



Special Education Advisory Committee

Minutes - February 11, 2026

A meeting of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) was held virtually on Wednesday, February 11, 2026 at 7:00 p.m. with the following members in attendance:

Trustees: Samantha Estoesta, Joe Meissner

Association Members: Jennifer Checkley (Easter Seals), Jane Martin (Ontario Federation of Cerebral Palsy), Shannon Taylor (Epilepsy South Central Ontario), Roberta Thompson (Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society)

Non-Association Members: Carmen Sutherland (Waterloo Region Family Network)

Board Staff in Attendance: Jodi Albrecht (Superintendent, Student Achievement & Well-Being), Ines Bijl (Consultant), Jennifer Crawford (Administrative Assistant), Melanie Gravel (Speech-Language Pathologist Lead), Stephen McCrae (System Administrator)

Guest: Alicja Kotarska (WRDSB Parent), Esther Wainaina (Human Rights Officer - Lead Accessibility Plan)

Regrets: Lilly Adam (YMCA of Three Rivers), Lisa Bonnell (Ontario Parents of Visually Impaired Children), Michelle Hughes (FASD/ONE Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder/Ontario Network of Expertise), Ami McIntosh (Autism Ontario), Jeff Senior (Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society), Kathy Waybrant (Ontario Federation of Cerebral Palsy)

Call to Order

Roberta Thompson called the meeting to order at 7p.m.

Welcome & Territorial Acknowledgement - Jodi Albrecht

Approval of Agenda

Moved by Shannon Taylor, seconded by Carmen Sutherland:
That the agenda of the February 11, 2026 meeting of the Special Education Advisory Committee, be approved.

- Carried -

Approval of Minutes

Moved by Jennifer Checkley, seconded by Shannon Taylor:
That the minutes of the January 7, 2026 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
 - System Updates
 - Transitions
 - Moving to another SEAC meeting
 - Would like more information about ICAN-Inclusive Community Access Navigation
- Discussion
 - [Literacy Development in Students with Complex Communication Needs](#) Presented by: Melanie Gravel (Speech Language Pathology Lead), Ines Bijl (Special Education Consultant)
 - WRDSB Structured Literacy Multi-Year Plan
 - Complex communicators are visible and instruction is adapted, utilizing interdisciplinary collaboration
 - Based on, Comprehensive Literacy for All, by Erickson and Koppenhaver
 - WRDSB has 19 ERRT staff (Early reading resource teachers)

- Perform early reading screening, and assisting students who did not meet benchmark during screening
 - Newly funded positions in 24/25 school year
- Feedback:
 - Do you see confidence building in non speaking communicators and educators?
 - Yes, to build confidence we are using modeling in classrooms and through PD trainings
 - Have not gathered data currently but will incorporate in the future to track our progress
 - Next step would be to share the PD with more people in the system to increase educator's knowledge and confidence
 - If the ERRT is in the classroom, is the whole class and classroom teacher also gaining from the experience?
 - All students are gaining from this experience. We see that kindergarten students are drawn to the new person in the class and what they are doing and then we are encouraging interactions and learning through co-play.
 - When students are ready and willing they will engage
 - Encouraging educators to embrace and experience what they are learning from their ERRT support
 - Like hearing about the educator's experiences and impacts with the students to record important moments and bring life to the material being taught
 - A nice way to re-enforce teachings by having students helping each other while learning together
 - Jodi referenced a Shelley Moore presentation from a previous meeting: universalizing communication overall, how we communicate, and the impact when everyone in the classroom engages

- How this honours the complex communicators in the classroom
- Making it available and accessible to everyone
- Have you found reluctant educators are more willing to engage in this work?
 - This has garnered conversations and questions from educators about screening and using the tools to assist their learners
 - Willingness to ask questions
 - Relationship building occurring with the SLP, ERRT and classroom teachers at the school level
 - Would like to bring more stories from classroom teachers into the conversation to share their individual experiences in the classroom

Chair Report for discussion/feedback - Roberta Thompson

- [Simcoe Country DSB Letter](#)
 - Moving forward to the March SEAC meeting
- [Thames Valley DSB Letter](#)
 - Vulnerable students left without proper support
 - Wait times have impacts on rehabilitation services
 - 3-5 year waiting list
 - Looking for equitable and accessible services for all students
 - Less flexibility from an outside agency
 - SEAC would like to write a letter of support for this request

Trustee Report - Sam Estoesta & Joe Meissner

- February Trustees Report
 - Held a special board meeting to discuss writing a letter to the Minister of Education in support of Trustees in the Province

- would like a referendum or consultation process to check in with the rest of the province before decisions are made about school board Trustees
- Writing a letter to the Ontario Ombudsman to ask for a review of the process and the impact of removing school board Trustees
 - In the name of fairness, openness, and transparency
- Name for new school: Giinawind Public School, South Kitchener
 - Anishinaabe, meaning: Us including you.
- First reports on generative AI that is being rolled out across the school board, there is a gatekeeping age, grade 7 above
 - Looking at all applications in classrooms
 - Developing framework

Round Table Association Reports

- Amy McIntosh, Autism Ontario
 - [Autism Ontario February Updates](#)
- Jennifer Checkley, Easter Seals Ontario
 - Ontario post-secondary scholarship applications are open until April 17, 2026
- Carmen Sutherland, Waterloo Region Family Network
 - The Transition from Youth with Disabilities to Adulthood: Planning from a Parent Perspective, Feb 28, 9:30-11:30am, KPL, 85 Queen St. S. Kitchener
 - Choices and Connections: A Session for Adult Siblings of Loved Ones with Disabilities, Feb 28, 1-3pm, The Family Centre, 65 Hanson Ave. Kitchener
 - Kaleidoscope Kids, Feb 21, Mar 28, 3-4pm, Oak Creek EarlyON Centre
 - WRFN School Navigation Workshop Series - Modified Days and Safety Plans, Mar 11, 6:30-8pm, The Family Centre, 65 Hanson Ave. Kitchener

- Jane Martin, Ontario Federation of Cerebral Palsy
 - Adapted/Family Ceili, Kitchener City Hall Rotunda, March 1, 2026, 1-4pm. Tickets on sale till Feb 28, 11:50pm
- Roberta Thompson, Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society
 - Individuals from WWDSS are writing letters in support of school board Trustees
 - World Down Syndrome Day, Mar 21, 2026
 - Teachers and Coaches encouraged to take pictures of class or team rocking colourful socks, post it to social media tagging WWDSS, for a chance to win a pizza party, 4 winners chosen randomly
 - Titans Basketball - Silly Sock Game, March 8, 2026 - 3pm, Kitchener Auditorium
 - Special Olympics playing during half time show
 - Buddy Choir will be performing
 - Book Referral: Safe and Secure, Seven Steps on the Path to a Good Life for People with Disabilities, free resource

Adjournment

Moved by Shannon Taylor, seconded by Carmen Sutherland:

That the Special Education Advisory Committee meeting be adjourned.

- Carried -

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.