



Special Education Advisory Committee

Minutes - December 13, 2023

A meeting of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) was held virtually on Wednesday, December 13, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. with the following members in attendance:

Trustee: Joe Meissner

Association Members: Christine MacDonald (Learning Disabilities Association of Wellington County), Ami McIntosh (Autism Ontario), Shannon Taylor (Epilepsy South Central Ontario), Roberta Thompson & Jeff Senior (Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society)

Non-Association Members: Carmen Sutherland (Waterloo Region Family Network), Huseyin Unver (YMCA of Three Rivers)

Board Staff in Attendance: Jodi Albrecht (Superintendent, Student Achievement & Well-Being), Leonilda Gil (Administrative Assistant), Stephen McCrae (System Administrator)

Regrets: Lisa Bonnell (Ontario Parents of Visually Impaired Children), Jennifer Checkley (Easter Seals), Samantha Estoesta (Trustee), Michelle Hughes (FASD/ONE Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder/Ontario Network of Expertise), Nancy Lau (Autism Ontario), Jane Martin & Kathy Waybrant (Ontario Federation of Cerebral Palsy), Sara Penny (Epilepsy South Central Ontario)

Call to Order

Shannon Taylor called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Welcome & Territorial Acknowledgement - Jodi Albrecht

Approval of Agenda

Moved by Roberta Thompson, seconded by Ami McIntosh:
That the agenda of the December 13, 2023 meeting of the Special Education Advisory Committee, be approved.

- Carried -

Approval of Minutes

Moved by Roberta Thompson, seconded by Ami McIntosh:
That the minutes of the November 8, 2023 meeting of the Special Education Advisory Committee, be approved.

- Carried -

Business Arising from the Minutes

- None

WRDSB Special Education & Student Well-Being Report - Jodi Albrecht

- Information
 - Labour Update
 - The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO-T/OT), Ontario Public School Boards Association (OPSBA) and the Crown have reached a tentative agreement regarding central terms. This agreement relates to WRDSB elementary teachers and elementary occasional teachers. We are waiting for the central ratification process to be completed.
 - All groups are engaging in local negotiations
 - General Updates
 - Last year when we saw an increase in covid cases and were experiencing fails to fill, we had to reinstate a process to ensure we had a plan in case we were short staffed in a class. Administrators develop contingency plans where they will move staff as necessary within the school to provide the necessary support in all classrooms. In cases where there isn't enough

staff available and an administrator is contemplating the need to close a class, they reach out to their Family of Schools Superintendent to work through this possible need.

- If all options have been exhausted, and the class cannot safely open, the decision would be to close a classroom for the following day
- This year, we have had to close 3 classes
- Concern brought forward from a SEAC member about the last minute notification of class closures to families. It is exclusionary and more effort needs to be considered on how to support families as there are no other options provided to families. Conversations should be had with administrators as to how this affects families and students when there is a classroom closure. Recommendation to send a letter to the Ministry of Education regarding the funding for our EAs as this seems to be one of the causes for the lack of EA hires.
- Acknowledged the feedback provided by members and the challenges faced by the school and families when there are classroom closures. Families are encouraged to reach out to school administrators to provide feedback as to how we can work together.
- We will need to continue to build relationships and bridge the partnership for families and students
- SEAC Agenda
 - The Provincial Parent Associations Advisory Committee (PAAC) on the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) has provided suggested SEAC agenda items on their [website](#)
 - Review of the format of the agenda was discussed and going forward, all items will be identified as one of the following: information, discussion/feedback, decision.

- R. Thompson received a [letter](#) from M. Domm, the PAAC on SEAC rep for the Down Syndrome Association of Ontario. L. Gil will share the letter with members.
- We can continue to revisit the PAAC website each month and review various sections <https://www.paac-seac.ca/>
- Discussion/Feedback
 - IEP Parent Guide
 - We are currently working on an [IEP Parent Guide](#) which will eventually be in the form of a pamphlet that would go home at the beginning of the school year along with the SEAC information pamphlet and will also be posted on the website
 - Members reviewed various sections of the guide:
 - Introduction: Feedback provided that the language should be less formal and intimidating. It should be encouraging to parents and not imply that the IEP is a bad thing.
 - Guiding Principles: No suggested changes
 - Families as Partners: Feedback provided that often when families/caregivers indicate what their child does at home, they are sometimes met with resistance and are told that the child does not do that while at school. Also when families/caregivers give positive comments about their child, it should still require a list of improvements with the areas of strength provided. Need to revisit the communication out to schools about IEPs and support engagement with families during the IEP process. The questions sent home to families need to be better integrated into the IEP document to allow flexibility and conversations should also be an option in addition to the formal paper document.

- How Can Families/Caregivers be Involved? Feedback provided that the word powerful should be added before the word supporting role. The school to home communication is an important tool. Google classroom or agendas can assist students to continue to work on their goals while at home and allow families to know what their child is working on.
- What happens if you have concerns about your child's IEP? Feedback provided that this section needs to be more visually appealing, providing graphics and a list of steps for the IEP process if a family/caregiver has concerns. The document needs to be easier to read, especially for newcomers to our schools. The information provided should also be translated in all languages.

Chair Report - Shannon Taylor

- [Review SEAC Handout](#) & [SEAC website information](#)
 - The documents need to reflect that our voice matters and provide encouragement. We want to make sure that we are an action committee that works together with families/caregivers to create successful experiences for the students.
 - Need to define roles and responsibilities and add a section of How SEAC can help families/caregivers?
 - R. Thompson and S. Taylor to connect and update the documents for further review by members
- S. Taylor has been asked to sit on a committee to review the air quality in schools. They will be reviewing data about the air quality and how to improve it. The first meeting will take place in the new year. Members are encouraged to reach out to S. Taylor if there are any concerns they would like

to bring forward to the committee that she can share. Will advocate for students with special education needs.

