

**REPORT OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**Thursday January 9, 2025, 6:30 P.M.**

**ROLL CALL:**

Eva Kyriakides, Association for Bright Children (ABC) SEAC Chair  
Charmain Brown, OPVIC Ontario Parents of Visually Impaired Children  
Maritza Basaran, Autism Ontario – Durham Region Chapter  
Tara Culley, Durham Down Syndrome Association  
Allyson Eamer, Easter Seals Ontario  
Rowin Jarvis, Learning Disabilities Association of Durham Region  
Elizabeth Daniel, Member at Large  
Jennifer McLaughlin, Sawubona Africentric Circle of Support  
Jessica Wells, Member at Large

Trustees: Donna Edwards Kelly Miller Michelle Arseneault

Staff: Superintendent, Andrea McAuley  
System Lead, Michelle Crawford-Eade

Recording Secretary: Lisa Wry

**1. Call to Order:**

SEAC Chair Eva Kyriakides called the meeting to order at 6:31 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, live, and learn.

This statement was co-created in partnership with the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation and the Chippewas of Georgina Island.

**DDSB Human Rights & Equity Statement**

The Durham District School Board recognizes Indigenous rights are distinct. In the exercise of those rights, Indigenous staff and students shall not be subject to action with the aim or effect of depriving these distinct rights.

The Durham District School Board is committed to providing learning and working environments that centre human rights and equity and are safe, welcoming, respectful, equitable, accessible, inclusive, and free from all forms of discrimination, oppression, harassment, and harm.

**3. Welcome Guests:** Superintendent of Education Heather Mundy, Leslie Parsons - Research Associate, Research & Strategic Analytics. Kim Argier Elementary Representative, Tracey Running Secondary Representative; Olivia Or Easter Seals Alternate.

**Regrets:** sensaRAneb Burrell, Trustee Kelly Miller, Charmain Brown

**Absent:** None

**4. Approval of Agenda:**

That the agenda for January 9, 2025, be approved with the addition under item number 12 a letter from the Ottawa Catholic District School Board

MOVED BY: Trustee Michelle Arseneault

SECONDED BY: Allyson Eamer

CARRIED

**5. Approval of the Minutes:**

That the minutes from December 5, 2024, be approved.

MOVED BY: Trustee Michelle Arseneault SECONDED BY: Trustee Donna Edwards

CARRIED

**6. Staff Reports:**

**ISS Impact Update-Service Animals in Schools**

- Thank you to community training partners that pair students/youth and service animals.
- We currently have seven service animals active in DDSB schools.
- The students are the primary handlers aligning to the Policy Program Memorandum (PPM) from the Ministry that provides the guidelines specifically for service animals in schools. Where students are working on this skill, we continue working with the family on ensuring the students accommodation are met in other ways.
- You will see in the report engagement in nine requests about service animals; seven are active in our schools-the other two are where the students is not yet independently handling or are not the primary handler of the animal, the accommodations are met in other ways to make sure the students are thriving in their learning and well-being at school.

**Planning has begun for 2025-2026 school year and calendars are out for consultation.**

- SEAC is asked to review and provide any individual and/or association feedback.
- Special Education class planning for 2025-2026 has begun.
- The Ministry of Education has provided funds to subsidise Additional Qualifications (AQ) for Math and Special Education. Currently, all funds for special education courses have been allocated which is approximately 45 educators; there is a waiting list maintained should there be unforeseen changes. Promotional fliers for the AQ courses shared with SEAC.

Trustee Donna Edwards brought forward information that community partners such as Grandview Kids, are under increased funding pressures inquiring about information sharing with the district.

Superintendent Andrea McAuley responded that teams have been involved with planning meetings for the 2025-2026 school year with Grandview Kids but discussion has not touched on pressures beyond the next school year.

Also, flagged by partners, the service pressures within the Ontario Autism Program, including Urgent Response Services.

7. **Board:** Trustee Donna Edwards shared with SEAC members that the Board of Trustees received information at the Board Meeting on January 6, 2025, including a Standing committee a presentation from the secondary Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF) Occasional Teachers' Bargaining Unit. Significantly less enrolment than anticipated and therefore some reorganizing was necessary. Reduced enrolment is due to construction and occupation in new communities being slower than anticipated. Board also received an Early reading screeners results presentation.

#### 8. **Consultation-Draft Policy: Accessibility**

Heather Mundy, Superintendent of Education People and Culture, seeking consultation on the draft (revision) accessibility policy. This policy pulls language from the Human Rights and Anti- Discrimination policy, which was in consultation and development for 18 months. At the request of Governance and the Board of Trustees, we have highlighted the importance of accessibility, by making a stand-alone policy.

