

REPORT OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Thursday September 16, 2021 6:30 P.M.

An on-line meeting of the Special Education Advisory Committee was held on this date.

ROLL CALL:

sensaRAneb Burrell, Autism Ontario – Durham Chapter
Craig Cameron, Member At Large
Tara Culley, Durham Down Syndrome Association
Elizabeth Daniel, Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders
Rowin Jarvis, Learning Disabilities Association of Durham Region
Kathy Kedey, VOICE for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children
Eva Kyriakides, Association for Bright Children (ABC) (SEAC Chair)
Carolyn McLennon, Member At Large
Christina Salisbury, Easter Seals Ontario

Trustees: Donna Edwards Darlene Forbes

Staff: Superintendent Andrea McAuley
Senior Manager and Clinical Lead Lisa Drake

Recording Secretary: Lisa Wry

1. Call to Order:

SEAC Chair Eva Kyriakides called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. Land Acknowledgement:

SEAC Chair Eva Kyriakides advised that the Durham District School Board acknowledges that many Indigenous Nations have longstanding relationships, both historic and modern, with the territories upon which our school board and schools are located. Today, this area is home to many Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island. We acknowledge that the Durham Region forms a part of the traditional and treaty territory of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, the Mississauga Peoples and the treaty territory of the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation. It is on these ancestral and treaty lands that we teach, learn and live.

3. DDSB Human Rights & Equity Statement

The Durham District School Board is committed to learning environments that are safe, welcoming, respectful, equitable, accessible, inclusive and free from discrimination while placing Human Rights and Equity at the center

4. Regrets:

- Hannah Nguyen- Easter Seals Ontario

Welcome Guests:

Jim Markovski: Associate Director, Equitable Education

5. **Approval of Agenda:**

That the agenda for September 16, 2021 be approved.

MOVED BY: Tara Culley

SECONDED BY: Darlene Forbes

CARRIED

6. **Approval of the Minutes from June 17, 2021:**

That the minutes from June 17, 2021 be approved with the amendment that Hannah Nuygen gave regrets, and Christina Salisbury attended.

MOVED BY: Darlene Forbes

SECONDED BY: sensaRAneb Burrell

CARRIED

7. **Introduction:** Jim Markovski Associate Director, Equitable Education

After thanking SEAC members for their participation and work through SEAC, which supports the planning and programming that takes place throughout the system.

Associate Director Jim Markovski gave a brief overview of his responsibilities of School Operations where Jim works in partnership with Superintendents to support Families of Schools. The title change to Associate Director of Equitable Education, signals a change in direction for the Board with a renewed commitment to ensuring that all aspects of our programme delivery and support services centre Indigenous inherent rights, human rights and anti-oppressive practices.

We believe that equity, diversity and inclusion is about creating a school and a board culture that embraces the uniqueness of individuals and is representative of the Durham population. In particular, we want to ensure that people of all identities are treated with respect, feel welcomed, and are integral to our success.

We will be prioritizing such things as our Indigenous Education Policy and Human Rights Policy. This work will help necessitate deep conversations about how our system operates and what we need to do to ensure that we are honouring both the rights and needs of all of our students and staff.

8. **Staff Reports:**

Administration:2020-2021 School Program Updates

- Responsive to parent/caregiver input in August, a number of special education programs were added to DDSB@Home for students with 1) placement in special education programs through Spring IPRCs and 2) seeking virtual format. Programs added include:
 - Elementary: 3 School Support Program classes, and 3 Practical Learning Program classes. The elementary model also includes 2 Developmental Programs in which students are learning from home and three of the class programs from within the Gifted program being through DDSB@Home.
 - Secondary: 2 School Support Program classes and 2 Practical Learning Program classes
- All schools, in-person and online, are supported with in-school supports as well as our integrated teams.
- Further details about our return to learning can be found in the September department report to SEAC.

