

PEEL DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Minutes of a meeting of the Special Education Advisory Committee of the Peel District School Board, held in the Brampton Room, the H. J. A. Brown Education Centre, 5650 Hurontario Street, Mississauga, Ontario on Tuesday, September 16, 2014 at 19:00 hours.

Members present:

Barbara Byers, Fragile X Research Foundation of Canada, Chair
Stan Cameron, Trustee, Vice-Chair
Nancy Bratkovic, Canadian Mental Health Association
Barbara Cyr, Association for Bright Children, Peel Chapter
Shelley Foster, VOICE for Hearing Impaired Children
Meredith Johnson, Trustee
Jennifer Knight, Easter Seals Ontario
Brad MacDonald, Trustee
Wes McDonald, VIEWS for Blind and Visually Impaired Children
Carol Oitment, Tourette Syndrome Association of Ontario
Dorothy Peddie, FASworld Canada – Peel Chapter
Fauzia Reza, Autism Ontario Peel Chapter
Ann Smith, Brampton-Caledon Community Living
Mary Wright, Peel Caring Network for Challenged Kids
Lorraine Yuill, Learning Disabilities Association of Peel Region

Also present:

Carol Ogilvie, Learning Disabilities Association of Peel Region (Alternate)
Tammy Bowman, Educational Resource Facilitators of Peel

Administration:

Louise Sirisko, Superintendent, Special Education Support Services (Executive Member)
Scott Moreash, Associate Director, Instructional Support Services
Tony Pontes, Director of Education
Joy Uniac, Superintendent of Education

Marina Amin, Board Reporter

1. Approval of Agenda

The following changes were made to the agenda:

Item 9.1 Draft SEAC Annual Calendar – Update (revised draft circulated)
Item 10.5 Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE) Feedback Form
– Collaboration with the Community (added)

SE-64, moved by Barbara Cyr, that the agenda, as amended, be approved.

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(2/3rds' majority)

2. Special Presentation: Starting Point 2014

Superintendent of Special Education Support Services, Louise Sirisko, welcomed Director of Education, Tony Pontes, and Associate Director of Instructional Support Services, Scott Moreash, to the meeting. She explained that the Director of Education addresses the system each year at “Starting Point” to deliver key messages and areas of focus for the upcoming academic year. Superintendent Sirisko reported on increased enrolment of special needs children in Peel this year, and she advised that staff are working with stakeholders, parents and families to support student transition into Peel schools. Members viewed the video “Epic” which celebrated Peel student involvement in a variety of activities.

Director Pontes welcomed members back to the new school year, and thanked them for their involvement and representation on associations that work toward enabling children be more successful. He highlighted the Board’s areas of focus, and their alignment with Ministry initiatives, of which, Achieving Excellence is a priority. He noted that closing the gap is about helping children with special needs achieve at the same level as other students. Director Pontes identified growth and well-being as an important goal, which encompasses the mental and physical well-being of children. He highlighted: Peel’s focus on improving numeracy scores; using 21st Century tools and technology to support and enhance the learning experience; building awareness and confidence in the public school system. Director Pontes spoke about the Board’s attention to equity in regard to equal opportunity for students, as well as with respect to the hiring and promotion processes within the Board. He commended Superintendent Sirisko and her team for the work being done to provide equal opportunities for children with special needs to be successful. Director Pontes acknowledged and thanked members for their support in the Board’s campaign to fix the formula, which has resulted in the Board receiving \$3.9 million in High Needs Amount funding for this year, which is approximately \$15 million over four years for special education program use.

3. Conflict of Interest

There were no declarations of conflict of interest.

4. Minutes of the Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting, June 17, 2014

SE-65, moved by Lorraine Yuill, that the Minutes of the Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting of June 17, 2014, be approved.

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5. Revised Policy/Program Memorandum 8: Identification of and Program Planning for Students with Learning Disabilities

Superintendent Sirisko advised that the report is brought for review and information, and will be discussed at the Committee's October meeting. She asked members to forward questions they might have regarding the revised policy to her or other members of the team.

SE-66, moved by Shelley Foster, that the report re Revised Policy/Program Memorandum 8: Identification of and Program Planning for Students with Learning Disabilities, be received.

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6. Links to Literacy

A handout entitled "Links to Literacy" was circulated.

Reporting that "Links to Literacy" is a pilot program that staff have been working on during the course of last year, Superintendent Sirisko introduced and thanked members of the team responsible for developing this Peel program, namely, Instructional Coordinator of ESL/ELD Programs, Zaiba Beg, Speech and Language Pathologist, Susan Bernstein, Lorie Grant, Chief Speech Pathologist, and Research Officer, Aimee Wolanski.