- Trustee Donna Edwards noted she is happy to see this and thinks it is well done.
- A Definition of Ableism or Anti-Ableism should be included.
- Ensure links the Procedures within the Policy
- Add the Accessible Canada Act as a link.
- It might be appropriate to include a section about supporting learning environments. Superintendent Heather Mundy considered included under section 1.4 or 1.6 e.
- The active procedure supporting this policy provides the actions.

#### 9. **SEAC Parent/Guardian Survey 2025**

Leslie Parsons, Research Associate, Research & Strategic Analytics joined to review options and respond to questions for the development of the 2025 SEAC survey. SEAC Chair Eva Kyriakides advised that the most recent (2023) survey was shared with members for review and now the decision needs to be made whether to follow up with the same focus of communication and/or put forward another topic.

- Priority is to keep it efficient and concise for ease of completion.
- The Thought Exchange for SEAC was set up to allow an opportunity for members to submit ideas for consideration. Top thoughts: support, communication, education, children and parents/caregivers.
- One of the results from the last survey where we could improve was specific to the Identification Placement Review Committee (IPRC) process and the related Parent/Caregiver Guide ("Guide"). The DDSB has updated this resource and created a flowchart for ease of understanding. A standardized letter of invitation was created with the Guide linked within the letter.
- We would like to see if the changes have been effective.
  - Discussion and agreement that communication will be continued to focus; SEAC would like to consider a question that further focuses on communications with families/caregivers of secondary students.

- Leslie Parsons shared that the survey can be set up to move through additional questions depending on the answers.
- Suggestion made about the inclusion of an experience question. Suggestion to reframing the two open ended questions: what things are going well and what things can be approved upon.
- Agreement to add a preamble at the beginning about what action was taken in response to the previous survey.

**10. Business Arising from the Minutes**

**Grandview Parent Advisory Committee-Membership Request**

SEAC Chair Eva Kyriakides- suggested to put forward a motion to Board to approve the SEAC recommendation to have the Grandview Parent Advisory Committee join the DDSB SEAC should they provide an alternate member that is part of the Parent Advisory Committee.

MOTION: UPON NAMING ANOTHER PARENT MEMBER AS ALTERNATE THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES APPROVE THE SEAC RECOMMENDATION FOR THE GRANDVIEW PARENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO BECOME AN ASSOCIATION REPRESENTED ON THE DURHAM DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SEAC).

MOVED BY: Tara Culley    SECONDED BY: Elizabeth Daniel

CARRIED

**Draft Letter to Ontario College of Teachers**

Looking for additional comments and consultation with all members and will be shared with Charmain Brown for additional input around identity intersectionality. Consider sharing the letter with the deans of Education.

MOTION: TO SENT THE LETTER TO THE ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TEACHERS INCORPORATING A MANDATORY SPECIAL EDUCATION COURSE.

MOVED BY: Trustee Michelle Arseneault    SECONDED BY: Rowin Jarvis

CARRIED

**11. Association Reports & Committee Reports**

- Autism Ontario shared information about upcoming March Break Camps. Information will be distributed to members of SEAC.

**12. Correspondence**

Letter from the Ottawa Catholic District School Board

- SEAC Chair Eva Kyriakides feels that the Ministry would respond that Boards are responsible for allocating funding.
- Memo 2024:B05 Memorandum to Boards of Education committed to working toward using updated census data.
- Discussion that the letter does not reflect the reality of how we work within our district. Concerns that data used for funding is significantly outdated, there needs to be a catch up to current census. Boards are not fully funded for EI and CPP and that ends up coming out of the Board budget. There needs to be standards established from Board to Board.
- Superintendent Andrea McAuley-advocacy has come from Trustees, through the Ontario Public School Boards Associations (OPSBA) including Special Education. Local context is that Trustees approved the addition of 50 Educational Assistants permanent positions for this school year.
- Decision – communication with requesting SEAC concurring with advocacy and also decline of request for co-signing draft letter as it does not align with our local context and service model.

MOTION: TO THANK THE OTTAWA CATHOLIC SCHOOL BOARD

MOVED BY: Trustee Donna Edwards SECONDED BY: Trustee Michelle Arsenault.

CARRIED

**13. Community Concerns**

None

**14. Celebrations & Successes**

Donna Edwards – Ontario District School Boards Public Education Symposium have David Lapofsky presenting on Tearing Down Disabilities in the K-12 System.

Tara Culley – Shared that Adam went to his first dance without parent accompaniment.

Andrea McAuley- J. Clark Richardson Collegiate had an inclusive paralympic basketball event.

**15. Next S.E.A.C Meeting**

February 6, 2025

**16. Adjournment**

That the meeting now adjourns at 8:17 p.m.

