

Upper Grand District School Board
Special Education Advisory Committee

Minutes

Wednesday, January 25, 2023

The Special Education Advisory Committee of the Upper Grand District School Board met on Wednesday, January 25, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. in the MS Teams virtual meeting platform.

The following Association Members were in attendance: Mandi McCreary, Kerry's Place Autism Services; Sara Avoledo, Community Member-at-Large; Andrea Wyshniowsky, Dufferin Child & Family Services; Dianna Landry, Easter Seals Ontario; Shelley Marks, OPVIC/IEWS (Ontario Parents for Visually Impaired Children); Maren Vsetula, FASD Ontario; Melissa Williamson, Community Member-at-Large

Present from staff were: Wendy Donaldson, Superintendent of Education; Jennifer Meeker, Principal of Special Education; Brent Bloch, Secondary Principal; MaryAnn Schouten, Supervisor, Communication Language and Speech Services; Special Education Consultant, Sara Kaufman, Marni Reijmers

Trustees present: Kenn Manzerolle, Laurie Whyte

Regrets: Denise Helm, Canadian Mental Health Association

Absent: Patricia Townson, Learning Disabilities Association of Wellington County (LDAWC);

Wendy Donaldson, Superintendent of Education, Student Support Services welcomed everyone to the meeting. She explained that she will be chairing the meeting until the election of the Chair.

She introduced the new members and Trustees who will sit on the committee.

Wendy Donaldson read the Land Acknowledgement and the Anti-Racist statement.

Approval of Agenda of January 25, 2023

Shelley Marks moved that the agenda of January 25, 2023 be approved. Andrea Wyshniowski seconded the motion.

The motion carried.

Approval of the Minutes of December 14, 2022

Dianna Landry moved that the minutes of December 14, 2022 be approved with the correction to Maren Vsetula's association name in the draft minutes. Mandi McCreary seconded the motion.

The motion carried

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Elections

Wendy Donaldson proceeded to the elections of Chair and Vice-Chair. She explained the process and the responsibilities of the role and named Jennifer Meeker, Principal of Special Education and herself as scrutineers. She explained the process for voting and proceeded to call for nominations for Chair.

Dianna Landry nominated Laurie Whyte for the position of Chair of SEAC for the term of January 25, 2023 – November 30, 2023.

Laurie Whyte accepted the nomination.

Wendy Donaldson called for additional nominations. None were received.

Sara Avoledo moved that nominations for Chair be closed.

The motion carried.

Laurie Whyte was declared Chair of SEAC for the period of January 25, 2023 to November 30, 2023.

Laurie Whyte called for nominations of Vice-Chair of SEAC for the period of January 25, 2023 to November 30, 2023 in accordance with Section 4 of the Board's By-Law No. 1 and explained the role of Vice-Chair.

Melissa Williamson nominated herself for the role of Vice-Chair. No other nominations were received.

Melissa Williamson was declared Vice-Chair of SEAC for the period of January 25, 2023 to November 30, 2023.

Laurie Whyte proceeded to the next item on the agenda.

Action Items

Wendy Donaldson provided the following updates:

- Recruiting new members – associations to work at providing an alternate
- Collaboration work – item has been completed

Correspondence

No correspondence this month

Open Forum – Best Practice and Good News

Maren Vsetula, FASD Ontario – UGDSB is offering a virtual after-school program for children with or suspected FASD to help develop social skills. A conference is planned by FASD Action Group for Wellington Dufferin in May. More details will come later.

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Laurie Whyte commented that she appreciates the work of Sara Kaufman (Special Education Consultant) and others that have been instrumental in putting the UGDSB after-school program together.

Mandi McCreary asked how students could access the programs. Sara Kaufman explained that the registration process was sent to schools with specific criteria for students in grade 5-8, who are actively aware of their diagnosis or suspected diagnosis. Registrations are being reviewed Thursday, January 26, 2023 and the program will start in 2-3 weeks. Sara Kaufman shared the information in the chat for others to inform anyone that would benefit from this program.

Wendy Donaldson added that if any community member could think of ways to network more effectively, to contact herself or Jennifer Meeker.