Lorie Grant reported that the pilot project is the result of a collaborative partnership of staff from Curriculum and Instruction, and Special Education departments. The program includes research and evidence-based practices for successful and early literacy development. Its effectiveness will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, and expansion will depend on the success rate of the program. A resource material binder was circulated for members to view samples of strategies and tools that are available to teachers.

Using a PowerPoint presentation, Susan Bernstein provided a brief overview of the program, which is a small group support program, designed to assist at-risk students in Grade 1 with early supports in developing literacy foundation skills like vocabulary, phonological awareness, reading, etc. She noted that Links to Literacy (L2L) is coordinated with the Grade 1 curriculum, and this helps students as they return to the classroom. Zaiba Beg spoke about the program as it relates to English Language Learners (ELLs). She indicated that L2L involves focused instruction and close monitoring of student development. She noted that the program ties into the tiered approach to learning, and explained that, if progress is not apparent, the student will be considered for a further assessment and alternative program supports. Zaiba Beg highlighted the complexities involved in supporting English as a Second Language (ESL) learners and stressed the importance of collaboration between classroom, ESL and In School Support Program (ISSP) teachers, for a seamless transition of students. The advantage of a first language is key for development of English Language Learner skills, and parents are encouraged to use picture talk in their own language.

6. Links to Literacy (Continued)

Aimee Wolanski spoke about the research survey being launched this fall, that will assess effectiveness of the program, its impact on key stakeholders and at-risk learners. She noted that 43% of elementary students in Peel are believed to be students of English as a Second Language. Aimee Wolanski advised that a mini study was conducted in April 2013, with some limitations, and feedback from the study resulted in: availability of parent tip sheets, resource links and program binders; organized resource materials made available in the classroom. She noted that the fall study will include 16 Peel schools, 80 staff members, and approximately 200 students, and she provided details of schedules for training workshops, program implementation; student tracking forms; collection of student assessment data; staff online survey; English and translated parent/guardian paper survey. Aimee Wolanski advised that the data will be collected and analyzed, and a final report is expected to be completed by August 2015. It was noted that tip sheets will be sent home to parents within the next few weeks.

Questions of clarification were responded to by the administration, including: L2L is for students with a specific profile; when progress and improvement is not apparent, students will be referred for a further assessment; more information on students regarding outside learning supports will be collected through the parent survey; the L2L initiative is being launched as a research study and, if successful, will be expanded to more classes, and specific groups.

SE-67, moved by Dorothy Peddie, that oral report re Links to Literacy, be received.

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7. Mental Health Anxiety Module

Chief Social Worker, Jim Van Buskirk, reported that while the focus last year was on building an awareness of mental health and what students might be coping with, this year's focus is on mental health literacy, and he spoke of concerns expressed by educators in the area of student anxiety. Jim Van Buskirk explained that the Mental Health Anxiety Module is evidence-based, and learning sessions are scheduled for September and October. Teams will be invited to learn about this module and share with their teaching colleagues, so that educators become aware of the signs of anxiety, and are equipped with classroom techniques to support students. He noted that the resources, which address some clinical concerns expressed by teachers, have been shared with Professional Student Services Personnel.

Jim Van Buskirk introduced Kristine Cavanagh, Social Worker, involved in capacity building and implementation of the module. Using the presentation on Anxiety, which is available on the Peel Intranet site under the Mental Health chiclet, Kristine Cavanagh reviewed information regarding: the definition of anxiety; its signs and symptoms; classroom and specific strategies to support students experiencing anxiety. She noted that this resource module will provide teachers with a better understanding of anxiety, and when there is a need for concern.

7. Mental Health Anxiety Module (Continued)

In response to a trustee's query whether similar information is available for high school students, Jim Van Buskirk advised that the province is working on this, and he explained that such programs are introduced by the province in phases.

Responding to a member's query, Jim Van Buskirk stated that strategies provided in the module will be used by teachers. If the strategies are not working, and the child continues to demonstrate anxiety, the teacher would be encouraged to refer the child for further consultation and other resources. Superintendent Sirisko stated that efforts are being made to support universal design applications that will become the standard in all classrooms.

SE-68, moved by Carol Oitment, that the oral report re Mental Health Anxiety Module, be received.

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8. Draft SEAC Annual Calendar 2014-2015 - Update (Revised)

Superintendent Louise Sirisko handed out a revised updated draft of the SEAC Annual Calendar, and highlighted the changes.

SE-69, moved by Mary Wright, that the revised update draft of the SEAC Annual Calendar 2014-2015, be received.

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9. Special Education Funding Plan: Progress to Date, Year Three

Superintendent Sirisko indicated that, over the last three years, the Board has requested progress reports on the supports provided to students with special needs. She noted that the report was presented at the Regular Meeting of the Board on June 18, 2014.