Adjournment called by SEAC Chair Eva Kyriakides

MOVED BY: Allyson Eamer SECONDED BY: Trustee Michelle Arseneault

CARRIED

Report respectfully submitted by: Eva Kyriakides, SEAC Chair

*Table 1 Action Items*

ACTIVITY	RESPONSIBILITY	COMPLETION
Completion of OCT Letter	Allyson Eamer	Distributed January 17, 2025
Response to OCDSB	Eva Kyriakides	Sent January 17, 2025
Update to draft Parent/Caregiver Survey (2025)	Leslie Parsons Andrea McAuley	Update for inclusion in February 2025 SEAC Agenda Package

# Inclusive Student Services Impact Update

2024-2025 • Issue 4

## Service Animals in Schools

DDSB has a long standing history of inclusion of certified service animals where students or staff use for accommodation and are the independent handlers.

*"The term "service animal" refers to any animal that provides support to a person with a disability. Traditionally, service animals have been dogs, and dogs remain the most common species of service animal; however, other species may also provide services to individuals with disabilities. The types of functions performed by service animals are diverse, and may or may not include sensory, medical, therapeutic, and emotional support services."* (Ministry of Education, Policy Program Memorandum (PPM) 163, [ontario.ca](https://www.ontario.ca))

Service animals are traditionally highly trained dogs (Guide Dog, Autism Support Dog, Hearing/Signal Dog, Mobility Assistance Dog, Seizure Response Dog) that assist individuals with various daily tasks.

Service animals help students move safely, be more independent, and support opportunities for participation and integration. Licensed organizations like the Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides (LFCDG) and Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) Guide Dogs maintain high standards of training and care in supporting handler, family, and the service animal.

### Students

Where students are supported by a Guide Dog/Service Dog at school, the student is the primary handler. The student handler must:

- demonstrate the ability to control the Guide Dog/Service Dog in accordance with the training received by the accrediting training organization;
- ensure the Guide Dog/Service Dog is always wearing a vest and leash or harness when the dog is not in its crate;
- ensure the Guide Dog/Service Dog's biological needs are addressed;
- transition and maintain at all times the Guide Dog/Service Dog on a leash, harness, mat and/or crate.

Service animals in schools raise awareness about disabilities and the importance of inclusion. This leads to greater understanding and helps foster inclusion within the school community.



*"We have a yellow lab trained by the LFCDG. He quickly became my son's best friend, attending school with him daily. Autism is isolating and can come with a high degree of anxiety. Our service dog provides a calming effect and physical de-escalation when my son is overwhelmed. My son's favourite part of having a service dog is "when he licks my face". I think that's gross, but who am I to come between a boy and his dog?"*

-Parent

Consideration and use of service animals in schools is aligned with the expectations of the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC), Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and Ministry of Education PPM 163. Each request for a service or support animal to be part of a student in school accommodation plan is reviewed on an individual basis considering the student's dignity, integration, independence, and disability-related learning needs.

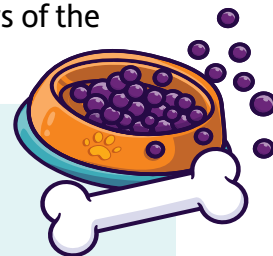
The accommodation process is a shared responsibility and the DDSB will cooperatively engage with the student/parent/caregiver to consider accommodation options.

### How Do I Know If There is a Service Animal Working at My Child's School?

Communication is shared with school staff and broader school community. Information is shared through the school newsletter and may include assemblies supported by the training organization. Standardized DDSB signage is placed on the entrance doors of the school to inform visitors of the service animal.

*"(Service Animal)'s greatest impact is not just seen in (student handler)'s eyes, but in the eyes of all the students who feel their presence in the school. A sense of empathy and curiosity allows you to feel the good in people and their acceptance of individual differences."*

*-Parent and Educator*



### Transportation

If the student accesses transportation, Durham Student Transportation Services (DSTS) may add the service animal to the school bus roster.

### Current DDSB Data (2024)

Accommodation for students is an ongoing process where programming is reviewed regularly to ensure it meets their evolving needs.

Currently, seven students are actively supported by working service dogs as part of their accommodations at school. During the previous calendar year, the DDSB received nine requests with seven approved and/or renewed for the school year and two declined/accommodations met in other ways to support student learning and well-being. Where a student is, for example, not yet able to be the primary handler for the service animal at school, other accommodations are put in place to meet student's programming needs and the DDSB remains committed to ongoing considerations for accommodation.

Multiple schools also welcome service animals, with parent/caregiver handlers, on the school grounds daily during pick up and drop off times.

*"Having a Service Dog at school is like having a silent teacher for life skills—patience, responsibility, and inclusion. Their presence encourages children to think beyond themselves, fostering empathy and understanding in ways that traditional lessons sometimes cannot."*

*-Principal*



For more information about the DDSB Inclusive Student Services Impact Update, please visit [DDSB Inclusive Student Services](#).