Shelley Marks, OPVIC/VIEWS (Ontario Parents for Visually Impaired Children) -

The CNIB/OPVIC Parent Resource Zoom Meeting has now changed to the 4th Wednesday of the month at 7:30 p.m. EST. Tonight's meeting will be focused on library services and access to information. Josephine Murphy of AERO (Alternate Education Resources Ontario) will present. Replacing the previously scheduled CELA representative will be Ka Li, an Accessibility Analyst at National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS) who will share info on a new project related to tactile graphics and 3-D printing with the library.

Policy Review Update

No policies are currently out for public consultation.

Student Support Services Orientation

Wendy Donaldson introduced MaryAnn Schouten, Supervisor of Communication, Language and Speech Services and Dr. Josh Boden, Supervisor of Psychological and BCBA Services.

Dr. Josh Boden addressed SEAC and explained that in his new role, he has also incorporated the Board Certified Behaviour Analyst (BCBA) within Psychological Services. He provided details on the composition of the psychology and BCBA departments and the roles and responsibilities of his team.

Mandi McCreary asked if there were any statistics showing the number of individuals that are supported through the BCBA that do not have a diagnosis of ASD.

Josh Boden replied that at this time there are no statistics but a general impression of 10% - 20%, depending on the time of year.

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Wendy Donaldson replied that all supervisors meet every Monday morning to review the referrals that are submitted and discuss how to support and build a multidisciplinary team for a student based on their needs. She added that we have a database that would be able to identify the students who have a diagnosis or not and bring the actual numbers back. They could look at the ways in which students are being assigned, or assigned to a multidisciplinary team, and they would be able to support ABA use in schools more broadly for students with ASD as well as for students who didn't have a formal diagnosis.

Josh Boden replied that CLEVR, a new database system being utilized at UGDSB, collects more of this data. The opportunity to track some of this data will grow over time.

Maren Vsetula asked what the percentage of students is that are recommended for small class placements and how that compares to the number of students that actually get into the small class placement.

Josh Boden replied that it would depend on the class. Students with developmental disabilities, particularly with a diagnosed intellectual disability, that are recommended based on their profile will receive a place where they can have the programming. Other diagnosis, particularly learning disability, (as there are many across the board) has a smaller percentage that qualify. This is largely based on services and interventions that they receive along the pathway rather than on the disability.

Maren Vsetula asked if a student would have to have a diagnosis to be put into a MID or LD class. She added that this may be an equity issue as some students can't afford to have the assessments done.

Josh Boden replied it's something he's reflected on often. He added that the students referred for placement are the ones at the top of a school's needs threshold and are identified for assessment within the school board. The internal assessments are for the highest needs, particularly around learning or what the root case might be for the highest needs.

Wendy Donaldson responded that the number of applications and overview of class placement and the outcomes for this year is something we can bring back so SEAC can see the number of students for different groupings as well as those students who access placement. Psychological assessments done within the school board are intended to support programming. If schools are struggling to provide programming, there are multiple ways we can support. Funding is available from different avenues that allow for hiring out these services. Discussions regarding the number of students on the waitlist and equitable access have been occurring.

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MaryAnn Schouten addressed SEAC and explained the roles of her staff and the resources they access to provide programming for students. The Speech Language Pathologist provides assessments of communication disorders which fall across a range of other diagnoses such as ASD or intellectual disabilities in addition to developmental language disorder. The Communicative Disorder Assistants provide therapy and a number of different programs such as LITES (Language Intervention Through Engaging Stories), SPARC (Structured Play and Emergent Communication), Connect with Core, and S.O.C.I.A.L. AACts (Scaffolding Opportunities to Create Inclusive AAC Learning).

The department offers mentorship for professional registration, runs afterschool workshops for educators and participate in multidisciplinary teams such as the kindergarten intervention team. The SLPs work with the BCBA's for students with ASD who are nonverbal and with literacy teams on the Curriculum side.

They are a practicum site for graduate students; for supervision and training; for community colleges who provide post-degree, post-diplomas for Communicative Disorder Assistants.