Special Education Plan 2022-2022

- The Durham DSB Special Education Plan for 2021-2022 is posted on the district website and we confirm that the plan has been submitted to the Ministry.
- Our commitment, reflected in the Special Education Plan, is to continue to examine and reconstruct services to remove discriminatory barriers and address disproportionate experiences and outcomes. An inclusive model of special education identifies, addresses, and eliminates barriers that may limit a student's ability to access education without discrimination. We need to uncover, name, challenge and disrupt biases, barriers, structures and practices that impede the achievement and well-being of our learners, especially those who are discriminated against and disadvantaged in and by our systems and structures. A focus on intervention through the provision of culturally relevant strategies and tools will further address these barriers.
- Our commitment includes addressing ableism, stigma, negative attitudes, stereotypes and assumptions about students with special education strengths and needs.
- Outlined in the Special Education Plan is our commitment that professional development planning will be grounded through an anti-oppressive and human rights lens. Understanding and honouring the identity of all learners, those who are racialized, those who are impacted by socio-economic challenges, and those who may be discriminated against, minoritized and marginalized in any way, is a driving force for the work that we do.
- Our examination of practices and resources includes continuing to deepen consultation.
- SEAC input on services and programs is essential. Throughout this year we will continue to seek your guidance as we make changes responsive to our students and build towards the plan for 2022-2023.

Connection Before Curriculum

- The foundation of a mentally healthy return to the school is grounded in relationships. Moving into this school year, our focus is to co-create environments that prioritize **connection**, where caring and respectful relationships create the conditions for all to thrive. This year, as with last year, the focus on developing caring and attuned relationships will be the key to the success of our students, their families, and ourselves.
- "Connection before curriculum" puts focus on our interactions to allow time for staff, students and caregivers/families to re-connect and build or re-establish relationships with one another, where we allow for time to get to know one another again, and allow for collaboration, idea sharing, and emotional support.
- We are focusing on [The Foundations of a Mentally Healthy Classroom: The First 20 Days \(And Beyond\) of Creating Connection and Well-Being](#) as a guide. As we re-engage in learning, we focus on the foundations of mentally healthy classrooms and leveraging the power of connections to support student and educator relationships, while deepening our partnerships with families. It also will contribute to making our classrooms more inclusive and equitable learning environments

Board: Trustee Donna Edwards informed SEAC members that the Board of Trustees received presentations and information from the Standing Committee which included the start of school, and staffing. 8.4% are in virtual programming. As a board we have set a side money for ensuring that we can keep class size appropriate for distancing. Technology update, biggest issue is the supply and demand of technology. Which has impacted the cost, so the less costly option for the Chromebook does not have a touch screen. The Board is in the process of consolidating by-laws regarding operations of the Board.

9. Inclusive Student Services Report –September 2021

- Return to School – Overview
- Summer 2021
- "Connection before Curriculum"
- Transition Supports
- PA Day Professional Learning Overview
- September Parent/Caregiver Engagement Event: September 28th
- Staffing Update
- Special Education Plan 2021-2022

2021/2022 Return to School Overview

- A survey for parents/guardians ran at the beginning of August as a further opportunity to indicate in-person or virtual preference.
- School staffing (elementary and secondary) was adjusted mid-August.
- Responsive to family/caregiver requests, adjustments included special education class considerations.
- Secondary school bell times remain on the later start to the day (10am-4pm schedule).
- COVID protocols have been updated in consultation with the Durham Region Health Department.

Summer Learning Supports for Students and Families

Collaboration with Curriculum department regarding the integration of daily well-being themes into summer learning programs.

- Prioritized Psychological assessments, with mental health focus.
- SLPs completed 25 language/literacy assessments for high-priority students and supported the DDSB reading summer camp (July).
- SERTs (3 for July and 1 for August) supported learning.
- Virtual learning hubs provided to support students with IEPs accessing supports. There were 1273 student connections through the Learning Hub.
- ESL/ELL support embedded.
- EAs added to both elementary and secondary summer learning opportunities include 6 (July) and 2 (August) supporting credit achievement.
- Autism Resource Team (ART) supported STAR online summer continuity for students.

