, with 93% earning two credits.

For many years, students, parents, and community partners have raised concerns that racialized students, students of diverse gender identities, and students with disabilities face barriers to graduation. Based on the analysis of data for this subset of students, a disproportionate underrepresentation exists particularly for:

- Students who identify as First Nations, Metis, and Inuit;
- Those who identify with an undisclosed disability, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and/or addiction;
- Those who identify as transgender, gender fluid, gender non-conforming; and
- Indigenous, Black, Middle Eastern and Latino students

All groups are underrepresented in the group of students who had earned a minimum of 16 credits by the end of their grade 10 year. Students who identified as Indigenous were the most underrepresented and 0.7 times as likely as non-Indigenous students to be on track to graduate within 5 years of starting secondary school.

Manager Oracheski reported that the analysis of student achievement data and other outcomes allows the District to identify patterns and trends, and monitor progress towards improving outcomes for all students, including the dismantling of systemic barriers and biases that preclude students from reaching their full potential. Critical components to this work are the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan, the Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap, student success initiatives, and providing support to schools to engage in dialogue with students, staff, and the broader community to better understand the barriers students may be facing at the school level that could be contributing to these district-level outcomes.

System Principal Lavergne reported on the specific initiatives in Student Success, Innovation and Adolescent Learning.

Some of the key initiatives planned, or being undertaken, include:

- Graduation coaches supporting Indigenous and Black students;
- The Summer Learning Program was introduced in 2020 to support Indigenous students in the attainment of credits. The success of this program has led to an expanded focus to support Black students, an initiative to be implemented in the summer of 2021;
- The Annual Equity Accountability report to support monitoring of the Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap;
- Additional resources have been allocated to schools where credit attainment has been below average;

- The Authentic Student Learning Experience Tool (ASLE), an OCDSB innovation, moves beyond completing missing assignments but focuses on student voice and recovery plans that take into account the student interests; and
- School-Within-A-College (SWAC) re-engages high school students by inviting them to participate in a collaborative learning experience at Algonquin College.

System Principal Lavergne highlighted the “Project True North ” being piloted in ten schools, which is an example of experiential learning to enhance equity. He summarized the next steps in supporting student success as: providing multilingual information to parents to help them make the best decisions for their children, using experiential learning to enhance equity and to build meaningful community partnerships, expanding the pilot for Project True North, expanding the use of “homegrown” ASLE and continuing to review and prioritize student success funding.

In response to questions during the presentation and in discussion the following points were noted:

- The committee expressed an interest in seeing a study that examined achievement data on students attending OCV versus the in-person classroom. Manager Oracheski mentioned that a study was conducted at the end of quadmester one in the secondary panel. There was not a significant shift in results between the two models;
- Students are being afforded the opportunity to choose projects that are of interest to them on a personal level. A shift to student-directed learning is being encouraged;
- ASLE began as a strategy in the Learn at Home program during the spring of 2020 to avoid the potential loss of contact and engagement with students. Teachers began working with students to connect with them on how they preferred to learn while in the home setting. The tool evolved to incorporate individual talents and experiences of the students, apart from the formal learning that occurs inside the classroom;
- Manager Oracheski noted that not all information is easily accessible at a system-level, the District is attempting to capture data that is of a more qualitative nature;
- Indicators on the effectiveness of the achievement strategies include a gauge on the number of students who are actively interested and participating in the curriculum;

- From the first day of planning with teachers, they are made aware of which students are benefitting from an IEP; and
- The intersectionality of the data was not the focus for this report. In the future, the District will need to consider how to incorporate this type of analysis to delve deeper into the reporting of student outcomes.

6. Discussion

6.1 2021-2022 Budget

Superintendent Symmonds provided an introduction to the breakout room exercise designed to identify key priority areas of focus to improve the way service is delivered for families accessing special needs support. These discussions will inform future meetings with the senior administration team when creating the staff recommended budget for the 2021-2022 school year.

SEAC members were divided into three groups with each group considering the following questions:

- Discuss up to three special education practice changes or improvements that the District should focus on for the 2021-2022 school year.
- What would it take for those ideas to be realized?
- What resources may need to be allocated to these practice changes or improvements?

Facilitators reported on the break-out room discussions as follows:

- More resources are required and capacity building is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of IEPs;
- Create IEPs to be understood by the students they are meant to serve. Use Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-based (SMART) goals to encourage students, parents and teachers to engage in the learning process through the IEP tool;
- Bolster the communication plan for accessible special education supports for families;
- Students require added support in large, regular classrooms;
- Develop a more accessible parent portal on the District website;
- Place emphasis on structured, evidence-based reading instruction, as it pertains to the Ontario Human Rights Commission's (OHRC) Inquiry on the Right to Read. Strengthen the education of teachers in assessing level one, two and three tiered reading interventions.