MaryAnn Schouten described the Deaf and Hard of Hearing team which includes a Speech Language Pathologist, a Communicative Disorders Assistant, Language Acquisition Support Worker, an Educational Audiologist and Itinerant Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing. The teachers on the team are directly supervised by Jennifer Meeker.

Laurie Whyte thanked the presenters for the great information and good learning for SEAC.

PowerPoint presentation was uploaded to the SEAC folder on UGCloud.

Special Education Plan Review

Jennifer Meeker addressed SEAC and noted that the Special Education Plan is reviewed annually. She added that members will have a chance to provide feedback on the section of the Plan for revisions in the breakout sessions this evening.

She added that staff has suggested three areas they will be reviewing; the Multi Year plan to ensure that the four pillars are reflected in the Special Education Plan; an update on the Special Education roles; and incorporating the work of Tier 3 intervention and instruction in our literacy work.

Members were sent to breakout rooms to discuss which sections to review. A google document with questions was set up for each group to input their suggestions.

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Wendy Donaldson asked her group what SEAC found helpful and supportive as a Community member in relation to the Special Education Plan.

Andrea Wyshniowki replied that the roles and responsibilities within the schools and within SEAC were helpful as a guiding principle.

Wendy Donaldson suggested that each member review the Plan and share it with their organizations. She added that each person depending on the role that they play on SEAC may see the plan quite differently because they may see areas that they wish were more robust.

Wendy Donaldson summarized the work to be done by staff:

- Multi Year Plan to be incorporated in the Special Education Plan, specifically the strategic plan to align with Special Education Plan
- Reviewing all the different roles and job descriptions of the staff and how they are represented in formal implementation of the Student-Centered Instructional Tool
- Tier 3 interventions (Right to Read) to be captured in the Special Education Plan

She explained the timeline of the Special Education Plan review to the new SEAC members. The final Plan is approved by the Director and Trustees in June.

Mandi McCreary suggested that visuals be incorporated in the Plan and the Guide for families. She added that many families struggle with reading and following through and also with the language all being English text. It may be beneficial to have more diagrams and some more visuals to make it easier for people to follow.

Wendy Donaldson responded that she would follow up if there is a tool to have it read to the person from the website. Families would select a section and click on it and have it read to them. She added that over the years, SEAC members have worked to make it in parent friendly language and accessible.

Special Education Plan 2022-2023 was uploaded to the folder on UGCloud.

Association Input

Wendy Donaldson explained that this exercise is an opportunity for SEAC, the school board, schools, school board staff, and Trustees to come together and discuss the supports and services currently in place within the board and work together to make them stronger based on the experience of the people they represent.

She added that sometimes there are requests by community members or SEAC members for the board to bring board staff or members of the Student Support Service team to share information.

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She gave an example of what is currently planned on the agendas that are recurring each year.

She asked community members to reflect on the type of information that staff could prepare for SEAC to learn more about the students that each of the organization supports and for organizations or associations to bring their presentations to SEAC for the committee to learn more about their organizations.

Dianna Landry – more information on addressing the needs of students coming from treatment and who might be falling through the cracks.

Wendy Donaldson summarized: transitions where a student might be in a current treatment program, what the transitions look like back into the school board? What are the types of programs or opportunities for support that they might have access to? Or placement options?

- Transition specialized support; potential specialized or unique placement opportunities

Maren Vsetula – Willing to bring an FASD presentation. Curious what other boards are doing for class placements, how they are supporting students and if there has been thought to those within our board.

Wendy Donaldson summarized–Action item about the application numbers to our different class placements, what are our class placements? Looking at the board philosophy around what we offer and why maybe we don't offer specific ones.

Andrea Wyshnowski – service coordination for students that are graduating and into adult services. Would like more understanding of the transition and how the school prepares that transition.

Wendy Donaldson summarized – opportunity to look at current systems and structures in place as a board and then an opportunity for SEAC to be thinking about the associations and organizations that we serve to see if there is a way that we can enhance that collaboratively between us.

