



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

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

January 7, 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)  
Walter Heeney, Vice Chair, Durham Down Syndrome Association (In-Person)  
Donna Callaghan, Durham Down Syndrome Association (In-Person)  
Mariam Maskell, Participation House (In-Person)  
Tracy McGarry, Participation House (In-Person)  
Julie Sorhaitz, Learning Disabilities Association of Durham Region (In-Person)  
Claudia Nosseir, Grandview Kids (In-Person)  
Edward Secnik, Autism Ontario of Durham Region (In-Person)  
Alex Massis, Community Representative (Virtual)  
Candace Julien, Sawubona Africentric Circle of Support (Virtual)

### **Trustees Present:**

Robert De Souza, Trustee (In-Person)

### **Staff Present:**

Christine Congrady, Student Services Coordinator (In-Person)  
Yulan Fisher-Brown, Senior Manager, Mental Health Initiatives/Mental Health Leader (In Person)  
Mike O'Neill on behalf of Paula Sorhaitz, Superintendent of Education (In-Person)

### **SEAC Representatives Present:**

Anita Condrón, CUPE Representative (Virtual)  
Jennifer Harvey, CPCO Representative (Virtual)  
Lo Davis, OECTA Representative (In-Person)  
Ashley Toohey, APSSP Representative (Virtual)

### **Regrets:**

Jim McCafferty, Trustee

## **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

#### **1.1. Memorials and Prayers**



**1.2. Land Acknowledgements**

**1.3. Roll Call and Apologies**

**1.4. Approval of the Agenda**

Motion: SS-2025-01-07-01

Approval of the Agenda

Motion moved by Julie Sorhaitz and seconded by Edward Secnik.

“THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee approve the agenda of the Tuesday, January 7, 2025, meeting, as presented.” (CARRIED)

**1.5. Approval of the Minutes of December 3, 2024, SEAC Meeting**

Motion: SS-2025-01-07-02

Approval of Minutes

Motion moved by Walter Heeney and seconded by Claudia Nosseir.

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

**1.6. Declarations of Interest**

None

**2. Items for Information/Decision**

**2.1. Announcements**

**2.1.1. Introduction/Welcome – Trustees appointed to Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) for 2025**

Following the Board meeting on December 16, 2024 Committee Memberships were confirmed. Superintendent O'Neill announced that the following Trustees Jim McCafferty, Robert De Souza and Alternate: Richard Damianopoulos will remain and serve on SEAC for the coming year 2025.

**2.1.2. Durham Down Syndrome Association Change in Representation**

Walter Heeney is stepping down and Donna Callaghan will be the main contact. Chair Adamo and Superintendent O'Neill thanked Walter for his support and dedication over the past years and he will be greatly missed by the Committee.



## **2.2. Election for Chair of Special Education Advisory Committee**

### **2.2.1. Election for the Position of Chair of the Special Education Advisory Committee – Mike O'Neill**

Superintendent O'Neill opened the floor for nominations for the position of chair of SEAC for the period of January 7, 2025 to December 31, 2025.

<b>Nominee</b>	<b>Moved By</b>	<b>Seconded By</b>	<b>Willing to Stand?</b>
Valerie Adamo	Walter Heeney	Claudia Nosseir	YES

### **2.2.2. Comments from Candidates**

### **2.2.3. Motion to Close Nominations**

Superintendent O'Neill called three times for further nominations. Nominations were declared closed.

Motion: SS-2025-01-07-03

Close Chair Nominations

Motion moved by Walter Heeney and seconded by Claudia Nosseir.

"THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee close nominations for the position of Chair of SEAC." (CARRIED)

Superintendent O'Neill announced that Valerie Adamo, representative for VOICE for the Hearing Impaired, was acclaimed to the position of Chair of SEAC.

### **2.2.4. Motion to Destroy Ballots – not applicable, no ballots used**

### **2.2.5. Acceptance Speech by the Chair of the Special Education Advisory Committee**

Valerie Adamo assumed the position of Chair and expressed their thanks.

## **2.3. Election for Vice Chair of the Special Education Advisory Committee**

### **2.3.1. Election for the Position of Vice Chair of the Special Education Advisory Committee**

Chair Adamo opened the floor for nominations for the position of Vice Chair of SEAC for the period of January 7, 2025 to December 31, 2025.

<b>Nominee</b>	<b>Moved By</b>	<b>Seconded By</b>	<b>Willing to Stand?</b>
Claudia Nosseir	Walter Heeney	Robert De Souza	YES

### **2.3.2. Comments from Candidates**



### 2.3.2. Motion to Close Nominations

Chair Adamo called three times for further nominations. Nominations were declared closed.