Louise Sirisko advised that special education expenses exceeded funding by \$15.2 million in the previous year. However, with Ministry recognition of students having high levels of need, and of Peel not being appropriately funded, there has been an increase in the high needs funding amount to \$3.9 million, which reduces special education over-expenditures to \$10.5 million over funding this year. Louise Sirisko outlined administrative actions taken with regard to reviewing programs and practices for efficiencies, and the allocation of teaching assistants. She invited members to view the Telemental Health video available in the Special Education department at the Central Board office. Peel has signed Memorandums of Agreement with the Ontario Telemedicine Network, William Osler Hospital and the Hospital for Sick Children. Louise Sirisko provided details of the telepsychiatry and telemental health pilot initiative in four Peel schools, where front line staff can obtain medical advice from hospital staff through the teleconferencing facility available at the school.

9. Special Education Funding Plan: Progress to Date, Year Three (Continued)

Superintendent Sirisko reported that staff continue to monitor and assess results of the changes made in the inclusive support model. She noted that the focus is on building capacity and empowering school teams of teachers and Behaviour Teaching Assistants with varying strategies, to provide care and support to students with special needs. She noted that work in the In School Enhanced Learning Program continues, and stakeholders have identified that knowledge of the program, and development of an Individual Education Plan are improving.

Louise Sirisko provided details of EMPOWER, a program which began as a pilot project in 2009 in Peel, that includes the placement of students in contained Communication classes. She added that efforts are being made to expand the program. Louise Sirisko shared positive results of the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement mid-year testing with respect to word recognition and reading comprehension, as well as positive feedback from teachers and principals about the success of the EMPOWER program at the primary, junior and intermediate class levels.

Superintendent Sirisko outlined future work of the Special Education department, including: supporting the mental health strategy; increasing system alignment to Ministry standards, supporting transitions of special needs students; monitoring implementation of the Intensive Support Model and early intervention expansion; continue to review the needs of students with developmental disabilities and promote inclusive practices; support Links to Literacy and monitor implementation of EMPOWER reading program in Communication classes.

In response to a member's query, Superintendent Sirisko will bring back information about EMPOWER being extended to students with dyslexia. She also explained that the program has not yet been extended to students in the General Learning Disability class. She noted that current programs are being reviewed and assessed to determine their appropriateness for learners.

SE-70, moved by Mary Wright, that the report re Special Education Funding Plan: Progress to Date, Year Three, be received.

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10. Communications

SE-71, moved by Dorothy Peddie, that the following items, be received:

1. Letter to Minister Liz Sandals from SEAC Chair, Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic DSB regarding Mandatory Special Education Qualification for Teachers
2. Letter to Ministers Liz Sandals and Brad Duguid from SEAC Chair, Greater Essex County DSB regarding Teacher Education Program dedicated specifically to Special Education

10. Communications (Continued)

3. Letter from SEAC Chair, Halton DSB regarding School Health Support Services and Mandatory Special Education Training for OCT Graduates
4. Letter from SEAC Chair, Thames Valley DSB regarding Special Education to be a core component of teacher education
5. Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE) Feedback Form – Collaboration with the Community

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Referring to Item 10.5, Superintendent Sirisko explained that the MACSE form is meant to obtain feedback from the community about special education services with respect to: successful practice, challenges/issues, possible solutions/future direction. She advised that members may forward their comments directly to MACSE as independent representatives, although it would be preferable to submit feedback as the Special Education Advisory Committee. Louise Sirisko will send the form out electronically to members of SEAC. Individual comments may be sent back to her and a comprehensive report will be submitted to MASCE by September 25, 2014.

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SE-71

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11. Question Period

Lorraine Yuill asked whether the Board's Implementation Plan will be presented at the next SEAC meeting when Policy Program Memorandum 8 (Item 5 of these Minutes) is being discussed. Louise Sirisko responded that, although the Board's Implementation Plan is due in January 2015, details of what has been done so far will be shared with members.

Lorraine Yuill asked about the SEAC nomination process. Louise Sirisko advised that nominations to SEAC are done every December. She will bring the Board's By-law in this regard to the next meeting.

Lorraine Yuill reported that Learning Disabilities Association of Peel Region is hosting a webinar "Back to School" on September 24, 2014. She will send details of the link to Louise Sirisko.

Barbara Cyr spoke about the online black and white version of the SEAC agenda, and the difficulties associated with understanding colour coded statistical information in graphs. She asked whether such information can be displayed in colour. Louise Sirisko will follow up in this regard.

Lorraine Yuill asked for an update on the Accessibility Sub-Committee. Louise Sirisko advised that the Accessibility function has moved to the Human Resources department. Ann Smith asked whether there is representation from SEAC on the Accessibility Sub-Committee. Louise Sirisko explained that the membership remains the same, and that she will follow up regarding date of the next meeting.

12. Public Question Period

There were no public questions.

13. Adjournment

SE-72, moved by Brad MacDonald, that the meeting adjourn (21:00 hours).

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