Melissa Williamson – learn more about how the UGDSB is addressing the recommendations with the Right to Read Inquiry and the things that the board can address as opposed to what the Ministry is supposed to do. What is the board doing?

Wendy Donaldson summarized – we just finished a 3 part series through the fall about some of these pieces. We can put an outline to show the board approach and areas of focus.

Melissa Williamson replied that she would like to see this as a recurring item on the agenda. How are we continuing to achieve the recommendations that we can for the Right to Read because it doesn't just affect those students who have a learning disability specific to language. It affects all of the students across the board.

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Wendy Donaldson – Added as an action item

Maren Vsetula – Special days or awareness days happen within schools e.g. FASD on September 9 is a big day. Would like to know how information or support materials are presented at the school level? Are they highlighted and if not, is that something this committee could support?

Melissa Williamson – special class placement classes and what actually happens within those classes and the percentage that apply and get in.

Wendy Donaldson summarized – will expand the discussion about class placement to look at those pieces. Will look at full class placement offerings and some current data associated with those

Wendy Donaldson thanked everyone and added that she is greatly appreciated the list.

Laurie Whyte added that if anyone has additional ideas to email Krystyna Gazo who will share with Wendy Donaldson and Jennifer Meeker.

SEISSC Monthly Update

Currently no report. Laurie Whyte commented that typically there is a member from SEAC that sits on SEISSC. We need to check on what that committee will look like and if it's still something they want to continue.

Trustee Report

Laurie Whyte –

- There are 6 new Trustees out of 10. Trustees have completed their committee assignments and are starting to attend the various meetings. There will be more to report in the coming months.

Updates from Superintendent of Education

Wendy Donaldson highlighted the following updates:

1. Wellness Works: January's theme is realistic optimism.

This month at UGDSB our Wellness Work's theme is realistic optimism. *What is realistic optimism?*

Realistic optimism is:

- Believing that you will succeed with the right inputs like hard work and careful planning
- The tendency to look at the favourable side of events
- Expecting a positive outcome while preparing for obstacles and seeing ways to work around them
- A relatively stable expectation that good things will happen instead of bad
- A belief in the ability to learn and grow

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Realistic optimism is not about always seeing the positive. It is about recognizing that obstacles exist, focusing on what we can control, and looking for opportunities to problem solve even during times of struggle. Realistic optimism requires the cognitive flexibility skills explored in October. Here are some ways you can explore realistic optimism this month:

Self Talk: What we say to ourselves can shift our perspective. Ask kids to listen to that little voice in their heads and notice what it is saying. Identifying what they are saying to themselves is the first step. Next, prompt them to create new statements that are framed in a more positive tone. “I’m going to fail that test tomorrow” could shift to “I am going to do the best I can on that test tomorrow.”

Look for the Lesson: When something doesn’t go as planned, it can be easy to resort to blame. Often, that blame is turned on ourselves. Instead, look for the lesson. Intentional reflection can help highlight the possibility for personal growth inside of a challenging situation. What has this situation taught you? What have you learned? This is a great skill that adults can also model for their children.

SMART Goal Setting: Sometimes we set goals that are unrealistic or too vague, which leads to feeling failure when we don’t accomplish them. Setting goals that are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic, and **T**imely can help us celebrate small wins along the way, especially when connected to action tasks. Imagining what is possible and connecting it to the hard work needed to make it happen is realistic optimism in action!

<https://www.ugdsb.ca/blog/wellness-works-returns-januarys-theme-is-realistic-optimism/>

2. The UGDSB Before and/or After School Program (BASP) Survey goes live January 10, 2023

Our Before and/or After School Program (BASP) survey opened for parents/guardians on January 10, 2023.

The survey is intended to gather information about the number of children who need before and/or after school care for September 2023 at schools that do not currently offer a BASP.

Please complete the BASP survey if your child will be entering JK/SK in September 2023 or is currently registered in Kindergarten to Grade 5 and will need access to a BASP and if a Program is not already offered in your child’s school. Only parents requiring care at these schools are asked to complete the survey (one per family).

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The survey will close at the end of the day on January 31, 2023, and will not reopen after this point in time, so please take a moment to fill out the survey in the timeframe allotted.