Increasing the use of the Empower Reading and Learning Group to bring evidence-based literacy instruction to students with reading difficulties;

- Provide more professional development for teaching staff and build in a schedule where teachers can be available to access training;
- Enlisting casual employees is not an effective educational support structure;
- Increase the profile of Educational Assistants (EAs);
- Focus on early identification for students who may require special education support;
- Designate resources for identification, along with translated material, for newcomers to Canada, who are oftentimes on testing wait lists for extended periods of time;
- Continue assistance for students who require additional support in the remote learning setting;
- Grade 1 students require additional support for the transition from Kindergarten. These children come from a learning environment together with three or four adults and graduate into a grade 1 class with one designated teacher and 23 or more students in their classroom;
- Differentiated staffing is required , based on classroom needs (i.e., number of students, number of IEPs);
- Invest in supports for credit recovery considering the achievement challenge with virtual learning for some students; and
- When analyzing school resources and funding allocation, consider adding support to defray the impact of factors, such as poverty and racialization, on the ability for students with special education needs to engage in the curriculum.

Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Carson noted that the 2021-2022 budget deliberations will be challenging owing to uncertainties about the state of COVID-19 trends, the nature of enrolment and the levels of funding from the Ministry. He stated that there could be changes to the estimates and allocations to better utilize existing funds. He noted that changes in practice may address some shortfalls in services.

Dr. Mamen queried the role of teacher's colleges in teacher training for early identification protocol and interventions in the classroom. Superintendent Symmonds responded that the expectations of the faculties of education are developed through the Ontario College of

Teachers (OCT). LSS provides feedback regularly to the OCT on additional qualification courses.

Trustee Ellis noted that, previously, in conjunction with other school boards, the District worked with the OCT Standards of Practice and Accreditation Department to develop an additional qualification course for providers and instructors of special education programs. Formerly this was a one-year program that changed into a two-year program.

Superintendent Symmonds noted the importance of engaging in professional learning with educators notwithstanding the training they receive in college, as practices are continually evolving.

6.2 Report 21-020, Universal Screening Tool Exploration and Update (P. Symmonds)

Your Committee had before it Report 21-020, providing an update for the universal screening tool exploration. System Principal Hannah and District psychologist, Dr. Cheryl Plouffe, provided an update about the possibility of further exploring a universal screener in the District.

System Principal Hannah reported that the use of a universal screening tool should help to inform instructional decisions for all learners, including those who may require further enrichment. The information gathered will assist educators to assess the learning needs of all students with greater comprehension. One of the key considerations of the initiative was reducing an equity barrier by providing equal access to screening.

A Universal Screening Tool Project Team will be established to review the key details and considerations to inform the final recommendation on the use of a universal screener for the District. This project team will have cross departmental representation (i.e., LSS, Program and Learning (PAL), Research, Evaluation and Analytics Division (READ), Indigenous Education, Equity, and English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Literacy Development (ELD) team) and school-based staff. System Principal Hannah reviewed the exploration timelines listed within Report 21-020, noting an updated report is planned for June 2021.

Trustee Boothby requested further information about the discontinuation of the District's practice of universal screening. Dr. Plouffe stated that in the past the CCAT was being used as an identifier of giftedness in children, however the current strategy is to re-introduce the upgraded tool back into the District to generate ability profiles of each learner to determine strengths and areas where the student will require greater support.

Trustee Boothby suggested that the screening process occur in January to enable adequate staffing for specialized program classes, additional LSS resources and an opportunity to use the tool to inform IEPs for the following year, rather than to schedule screening in autumn at the launch

of the school year. Superintendent Symmonds clarified that LSS is in the process of gathering information. The timelines for potential use of the tool is to be established after the release of the report in June 2021.

In response to a query, Dr. Plouffe explained that local norms are a percentile ranking of a student compared to all other students in a school on a standardized assessment versus Canadian norms which compare percentile rankings of a student on a national level. Dr. Plouffe emphasized that the research on effective screening has paired the use of local norms in conjunction with universal screening.

7. Department Update

7.1 Superintendent's Report

a. Planning for School Year 2021-2022

Superintendent Symmonds reported that student enrolment accounts for a large amount of school year funding and enrolment projections remained undefined for September 2021. In planning for the coming year a deliberate focus was placed upon stability for students, families, caregivers and staff. The goals of planning are to avoid a massive reorganization within the school community in September or later in the year.