Trustee Report - Joe Meissner

- J. Meissner shared the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) [Submission](#) to the 2024-2025 Education Funding Consultation letter to the Ministry. The areas of focus include Mental Health recommendations (pg 9), Special Education Grant (both Special Incidence Portion and Special Equipment Amount) recommendations (pg 18), and the additional Special Education funding recommendations (pg 20).

- The Special Education Funding recommendations include the following:

Special Education continues to be an area that is underfunded given the prevalence and complexity of student needs. This is even more significant where community services and supports are not readily available or easily accessible. This was highlighted and exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. These students now potentially have even more significant learning gaps that need to be intentionally addressed.

OPSBA recommends:

- Predictable and responsive funding that reflects the ongoing specialized needs of students who require Special Education supports and/or services.
- Continued review of the Special Education grant components to ensure they are reflective of the current school board realities.
- A comprehensive review to fully understand the issue of assessment wait times, gaps in services, and access to professional staff across the province in order to provide timely and relevant support to students and their families. This

continues to be more acute in northern, rural, and remote communities.

- That Special Education and specifically autism supports and services continue to be reviewed and revised to meet student and family needs, especially as it relates to the impact of COVID-19 on learning and well-being.
 - Predictable and stable funding to ensure that all learning spaces, educational equipment and teaching practices are fully accessible, under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act and associated regulations under the Act, for all students to engage and thrive in all aspects of school.
 - Continued support for the valuable contributions that our school treatment centres offer to students and their families, and for locally seconded staff.
- Acknowledged there are a number of Minister's Advisory Council Special Education (MACSE) vacancies. There is an application process to become a member. Recommendation that a letter from our board should be sent outlining the support to fill the open vacancies.
 - J. Senior shared that one of the MACSE representatives who is in his second term is Michael Jacques who has autism and an intellectual disability. He's been a great advocate on the council.
<https://www.heresmybook.com/>
 - Visit the [website](#) to learn more about MACSE

Round Table Association Reports

1. Ami McIntosh, Autism Ontario
 - **Rad Dads** - Join us each month to meet with other dads, male caregivers, and transgender/non-binary folks. This casual setting allows you to socialize, share your experiences, or simply sit back and listen.
 - Date: Monday, December 18, 2023 at 7:30–9:00 p.m.

- Registration opens on December 4, 2023 at 12:00 p.m.
[Registration Link](#)
- **Ausome Moms** - Join us each month to meet with other moms, female caregivers, and transgender/non-binary folks. This casual setting allows you to socialize, share your experiences, or simply sit back and listen.
 - Date: Thursday, December 21, 2023 at 7:30-9:00 p.m.
 - Registration opens on December 7, 2023 at 12:00 p.m.
[Registration Link](#)
- **[World Autism Day 2024 Celebrate the Spectrum](#)**
 - ***What is Celebrate the Spectrum?***
Celebrate the Spectrum is an opportunity for positive action to provide spaces of support and advocacy for our diverse communities while learning about autism and how we can all make our communities better and more inclusive places for autistic people.
 - ***How do I participate in this year's World Autism Day events?***
There are so many fun ways to Celebrate The Spectrum with us on World Autism Day across Ontario. Find out [how to get involved](#) leading up to April 2, 2024, and throughout the month of April.
 - **School Giving** - Students are some of our most active supporters. In honour of them, we are launching the [Celebrate the Spectrum School Giving Challenge](#) in April. The school that raises the most will be eligible to win special recognition! [Visit here](#) to learn more about the challenge and to register.
 - Fly a Flag for Autism Awareness. Back by popular demand! Purchase a flag for \$25 to use as the centerpiece in an autism awareness gathering. Fly your flag for the month of April, or on

World Autism Day, April 2, 2024. All proceeds go to support the programs and services of Autism Ontario.

- [Pre-purchase your flag today!](#) Flags will be mailed out starting in January 2024.
- **To sign up for our newsletter(s):**
<https://www.autismontario.com/newsletter>

2. Carmen Sutherland, Waterloo Region Family Network

- KidsAbility [Summer Camp Planning Steps](#)
- [Virtual Camp Fair 2024](#) learn more about summer camp opportunities for children, youth, and adults with special needs in Waterloo Region, Guelph Wellington, and beyond. In partnership with Waterloo Region Family Network (WRFN) and Supporting Kids in Camp (SKIC), KidsAbility is hosting a series of Summer Camp Fairs to showcase camps who provide programming and/or supports for campers with special needs. Register at kidsability.ca/camp-info.

3. Roberta Thompson, Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society

- Planning for [World Down Syndrome Day](#) on March 21st, 2024 continues. Currently working on a google slide document with links for classes to explore and learn why the United Nations has recognized this day globally, and to celebrate how far people with Down Syndrome have come. Flash Mob dance at City Hall will be taking place.

4. Huseyin Unver, YMCA of Three Rivers

- Immigrant Services [YMCA Programs and Services December 2023](#)

5. Christine MacDonald, Learning Disabilities Association of Wellington County

- There are new board staff include Executive Director Marciane Any and President John McNamara who developed the Reading Rocks Program

Date of Next Meeting

The next SEAC meeting date is January 10, 2024 at 7:00 p.m.

Adjournment

Moved by Roberta Thompson, seconded by Carmen Sutherland:
That the Special Education Advisory Committee meeting be adjourned.

- Carried -

The meeting adjourned at 8:52 p.m.