BASP's within UGDSB schools are not board operated. It is important to note that the addition of a new BASP is solely reliant on the ability of a Third Party Child Care Operator to provide these services. Information from the survey about before and/or after school needs is helpful when determining the viability of a new Program and understanding the needs of families is helpful for their consideration.

Please note that the completion of the survey does not guarantee that a Before and/or After School Program (BASP) will be offered at your child's school and does not register your child or put them on a wait list.

You can find out more information about the BASP and the link to the BASP survey by viewing the brochure [here](#) or by visiting the BASP page of the board website [here](#).

<https://www.ugdsb.ca/blog/the-ugdsb-before-and-or-after-school-program-basp-survey-goes-live-january-10-2023/>

3. Parents/caregivers invited to webinar on understanding human trafficking

Parents/caregivers in the Upper Grand District School Board and the Wellington Catholic District School Board are invited to attend an information on understanding human trafficking.

On January 31, 2023, join Cindy McMann, Educator, and Jaseth Purcell, Human Trafficking Counsellor, from Women In Crisis for an informative webinar.

The presentation will provide information to parents/caregivers about human trafficking: what it is, how traffickers operate, red flags and risk factors, and ways to talk about this issue with young people.

Parents/caregivers will receive an overview of the Anti-Human Trafficking presentation that is being delivered to Grade 7 and 10 students at the UGDSB and WCDSB.

Resources that are available to support youth in school as well as in the community will also be provided.

EVENT DETAILS:

- DATE: January 31, 2023
- TIME: 6-7pm

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- REGISTRATION: Please click here https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_oOhWHj_XTVayRHjgGrVPbQ

<https://www.ugdsb.ca/blog/parents-caregivers-invited-to-webinar-on-understanding-human-trafficking/>

4. More than just a text: Having a conversation with your kids about mental health

The Canadian Mental Health Association's (CMHA) BounceBack program is inviting parents, guardians, support staff and care providers to a province-wide lunch and learn about talking to your kids about mental health.

This free webinar is open to all adults in the school community who have children in their lives and will be led by clinical psychologist Dr. Wendy Manel.

The webinar will go over subjects such as:

- how to recognize the signs and symptoms of depression, stress, and anxiety
- ways to start a conversation with your kids about mental health
- where to get support

The webinar will be held Thursday, March 2nd, from 12-1pm (ET) and you can register here.

<https://www.ugdsb.ca/blog/more-than-just-a-text-having-a-conversation-with-your-kids-about-mental-health/>

5. TIPS FOR SUPPORTING YOUTH DURING EXAMS

Youth are experiencing high levels of stress relating to the upcoming exam period. Staying connected and aware can be a huge support to your child/ren! Check out this document for more tricks and tips.

<https://sites.google.com/ugcloud.ca/mhugparents>

Meeting Summary, Recommendation(s), Motion(s) and Action(s)

Wendy Donaldson commented that the list will generate topics for the agendas and she will work with Laurie Whyte and Jennifer Meeker. She added the following action items.

New Action Items -

- A request to learn more about our BCBA caseloads – in particular the number of students currently with ASD being supported and students who do not have a diagnosis of ASD who are currently being supported. Are they single referral or they've been part of a multidisciplinary team associated with those same data points.

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- Class placements – what are the applications and requirements for class placement; how many people have applied for different classes and how many actually are receiving access to those class placements. Are they half or full day programs? Timing of class placements? When those placement decisions are made and what would need to happen in advance from a caregiver’s perspective. What caregivers do to be able to facilitate the process?
- Equitable access to assessments – when do students move forward for assessments; what is the function of that assessment when it comes from a school board? Do we have waitlists for assessments? What are the ways in which we can provide access to assessment in different regions of our board because we do have different types of funding. Clear picture of board-based funding versus rural funding versus some of the partnerships in specific regions.

Laurie Whyte thanked everyone for their attendance and noted that the next meeting is in two weeks.

Adjournment

Mandi McCreary motioned for adjournment of the meeting at 8:40 p.m. Melissa Williamson seconded the motion.