Summer Supports for Students and Families

- Offered a series of Parent/Caregiver Workshops:
 - *Thriving, Not Just Surviving Another Pandemic Summer* with Jennifer Kolari.
 - *Supporting Your Child's Mental Health through the Impact of Racism and Oppression* with Charmaine Laine.
 - *From Zoom to Classroom: How to Support Your Child's Social-Emotional Development When Return to School* with Nicole Tuzi from Sick Kids Learning Institute.
- Offered a selection of virtual groups for students and parents, offered in partnership with local community mental health organizations.

Parent/Caregiver Series and Virtual Group Programs planned in partnership, and cost sharing between DDSB and DCDSB.

- Mental health supports for students via direct service with Psychological Services and Social Work staff.
- Access to prioritized consultation with Psychological Services and Social Work staff via Connect with Your Mental Health Team link on website.

- Weekly drop-in opportunity for Black Youth with staff from Social Work and Psychological Services.
- Groups for parents/caregivers and secondary school students to support a mentally healthy return to school

Mental Health and Well-Being: "Connection Before Curriculum"

- The foundation of a mentally healthy return to the school is grounded in relationships.
- **"Connection before curriculum"** puts focus on our interactions to allow time for staff, students and caregivers/families to re-connect and build or re-establish relationships with one another, where we allow for time to get to know one another again, and allow for collaboration, idea sharing, and emotional support.
- We are focusing on [The Foundations of a Mentally Healthy Classroom: The First 20 Days \(And Beyond\) of Creating Connection and Well-Being](#) as a guide.

Transition Supports for Students – August/September

- Multi-disciplinary ISS team approach to supporting students entering school in September.
 - 160 families and students registered for drop-in sessions in August
- *Getting Ready for High School* program for students entering grade 9 have a new mental health component.
- Transition Co-Ordinator's continue to partner with families and school teams to support individual student pathways and planning.
- Across the district, on-site transition sessions for student in advance of school start for opportunity to meet with their educator team(s), visit classroom and/or key routines such as entry doors and desk selection.
- 8 Week support positions, 18 Educational Assistant and 1 focused SLP, specific to transitions funding through 40% draw on DDSB Special Education Reserve Fund

Professional Learning – PA Day Overview

The 2021-2022 school year calendar included three PA Days occurring at the start of the school year. District wide learning included, not limited to:

Day One: Relationship Building

- Welcome & Well-Being, COVID Related Safety Protocols, Inherent Indigenous Rights & Human Rights with Nancy Rowe and Devika Mathur

Day Two: Classroom Community Building

- Mentally Healthy Classrooms/Well-Being, Violence Prevention, Supporting Student Transitions,

Day Three: School Community Building

- New Math Curriculum, Well-Being, AODA, Cyber Security

Upcoming Parent/Caregiver Workshop Series
September Sessions:

- **Supporting Your Child's Mental Health through the Impact of Racism and Oppression**, with Charmaine Laine on September 23rd.
- **From Zoom to Classroom: How to Support Your Child's Social-Emotional Development When Return to School** with Nicole Tuzi from SickKids on September 28th

Inclusive Student Services – Staffing Update
Work Education & Transition Coordinator Role

- The role of Work Education Coordinator has existed in the DDSB for many years.
- Participation in the Ministry project, "Access Talent" provided four years of funding for the role of Transition Coordinator
- NEW "Work Education and Transition Coordinator" team (2 staff) supporting students with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, and their teams and parents/caregivers, through programming and pathway planning.
- Leadership: Kyla McKee, System Leader

Inclusive Student Services – Staffing Update
Well-Being Youth Workers

- Piloted in the 2020-2021 school year, the role of Well-Being Youth Worker has been extended for the 2021-2022 school year
- Funding: COVID related mental health funding (first half of school year only at this time)
- 5.0 FTE (full-time equivalent) contract roles
- Leadership from Steffanie Pelleboer, DDSB Mental Health Lead

2021-2022 Special Education Plan

Updates for the 2021-2022 school year include:

- Our commitment, reflected in the Special Education Plan, is to continue to examine and reconstruct services to remove discriminatory barriers and address disproportionate experiences and outcomes. A focus on intervention through the provision of culturally relevant strategies and tools will further address these barriers.
- Outlined in the Special Education Plan is our commitment that professional development planning will be grounded through an anti-oppressive and human rights lens.
- Integration of mental health and well-being supports which includes special education supports.

