



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

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

April 8, 2025, 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)  
Donna Callaghan, Durham Down Syndrome Association (Virtual)  
Mariam Maskell, Participation House (Virtual)  
Julie Sorhaitz, Learning Disabilities Association of Durham Region (In-Person)  
Caroline Andrews, Autism Ontario of Durham Region  
Alex Massis, Community Representative (Virtual)

### **Trustees Present:**

Robert De Souza, Trustee (In-Person)

### **Staff Present:**

Helen Killoran, Student Services Coordinator (In-Person)  
Yulan Fisher-Brown, Senior Manager, Mental Health Initiatives/ Mental Health Leader (In Person)  
Paula Sorhaitz, Superintendent of Education (In-Person)

### **SEAC Representatives Present:**

Anita Condon, CUPE Representative (Virtual)  
Lo Davis, OECTA Representative (In-Person)  
Frank Porco, CPCO Representative (Virtual)

### **Regrets:**

Claudia Nosseir, Vice Chair, Grandview Kids  
Edward Secnik, Autism Ontario of Durham Region  
Jim McCafferty, Trustee

### **Absent:**

Candace Julien, Sawubona Africentric Circle of Support  
Ashley Toohey, APSSP Representative

## **Minutes**

### **1. Opening**

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

Chair Adamo called the meeting to order at 7:36 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-2025-04-08-01

Approval of the Agenda

Motion moved by Julie Sorhaitz and seconded by Robert De Souza.

“THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee approve the agenda of the Tuesday, April 8, 2025, meeting, as presented.” (CARRIED)

### **1.6. Approval of the Minutes of March 4, 2025, SEAC Meeting**

Motion: SS-2025-04-08-02

Approval of Minutes

Motion moved by Mariam Maskell and seconded by Julie Sorhaitz.

“THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee approve the Minutes of the Tuesday, March 4, 2025, meeting, as presented.” (CARRIED)

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

None

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

### **2.1. Announcements**

#### **2.1.1. Minister’s Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE) Ontario Autism Program Update**

Helen Killoran, Student Services Coordinator, reviewed the report received from MACSE

- Overview of the Ontario Autism Program
- Significant implementation progress has been made giving families access to a range of services and supports previously unavailable
- **Entry to School Program**, a 6-month group-based skill-building program for children 3-6 years of age. Prepares entry into kindergarten or grade one for the first time with 6 months of transition support
- **Foundational Family Services** available to all families that build family capacity to support their child’s learning and development
- **Care Coordination** support for families providing orientation to the program, service planning and navigation, and help with managing transitions



- **Caregiver-mediated Early Years Program** available for up to 6 months for children 12 to 48 months of age learn new skills and meet individualized goals in the areas of social communication and play and build caregiver capacity to support their children
- **Urgent Response Services** – time-limited services intended to respond rapidly to a specific need and prevent further escalation, risk of harm to self, others and/or property
- **Core Clinical Services and Supports** include Applied Behaviour Analysis, Occupational Therapy, Speech Language Pathology, Mental Health Services, technology and other supports
- Implementation of AccessOAP – a single point of access for families and administrators
- Spoke about progress achieved and highlights from previous year

## **2.2. Presentations**

None

## **2.3. Discussion Items**

None

## **2.4. Business arising from previous meeting**

None

## **2.5. Staff Reports**

### **2.5.1. Student Services Report** – Helen Killoran, Yulan Fisher-Brown, Paula Sorhaitz

#### **Helen Killoran presented the Coordinator's Report:**

- Nearly 60 educators participated in the online Sonderly courses for Applied Behaviour Analysis, offered through the Geneva Centre
- PEERS Games Club, Friendship Lab and Secret Agent Society are running for the Spring session
- Schools are participating in the annual front foyer display for Autism Awareness and Acceptance Day on April 2.