For the 2020-2021 school year, The Ministry of Education provided the District with approximately \$20 million in funding to mitigate emergency decisions that were being made during the initial phases of the global pandemic. The Ministry has indicated that these additional funds are not to be expected for the development of the new budget for 2021-2022.

After two terms of operating schools in the blended model of instruction in brick and mortar schools, along with the OCV, some best practices have emerged: Ottawa Public Health (OPH) report evidence that COVID-19 transmission is limited in schools, attending school in-person is important to learning and well-being, and students are more engaged in their learning when they can interact with their teachers and peers and build supportive relationships. Superintendent Symmonds noted that the District has considered that some students will require the accommodation of virtual learning. He noted that as the largest school board in the region, the District offers a range of varied and diverse programming. This will continue to be offered to in-person learners however the OVC will be operating with some key changes. The number of students who require virtual learning as an accommodation is a small percentage of the current OCV population. With a smaller cohort of students in virtual learning,

program offerings may be affected, especially for very small programs such as Middle French Immersion (MFI) and English Alternative. Specialized program classes offer the highest level of support and much of that support is centred on the capacity to provide timely and effective interventions and direct access to educational assistants or central professional supports. For these reasons, in the 2021-2022 school year, specialized program classes will return to in-person delivery only. Many of the high yield strategies that are applied in specialized program classes do not translate well to virtual environments. Students who are in a specialized program class but select virtual learning will be supported in a regular classroom at OCV. Superintendent Symmonds referred to receiving feedback from parents and staff outlining the need to provide direct support to students in the virtual environment. Based on this communication, a key staffing change will occur. Learning Resource Teachers (LRT), Learning Support Teachers (LST) and EAs will be allocated to support OCV students in the virtual environment. Central support staff will assist with programming, accommodations and modifications, as noted in student IEPs.

Trustee Boothby requested more information regarding the delivery of extra supports in the virtual classroom setting. Superintendent Symmonds reflected that the nature of the needs of each student will be considered when determining levels of support. He recalled the creative practices demonstrated by EAs during the initial Learn at Home phase in the final terms of the 2019-2020 school year. EAs provided assistance by rotational body breaks and social skills programming. LRTs and LSTs will be accessible to both teachers and students. Students from different virtual classes may come together in intervals for professional supports. Superintendent Symmonds underscored that in order for LSS to schedule appropriate staffing, it is imperative that they become aware, early in the planning phase, of which model of learning each family selected.

Ms. Miedema noted that many parents in the OCV community are struggling to decide on school enrolment for next year. She highlighted that some children are afflicted with medical conditions. Returning to in-person schooling is not an option for these families. She has heard from parents that they intend to look at homeschooling options and keep their children out of public school until the spread of COVID-19 is eradicated. She stated that parents may react to the instability in educational programming in unexpected ways.

Ms. Miedema contributed that scheduling a secondary gifted program in OCV will not require additional funding. She understood that with the pressure to open schools in the 2020-2021 school year, offering a secondary gifted class was a challenge due to the complications with scheduling during a short planning process. This year there is ample time to schedule a secondary gifted program online. Students select their own classes at the secondary level. She expressed concern that families have been asked to choose whether or not they will be coming back into the schools, and at this point, there may not be enough students to offer full classes. Should this be the case, she advocated for shared sections of gifted in classroom assignments, such as three or four students with the gifted exceptionality in the same classroom. Teachers have pointed out that it is difficult to have deeper discussions in classrooms where there are only two children who have been identified with the gifted exceptionality. Superintendent Symmonds noted his appreciation to Ms. Miedema for sharing community concerns and he will take the feedback under advisement.

Ms. Dewshi recounted the District's commitment to a 'Culture of Innovation' under the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan and noted that some parents have been able to innovate and support their children with special education needs from home in better ways. For example, parents have disclosed that their children have opted out of synchronous learning. All school work is being done in a flexible way, apart from the parent's work day and the scheduling of therapy during daytime hours was subsequently a new possibility for the students. These families have expressed joy over finding a way forward in 2020-2021 with both education and therapy that aligned with the needs of the household. They are concerned that, for the 2021-2022 school year, innovation and flexibility in these ways are discouraged with the District's announcement that special program classes will not be available to students attending OCV.

Ms. Dewshi queried whether or not families would lose their spot in specialized program classes and be required to re-apply should they attend OCV for the 2021-2022 school year. Superintendent Symmonds responded that re-applying to programs will not be necessary for the 2021-2022 school year however he could not commit to the options for 2022-2023 school year.

Superintendent Symmonds maintained that the parental decision on the model for return to school is to be thought-through as a year-long decision. He noted families must complete the registration form between 4 March and 14 March 2021. A 'Back to School

Guide' for both elementary and secondary panels will accompany the form.

b. Other

System Principal Kessler announced that World Autism Awareness Day (WAAD) is on 2 April and celebrations will be held throughout the month of April.

