



**DURHAM CATHOLIC  
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD**  
*Learning and Living in Faith*

## **Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Meeting**

December 3, 2024, from 7:30 PM to 9:30 PM  
Catholic Education Centre, 650 Rossland Road West, Oshawa  
North and South Board Rooms

### **Members Present:**

Valerie Adamo, Chair, VOICE for the Hearing Impaired (In-Person)  
Walter Heeney, Vice Chair, Durham Down Syndrome Association (In-Person)  
Mariam Maskell, Participation House (Virtual)  
Julie Sorhaitz, Learning Disabilities Association of Durham Region (In-Person)  
Alex Massis, Community Representative (Virtual)  
Candace Julien, Sawubona Africentric Circle of Support (Virtual)

### **Trustees Present:**

Jim McCafferty, Trustee (Virtual)

### **Staff Present:**

Christine Congrady, Student Services Coordinator (In-Person)  
Shelley Phoenix, Senior Manager of Social Work and Child and Youth Counsellors (In Person)  
Paula Sorhaitz, Superintendent of Education (In-Person)

### **SEAC Representatives Present:**

Patricia Bosley, CUPE Representative (Virtual)  
Frank Porco, CPCO Representative (Virtual)  
Lo Davis, OECTA Representative (In-Person)  
Ashley Toohey, APSSP Representative (In-Person)

### **Regrets:**

Claudia Nosseir, Grandview Kids  
Robert De Souza, Trustee  
Edward Secnik, Autism Ontario – Durham Region

## **Minutes**

### **1. Opening**

#### **1.1. Call to Order**

Chair Adamo called the meeting to order at 7:38 p.m., offered the opening prayer and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **1.2. Memorials and Prayers**



### **1.3. Land Acknowledgements**

### **1.4. Roll Call and Apologies**

### **1.5. Approval of the Agenda**

Motion: SS-2024-12-03-01

Approval of the Agenda

Motion moved by Julie Sorhaitz and seconded by Jim McCafferty.

“THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee approve the agenda of the Tuesday, December 3, 2024, meeting, as presented.” (CARRIED)

### **1.6. Approval of the Minutes of November 5, 2024, SEAC Meeting**

Motion: SS-2024-12-03-02

Approval of Minutes

Motion moved by Walter Heeney and seconded by Alex Massis.

“THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee approve the Minutes of the Tuesday, November 5, 2024, meeting, as presented.” (CARRIED)

### **1.7. Declarations of Interest**

None

## **2. Items for Information/Decision**

### **2.1. Announcements**

- 2.1.1. Minister’s Update on EQAO Scores for Students with Special Education Needs**
- the document update reflects provincial results, not specific to DCDSB
  - key items in the document
    - slight increase in math scores for students with Special Education needs
    - decline in reading and writing
    - sense of belonging scores for students with special education needs lower compared to students who do not have special education needs
  - EQAO is partnering with the Ontario Institute for Studies and Education and embarking on a research project to help increase outcomes for students with special education needs focusing on grade 6 students reading with learning disabilities
- 2.1.2. Minister’s Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE) Kindergarten Updates**
- In September 2025 MACSE is looking to introduce new mandatory learning for kindergarten classrooms to ensure alignment with the recommendations for the Right to Read report
  - geared to improving alignment with new elementary curriculum with math, language, science and tech changes
  - Focus on play-based learning for full day kindergarten will continue



**2.1.3.** Ministry directives re: LD at school, Geneva Centre – Sonderly courses DCDSB had begun sharing the resources from LD@school prior to the Ministry direction, and a memo for DCDSB educators re: Sonderly courses is set to go out in January as per our usual practice.

## **2.2. Presentations**

## **2.3. Discussion Items**

### **2.3.1.** Review of Special Education Data – Diagnoses

- Superintendent Paula Sorhaitz provided statistics from our IEP Online program

## **2.4. Business arising from the Minutes**

### **2.4.1.** Draft letter to Ministry – Learning Disabilities of Durham Region

- Committee reviewed and approved letter to be signed and submitted to the Ministry

Motion: SS-2024-12-03-03

Approval of Letter to Ministry – Learning Disabilities of Durham Region

Motion moved by Walter Heeney and seconded by Mariam Maskell

“THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee approves Letter to Ministry, as presented.”  
(CARRIED)

## **2.5. Staff Reports**

### **2.5.1.** Student Services Report – Christine Congrady, Shelley Phoenix, Paula Sorhaitz

#### **Christine Congrady presented the Coordinator’s Report.**

- New Teacher Induction Program – during the month of November Student Services Coordinators and Student Services Consultant provided professional development to approximately 40 new teachers on the topics of Developing an Effective Individual Education Plan (IEP) and the Board's Inclusion Policy and Universal Design for Learning
- New PST Mentoring Program – Dissection of the IEP - this session allowed new PSTs to explore each section of the IEP