#### **Project SEARCH Update:**

- March 28, 2025 – Manager and Mentor Appreciation Luncheon – Hillsdale Estates – all managers and mentors who supported interns this year in their departments at Durham Region Headquarters and Hillsdale Estates or Terraces were honoured
- Lakeridge Gardens, a state-of-the-art Long Term Care facility in Ajax, has become the business host for the program



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- This week is a transition week for the interns who will be moving into their final round of internships during the week of April 14th

### **April is Autism Awareness Month**

- April 2, 2025, is World Autism Awareness and Acceptance Day.
- DCDSB supports students with ASD across both Elementary, Secondary panels
- DCDSB Schools celebrated Autism Awareness and Acceptance on April 2, by promoting their front foyer displays and participating in activities centered around inclusion and acceptance

### **Durham Catholic Autism Resource Team (DCART)**

- Supporting student referrals from both Elementary and Secondary, in the areas of:
  - Alternative Programming and Curriculum Modifications
  - Communication
  - Social Language
  - Challenging Behaviours
  - Sensory Needs/Environmental Factors
- DCART Services
  - Services will include a minimum of 12 weeks intensive support, to the school, for students who have been referred to the team.
- Members of the DCART:
  - Consultant for Autism Services;
  - Speech and Language Pathologist;
  - Board Certified Behaviour Analysts;
  - Resource Teacher;
  - Behaviour Support Specialists

### **Consultant and Resource Teacher Supports**

- Additional supports for students have been provided by our Consultant and Resource Teacher for Autism Services, in Consultative and Crisis Response DCART models
- The objective is to further develop capacity building in the school, while supporting the PST in their roles as Special Education Leaders

### **Sonderly Courses in Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA)**

- Geneva Centre Ministry Course funding for ABA was given to DCDSB on the Sonderly online platform
- All funding was spent
- A Numbered Memo in January offered courses to all educators who were interested
- 58 Educators registered for courses this year. This is an increase in over 60% from last year



### **Early Intervention Classrooms (EIC)**

- The Early Intervention Classroom (EIC) is a communication-based program to support the areas of language/communication, school-readiness skills, self-regulation, play, and social-emotional development for students in Kindergarten. The small classroom placement has a maximum of 6 students per site.
- DCDSB has 4 EIC sites: St. John XXIII C.S., St. Francis de Sales C.S., St. Bridget C.S., St. John Bosco C.S.
- Professionals who support the EIC:
  - Program Support Teacher
  - Educational Assistant (2)
  - Speech and Language Pathologist
  - Communicative Disorders Assistant
  - Board Certified Behaviour Analyst
  - Behaviour Support Specialist
  - Consultant for Autism Services

### **After School Social Skills Development Programs**

- DCDSB currently offers learning for:
  - PEERS for students in Grades 7-12, PEERS and PEERS Games Club for Social Development
  - Friendship Lab for both students and their parents in Grades 3-6
  - Secret Agent Society for students ages 8-12
- All programs are offered to students with an ASD diagnosis

### **Yulan Fisher-Brown presented the Mental Health (MH) Report:**

#### **Mental Health First Aid for Parents/Caregivers**

- MHFA Supporting Youth was offered to parents/families/caregivers for the first time on March 26th and 27th
- MHFA offers practical tools to help adults recognize when a young person may be struggling and provides guidance on how to offer meaningful support. By focusing on the challenges and pressures faced by youth today, the program empowers participants to foster understanding, build trust, and promote resilience in the young people they care for.

#### **By Your Side Parent/Caregiver Learning Hub:**

- An online resource centre designed to provide Ontario families with accessible information and strategies that promote mental health learning and well-being

#### **How was it developed?**

- Co-created by Ontario parents/caregivers and school mental health professionals
- Extensive consultation with key stakeholder groups (e.g. students, cultural and community organizations) to inform resource development



**Why was it developed?**

- Students want their parents/ caregivers to learn more about mental health ([HearNowON 2021](#))
- Studies show that learning about mental health and how to support your child can:
  - Improve your ability to notice signs of a mental health problem
  - Make it easier to recognize the need for professional help
  - Help you to offer effective support, which is linked to improved well-being for your child

**What By Your Side Offers:**

- A variety of tools and supports, including:
  - Info sheets to address common challenges such as stress, anxiety, and transitions.
  - Videos featuring expert advice and practical strategies for supporting mental health at home.
  - Webinars that dive deeper into mental health topics and offer opportunities for interaction

Companion tools have been designed for school staff to strengthen the partnership between schools and families.