Next Steps:

- Annual refinement of the plan includes improvements for accessibility of content (e.g., language, formatting) while maintaining adherence to the Ministry requirements. We acknowledge that this continues to be a growth area and important commitment.
- SEAC provides valuable input into special education programs & services throughout the school year and is welcomed regarding the Special Education Plan.
- Timelines for creation of the 2022-2023 Special Education, inclusive of consultation opportunities, will be brought to SEAC for discussion in October.

The DDSB Special Education Plan is available publicly on:
the DDSB website: <https://www.ddsb.ca/en/programs-and-learning/resources/Documents/Inclusive-Education/Special-Education-Plan.pdf>.

Trustee Donna Edwards highlighted how our School Board and staff are engaged with work in the community. As an example: the Ajax, Anti-Black Racism Taskforce is presenting a diversity exchange series on September 28, Principal Eleanor McIntosh and Superintendent Margaret Lazarus are going to be discussing navigating the education system.

Trustee Donna Edwards also inquired about enrollment of students with special needs and if the district experienced an increase this year? Superintendent Andrea McAuley replied that we are currently connecting with each of our schools. For students of complexity, we had staff connect, as part of transition supports, with families prior to the start of school. Team is monitoring as students settle into the school year. Team will provide update to. One of the

strategies that is helping in the system, is the proactive anticipation of heightened transition support needs this fall. As a result of funding approval drawing on 40% of special education reservice, 1 additional SLP and 18 additional EAs are allocated for the beginning 8 weeks of the school year. Consequently, our staff levels are currently elevated, and once we see where the needs are, we will look at how to adjust within the system.

- The SLP for this duration will work with Early Years as well as the entire system and use this information to see where the needs are focused.
- Requests for support will come from SERTs and through the SLPs already in the school which will facilitate a quick response.
- Looking at what the results are and then going from there moving forward for future service.
- Will be able to refine our practice based on the data we receive.
- SLPs work with educators and their literacy goals through training and coaching to focus on strategies, and evidence-based practices around literacy.
- This year we are focusing on efficient assessment practices to help identify 1 or 2 strategies that have worked with students to help move them toward the goals.

Superintendent Andrea McAuley explained that Lisa Drake is co-leading, along with our System Lead for Early Years Elementary Curriculum, a team that is getting ready and looking forward to the release of "Right to Read" and taking an interdisciplinary look.

Lisa is also working closely with Steve Graffi combining Speech and Psychological Services. One of the commitments that our Psychological Services team has started is a launch of Essentials of LD knowledge for staff, because we know it starts with Educator knowledge and Educator practice. This is an on-demand series available through our learning hub.

10. SEAC Membership Related Items:

- Member at Large Resignation & Vacancy
SEAC Chair Eva Kyriakides thanked Craig Cameron for his service. Eva also brought to the attention of the group the opening for the Member at Large Position as well as a request for associate membership from the Black Parent Support Group

The Ministries requirement for SEAC membership along with the regulations on Local Associations were reviewed, and the following observations were made:
 - In reviewing the letter from the Black Parent Support Group as set out in their letter dated July 17, 2021, it is recognized the clear intersectionality between Special Education and marginalized children as well as the valuable voice this group would bring to the table.
 - SEAC needs to make sure the group meets the regulations to be members. May need some clarification or attestation that Black Parent Support Group are not an organization exclusively of professional educators and do they have a local chapter.
 - The Group is applying for a voting position within SEAC.
 - Member at Large, could possibly be another avenue for this group.
 - These members would have a valuable voice at the table.
 - The Member at Large is an option, but it is not an association seat and would limit participation to single individual rather than association representative, and option of alternative attending in place.
 - This will give families an option to reach out this group for support.
 - Committee, through SEAC Chair, will reach out to the Black Parent Support Group, to inquire for information.
 - The Black Parent Support Group is a member of the TDSB SEAC.

- Request was made to have this go to Board for November which would mean requirement for SEAC approval at October meeting.

Direction is was given by the committee members to the SEAC Chair Eva Kyriakides to reach out the Black Parent Support Group Member for further clarification.