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- Project SEARCH Update:
  - November 11, 2024 – Interns and Project SEARCH staff participated in a retreat at Manresa Jesuit Spiritual Renewal Centre where interns explored their God-given talents and how these will be used to support employment in the community
  - First round internships will end December 20th
  - Second round of Employment Planning Meetings will happen December 9th and 10th
  - Internships are happening at Hillsdale Estates and Terraces and Durham Regional Headquarters
- All Principals and Vice Principals attended a professional learning session about Lexia from Jenny Graham, Education Consultant at Greenfield Learning. The purpose of the training was to give PVPs a basic understanding of Lexia, the benefits of the program and how as administrators, they can monitor and use Lexia data to inform decisions and next steps to better support teachers and students.

**Shelley Phoenix presented the Mental Health (MH) Report:**

- During the month of November, we have had several student summits/retreats:
  - Durham Youth Drug Awareness Committee Conference was held on November 6th, with 5 DCDSB secondary schools in attendance
  - Student teams will now be completing activities within their schools related to substance use.
  - Talking About Mental Illness Elementary and Secondary Summits were held on November 5th and 28th.
    - 10 Elementary schools and all 8 Secondary Schools were in attendance
    - Students learned about mental health and well-being promotion in schools and are to plan events/activities at their schools
    - They will be returning for a second summit in April/May to share what they have done
  - 2SLGBTQ+ Student Retreat was held on November 8th
    - There was a focus on well-being and activities were centered on self-care and coping strategies.
    - The staff moderators were offered some professional development on supporting the GSA student groups.
  - November 28th was our 2nd annual DCDSB Let's Talk Day, highlighting mental health, working to lessen stigma and encourage help-seeking. Many schools ran special initiatives on this day:
    - Notre Dame student group (BWell) made cookies to sell to raise awareness of MH and fundraise for initiatives.
    - St. Catherine of Siena's Empowerment club visited each class in the school to deliver a short presentation focused on promoting mental wellness, coping strategies and help-seeking.
    - St. Luke students discussed ways in which they could ask caring adults in their lives for help and shared this on their posters



**Paula Sorhaitz presented the Superintendent's Report:**

- Program Support Teacher Learning - last meeting November 12, 2024
  - Principal/Vice-Principal Learning – Lexia, LD @ school
  - Alternate learning goals training:
    - Write an annual program goal
    - Write an alternative learning expectation
    - Write appropriate teaching strategies
    - Choose an assessment method
    - ERAID training, practices for School Team Meetings
    - PSTs also learned about the LD@school platform
  
  - Best practices for recording school team meetings in electronic case management system

Motion: SS-2024-12-03-04

Approval of the December 3, 2024, Student Services Coordinator, Mental Health Leader, and Superintendent Reports

Motion moved by Julie Sorhaitz and seconded by Walter Heeney

“THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee accept the verbal Coordinator, Mental Health Leader and Superintendent Reports of the December 3, 2024, meeting.”  
(CARRIED)

## **2.6. Association Reports**

Julie Sorhaitz, Learning Disabilities Association of Durham Region

- Presentation Right to Read was held on Sunday, November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at the Ajax Public Library
- Part I: We discussed recent updates and developments in the areas of literacy and ADHD and how they impact you, your children and your community.
- Part II: Attendees brought their IEPs and had 1:1 session with Donna and Julie focusing on literacy, executive functions and answering any questions.

## **2.7. Correspondence**

**2.7.1.** Letter from Limestone District School Board dated November 6, 2024  
Re: Ontario College of Teachers

Committee members agreed to support the concerns in the letter from Limestone by drafting a letter of support on the importance of Special Education training as a core component for all teacher preparation programs in Ontario.

Motion: SS-2024-12-03-05

Approval of the correspondence letter from Limestone and drafting a letter of support.

Motion moved by Julie Sorhaitz and seconded by Walter Heeney

“THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee accept the correspondence letter from Limestone and drafting a letter of support.” (CARRIED)



### **3. Other Business**

#### **3.1. Board Communications**

None

#### **3.2. Motion to Adjourn**

**3.2.1.** The next meeting of the Special Education Advisory Committee will be held on January 7, 2025

Motion: SS-2024-12-03-06

Motion to Adjourn

Motion moved by Jim McCafferty and seconded by Walter Heeney.

“THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee meeting of December 3, 2024, adjourn.” (CARRIED)

#### **3.3. Closing Prayer**

Closing prayer was offered by Jim McCafferty. The meeting was adjourned at 8:19 p.m.

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Valerie Adamo  
Chair, Special Education Advisory Committee

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Paula Sorhaitz  
Superintendent of Education, Resource

Recording Secretary: Karen Lutz