**Key Topics:**

- Understanding mental health
- Promoting mental health at home
- Supporting mental health at school
- Stress and anxiety management
- Substance use prevention
- Navigating digital technology use
- Reaching out for help

**Where can I find the parent/caregiver learning hub?**

<https://smho-smso.ca/parents-and-caregivers>

**Mental Health Report PD:**

- March 31 PA Day Mental Health/Well-being Workshops:
  - Accessibility, Inclusion, Diversity and Equity AND Catholicism: It can go together
  - Behaviour Speak: How to talk to families about behavioural concerns in the classroom
  - Seeing Beyond the Behaviour – Remaining Curious When ‘Behaviour’ Occurs
  - Mental Health, Healthy Eating, and Substance Use in Schools
  - Connection & Community Building in the Classroom



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- Prepare, Prevent, Respond: Suicide Prevention and Life Promotion
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) from a Behaviour Analytic Perspective
- So, there's a diagnosis...Understanding Various Diagnoses and How to Support in the Classroom
- Substance Abuse
- Understanding Autism through a Neurodiversity Lens
- Practical Strategies to Support Newcomer Students in your Classroom and School Community
- Well-Being in Kindergarten
- Self – Regulation & Co – Regulation: How to Support Students Through Stress
- Gr. 10 Career Studies MH Modules PD
  - March 25th with all new Career Studies educators this semester
- Director's Meeting: Leading Mentally Health Schools, Tier 1 Mental Health Promotion
  - April 2nd with all administrators
- Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training Tune up
  - April 7th with Gatekeepers

### **Upcoming**

- MH LIT for Guidance and Student Success Educators
  - April 10th and May 1st
- Prepare, Prevent Respond: Suicide Prevention and Life Promotion
  - May 7th

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

#### **PST Learning last meeting March 18, 2025:**

- Weschler Fundamentals – when, why, how to use data
- World Autism Awareness Day
- World Down Syndrome Day
- Psych and SLP updates
- Summer Rays program
- Grandview – Entry to School Program

#### **Grandview - Entry To School Program:**

- School Readiness Phase:
  - Six-month program
  - Building skills to support transition to school (Pre-academics, Communication, Social Interaction, Play, Behavioural Self-Management, Functional Routines)



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- Multidisciplinary team approach
- Consists of 2 models:
  - **Group-based model** – small groups with a 3:1 ratio of children to group facilitators
  - **Integrated service model** – children remain in full-time daycare program and coaching is provided to educators
- School Transition Phase:
  - School entry – September 2025 OR January 2026
  - Often includes Transition Report
  - Up to six-months of transition supports in school
  - Collaboration with school staff and caregivers upon request

**DCDSB Celebrates World Autism Awareness and Acceptance in the month of April:**

- Numbered Memo with activities, announcements and prayers for each division
- Please tweet your school's pictures
- Front foyer display and competition
  - Prizes for most creative displays will be awarded at the next PST meeting
  - Please refrain from using puzzle pieces or "light it up blue" wording

**World Down Syndrome Day:**

- Numbered Memo with links and resources was sent out March 4
- March 21 was World Down Syndrome Day (WDSD). 3/21 (Three copies of Chromosome 21)
- This day is dedicated to raise awareness around and celebrate people with Down Syndrome.
- A few ways you can celebrate World Down Syndrome Day-
  - Wear blue & yellow; #LotsOfSocks (colourful or mismatched)
  - Share your celebrations using hashtags 2025 Theme- #ImproveOurSupportSystems
  - Look for Lights! Landmarks lit up in blue and yellow (eg., CN Tower)





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**July Elementary Summer Learning:**

- Summer Rays Program (current 2<sup>nd</sup> year FDK – Gr. 1 students) – 10 classes
- Lead by Jennifer Brown, Elementary Vice Principal

**When:**

- Week #1 – Monday, June 30 to Friday, July 4 (classes start July 2nd)
- Week #2 – Monday, July 7 to Thursday, July 10
- Week #3 – Monday, July 14 to Thursday, July 17
- Week #4 – Monday, July 21 to Thursday, July 24
- Mon. June 30 – Educator Set-up Day – no students
- Thurs. July 24 – ½ day programming for students, afternoon is “Take-down” time

Motion: SS-2025-04-08-03

Approval of the April 8, 2025, Student Services Coordinator, Mental Health Leader, and Superintendent Reports

Motion moved by Julie Sorhaitz and seconded by Robert De Souza.

“THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee accept the verbal Coordinator, Mental Health Leader and Superintendent Reports of April 8, 2025, meeting.” (CARRIED)

**2.6. Association Reports**

**Learning Disabilities Ontario – Julie Sorhaitz**

- Reminder Power to Achieve Scholarship Award applications have been released and deadline for applications is May 16, 2025
- Annual Parent Conference – Wednesday, May 28, 2025. 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. via Zoom. Free event
  - Windsor-Essex presents Effective Use of Assistive Technology
  - York-Simcoe presents Empowering Parents to Support Children with Learning Disabilities: A Framework for Social Anxiety, Stigma, and Emotional Well-Being
  - Chatham-Kent presents ADHD and alternatives to medication

**Durham Down Syndrome Association - Donna Callaghan**

- Scholarship application deadline is May 1, 2025. This is open to anybody who is graduating from high school to what's after
- Invitation to join Board of Directors. Meeting will be held on June 16, 2025.



## **2.7. Correspondence**

### **2.7.1. SEAC Chair – Ottawa Catholic District School Board (OCDSB)**

Chair Adamo shared final letter that was sent to new Minister of Education, Paul Calandra, signed by Special Education Advisory Committees representing 43% of the student population in Ontario. Letter emphasized the pressing need to substantially increase Provincial Funding for K-12 students with disabilities/special education needs.

### **2.7.2. Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)**

On March 18, 2025, ETFO released its latest position paper, *Promises Unfulfilled: Addressing the Special Education Crisis in Ontario*. It presents 27 concrete recommendations to ensure students with special education needs receive the support they deserve and are legally entitled to.

Link to [Full Report Promises Unfulfilled](#)

Link to [Executive Summary Promises Unfulfilled](#)

### **2.7.3. Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO)**

Letter and resources received from Dr. Steven Reid, President and CEO, Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO). This letter highlights current provincial priorities, key advocacy questions, and recent updates on issues affecting students with learning disabilities and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

- Attachments shared:
- Open Letter to SEACs Across Ontario – March 2025
- LDAO SEAC Circular – February 2025
- LDAO SEAC Circular – April 2025
- LDAO SEAC webcast transcript: SEAC Motions – A Guide for Effective Systemic Advocacy.
- LDAO Policy Statement on Educational Inclusion (PDF)

Julie Sorhaitz further spoke with regards to the information received.

- New head for LDAO
- Big push in the last 6 months restructuring/revamping information
- More effective communication with parents
- Focus is on SEAC Committees and funding
- A discussion on reading interventions, screeners and if any progress updates from the Ministry. More detail requested regarding how literacy gaps are being addressed. To be reported at the next meeting.
- Lexia licenses – being pushed out by Board assisting students with literacy



### **3. Other Business**

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

Superintendent Sorhaitz reminded the Committee about the opportunity to represent SEAC at our Student Services table during Kindergarten Community Fair the evening of April 29 at All Saints C.S.S. from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Great opportunity to inform parents about SEAC - what we do, how to access information about SEAC etc.

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

**3.2.1.** The next meeting of the Special Education Advisory Committee will be held on Tuesday, May 6, 2025 @ 7:30 pm

Motion: SS-2025-04-08-04

Motion to Adjourn

Motion moved by Julie Sorhaitz and seconded by Robert De Souza.

“THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee meeting of April 8, 2025, adjourn.”  
(CARRIED)

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

Closing prayer was offered by Donna Callaghan. The meeting was adjourned at 8:38 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