Member at Large- a vacancy sub committee will need to review any applications submitted for the position and bring recommendations forward to SEAC. Volunteers to form the subcommittee were:

- Tara Culley
- SEAC Chair Eva Kyriakides
- Direction was given to create a draft posting for the Member at Large position in order to have it prepared and circulated before the next meeting and to have recommendation brought forward for October SEAC and, subsequently, to November Board.
- Trustee Donna Edwards reminded of timelines to move it through Board.

11. Open Discussion:

SEAC Feedback to the K-12 Standards Development Committee Recommendations

Trustee Donna Edwards-explained to the group, that the K-12 sub-committee of SEAC members summarized this document using the 10 different sub-heading, or barriers found within the document itself.

- Lengthy document but a lot of it comes down to accountability.
- Many of the recommendations as a Board we do already but we are looking at a standard practice across the province, around policies and decisions.
- Co-ordinated inter-ministerial and education implementation plan. Critical that there is buy-in, this has nothing to do with which political parties are involved, it needs to be supported and moved forward.
- Many of the barriers are based around attitudes, beliefs and assumptions and outdated policies and procedures.
- Clearing up definitions for disabilities so that every Board is working with the same definition.
- The timeline is still September 30th, so we need to hear back and respond before that date.
- Associations and caregivers can go online and make their own recommendations and give their feedback.
- The committee will be looking at the feedback and make a final report.
- The K-12 committee will be meeting in October to review recommendations.

12. Business Arising form the Minutes:

Response letter from MCCSS regarding the Ontario Autism Program:

- The letter had a lot more information than the first response received by SEAC.
- Chair reflected on being pleased with the level of detail in the response.
- Disappointed with the program roll out taking 2 years.
- Families need immediate services-early intervention is key.
- Program highlight - Workers will go into the homes before the child even starts school.
- Hoping that the right organization will be helping things to move forward.

13. Association Reports:

No association reports.

Reminder that if your organization has events please send it to Eva before the meeting for sharing

14. Correspondence:

- Response from MCCSS – July 27, 2021

15. Community Concerns

- Last year SLPs were supporting challenges related to face masks, shields and protocol, along with student struggling with enunciation.
- The guidelines are always adapting.
- 1:1 PPE Under a guideline staff are to wear masks at all the times; eye coverage when the student is unmasked or when working in near proximity.
- In the classroom we do still have options for clear masks, the plastic muffles the auditory sounds, these masks are not a fit for students.
- Amplification systems have been used as well.
- From an inclusion stand point how are these kids going to be included if nobody can understand them.
- SLPs want to be called in to situations like that, to help kids participate and connect in the classroom.
- As a SEAC member is approached by a family who should we be contacting?
 - If the family is identifying the school, they would be encouraged to contact the school team.
 - Which ever door they feel most comfortable coming through.
 - When in doubt send to our department.
- DDSB@Home has all the same supportive roles as in-person programs.

16. Celebrations and Success:

Craig Cameron

- Reflected on his time and thanked the group for their support.
- Shout out to Michelle Da Camara for supporting his son.

Kathy Kedey

- Thanked Craig for his voice
- Thank the team at the school for lending the FM system for her daughter to use while riding in the Sunderland Fair and for recognizing that learning happens in a variety of ways

Darlene Forbes

- Celebrating her daughter attending Durham College, and a thank you to Craig

Carolyn McLennon

- Celebrating her son, graduated from Durham College and will be starting a new placement at the Toronto Zoo.

SEAC Chair Eva Kyriakides

- Craig has been a valuable voice and thank you.

17. Adjournment:

That the meeting does now adjourn at 8:16p.m.

Next S.E.A.C. meeting – Thursday, October 21, 2021.

MOVED BY: Tara Culley

CARRIED

SECONDED BY: Craig Cameron

Report respectfully submitted by:

Eva Kyriakides, SEAC Chair

Table 1 ACTION PLAN

ACTIVITY	RESPONSIBILITY	COMPLETION
Prepare a Draft of Posting for Member at Large and have it posted	Superintendent Andrea McAuley	Posted and closed before our October 21, 2021 meeting