District initiatives include:

- The Director's video message to the system with a link to a student video on the importance of friendship and belonging;
- Communication strategy encouraging schools to consider incorporating activities into their programming that showcase student achievement, awareness, and inclusivity;
- School Kits, including resources, videos, staff meeting suggestions and a slide presentation, for each school;
- Each school will receive a WAAD Banner and Speaker Series Poster to display in their lobby;
- The Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Team uses the butterfly symbol for Autism Awareness to represent diversity, each person's unique qualities and transitions; and
- The Ministry of Education funded Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) Professional Development through Sonderly: training for teachers, Educational Assistants, Early Childhood Educators, including specialized program staff. A total of 230 staff members are enrolled.

Additional education for parents, guardians and staff include:

- An Autism Awareness Speaker Series presented on Thursdays in April at 7:00 p.m.;
- All sessions will be recorded and available on the OCDSB Youtube channel for 30 days;
- Speakers include author Dr. Jed Baker as well as local community agencies who support students and families; and
- Communications Department will be hosting the events via Zoom with support from the ASD Team as moderators

In response to a query by Trustee Boothby, Superintendent Symmonds communicated that the Ontario government is providing additional support for families of children on the autism spectrum

through its new model. Starting in March, the province will begin offering core clinical services based on a child's individual needs, a key element of the new Ontario Autism Program. These services include applied behaviour analysis, speech language pathology, occupational therapy and mental health supports. The government currently has three funding models available. For several years, families covered under the previous plan have had their care plans renewed. Since then, some families have been shifted to a childhood budget model where funding is limited to \$5,000 or \$20,000 depending on the child's age. The shift to the new needs-based Ontario Autism Program will be a third funding stream but details have not been clearly communicated, yet. System Principal Kessler reported that a trial is planned for the needs-based system where 600 families across Ontario will participate. She noted that at this time LSS is unaware of the selection methods for the family trials. The Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) is the diagnostic hub for the Ottawa region. Community agencies have been able to put forward an expression of interest. She noted that details continue to emerge. ABA Coordinator, Leanne Forrest, represents the District at Eastern Region ASD meetings. LSS remains closely connected with Autism Ontario because the organization plays a significant role in helping families navigate the interim system.

Trustee Boothby expressed concern that the new funding version may not necessarily be improved from the former funding model because the capacity was unrealistic. System Principal Kessler responded that a cap on services is not expected for some families that have higher needs children with ongoing challenges. Early intervention diagnosis leads to children accessing services under the age of six. In the current situation families often seek out those services independently or privately. LSS have noted gaps in services where higher needs students may require a longer amount of time to respond to intervention. Supports and services are difficult for families to access as children transition into teenagers and outside of the education sector.

Superintendent Symmonds reported the District received funds to subsidize the additional qualification course for teachers called "Teaching Students with Communication Needs". Funding continues to be granted for training opportunities at Sonderly, paired with the Geneva Centre.

7.2 Special Education Plan (Standards)

Chair Nadon Campbell noted that Memo 20-139 was circulated in November 2020 proposing a new review format for the Special Education

Plan Standards. Standards where the content reflects status quo or is prescribed by the Ministry of Education, were to be independently reviewed and emailed to System Principal Hannah.

8. Committee Reports

8.1 Board

There was no report from the Board.

8.2 Committee of the Whole

Chair Nadon-Campbell reported that at the Committee of the Whole on 9 February 2021 there was a large focus placed on student safety and well-being at schools for the upcoming school year.

8.3 Committee of the Whole, Budget

There was no report from the Committee of the Whole, Budget.

8.4 Advisory Committee on Equity

Trustee Campbell reported at the Advisory Committee on Equity (ACE) on 25 February 2021. He noted that many of the committees he is involved with are being presented the same reports. He noted a comment that one member of ACE made about the Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap where the premise of equity must not only be about IEPs and servicing students with exceptionalities but there must be a place where students accessing special needs can improve on their feelings of well-being through social opportunities where they may join forums and discuss topics amongst themselves. He maintained that both SEAC and ACE share a synergy with a focus on mental health needs.

8.5 Indigenous Education Advisory Council

There was no report from the Indigenous Education Advisory Council.

8.6 Parent Involvement Committee

There was no report from the Parent Involvement Committee.

8.7 Advisory Committee on Extended Day and Child Care Programs

There was no report from the Advisory Committee on Extended Day and Child Care Programs.

9. New Business

There was no new business raised.

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:48 p.m.

Sonia Nadon-Campbell, Chair,
Special Education Advisory
Committee