Motion: SS-2025-01-07-04

Close Vice Chair Nominations

Motion moved by Walter Heeney and seconded by Robert De Souza.

“THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee close nominations for the position of Vice Chair of SEAC.” (CARRIED)

Chair Adamo announced that Claudia Nosseir, representative for Grandview Kids, was acclaimed to the position of Vice Chair of SEAC.

### 2.3.3. Motion to Destroy Ballots – not applicable, no ballots used

### 2.3.4. Acceptance Speech by the Vice Chair of the Special Education Advisory Committee

Claudia Nosseir assumed the position of Vice Chair and expressed their thanks.

## 2.4. Presentations

### 2.4.1. The Participation House Project – Mariam Maskell and Tracy McGarry

The Participation House Project is committed to providing services that enrich the lives of Families and People with Developmental Disabilities living in Durham Region.

PH has been offering services to families in Durham Region for 50 yrs

They offer:

- **Community Activation Services** – A fee-for-service model for people who are living at home with their families. This program facilitates participation in community-based activities of interest to the participant. These activities are aligned with the goals they are working on to develop the skills required to be independent, entirely based on their personal definition of independence. PH currently supports 34 people in our Community Activation Services.
- **Supportive Living Supports** – with locations in both Oshawa & Bowmanville – they provide a congregate care model of support. People live in apartments and support is provided to them based on the determined level of support they require to meet their needs.
- **Supported Independent Living Program** – this program provides support based on an identified number of hours weekly as determined through an assessment of support needs to assist the person in areas requiring development to increase their independence.



- **Community Based Supportive Living Program** – Similar to **SIL**, however, living accommodations are obtained and managed by the persons natural support network. PH provides support based on the person's support requirements. This model of support can also be provided through a fee-for-service option.
- PH currently supports 51 people in Housing Services

When bringing a person into service, they recommend that families take the time to review the "Steps To Independence" guidebook available through: <https://connectability.ca/2014/06/24/steps-to-independence-2/>. It provides an in-depth self-assessment for families/individuals with developmental disabilities to determine how prepared they are for semi-independent living. It provides a holistic tool to help someone with their goal of living independently with supports and community engagement by starting the conversation, identifying current skills, determining skill areas for improvement and next steps to focus on building a plan.

#### The Up-skills Learning Continuum

- Helps place families onto a path where our first conversations and our greatest priority is a focus on skill building that increases competencies, community access and citizenship.
- By progressing through a continuum that goes beyond learning a new skill to one that includes opportunities to practice, lead, and transition the learning to natural community settings, we are providing people with developmental disabilities greater opportunity to realize their full potential and citizenship.

#### The 5 Paths are:

- **Screening Assessment**
  - Motivation to learn
  - Physical analysis of abilities
  - Readiness and understanding
  - Assessment of support network
  - Work hardiness
- **Person Centered Planning**
  - Understanding personal goals
  - Establishing priorities
  - Inventory of options
  - Mapping of path for skill acquisition
  - Linking and connecting to services
- **Life and Living Skills Development**
  - Baseline/Outcomes (knowledge transfer)
  - Employment Orientation
  - Personal Empowerment
  - Lifestyle Management
  - Community Survival



- **Employment Readiness**
  - Job market screening
  - Job site observations/job analysis
  - Job sampling
  - Job matching and placement
  - Job coaching and sensitization training for employee and employer
- **Independent Living**
  - Meal planning and grocery shopping
  - Safety and security
  - Budgeting
  - Home Maintenance
  - Transportation

PowerPoint Presentation and information brochures that were distributed at the meeting will also be shared electronically to the Committee members.

## **2.5. Discussion Items**

- 2.5.1.** Review SEAC Terms of Reference – taking stock to ensure all members have access to the document

Will email a copy to SEAC Committee members to review and discuss any issues at next meeting.

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

- 2.6.1.** 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.

Julie Sorhaitz provided a draft letter to Ontario College of Teachers that the SEAC Committee reviewed and approved to send.

Motion: SS-2025-01-07-05

Approval to send letter to Ontario College of Teachers

Motion moved by Edward Secnik and seconded by Mariam Maskell.

“THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee approve and send letter to Ontario College of Teachers.” (CARRIED)

## **2.7. Staff Reports**

- 2.7.1.** Student Services Report – Christine Congrady, Shelley Phoenix, Mike O’Neill on behalf of Paula Sorhaitz



**Christine Congrady presented the Coordinator's Report.**

- New Teacher Induction Program
  - December 17 and 18, 2024 – approximately 50 new teachers participated in professional development focused on creating inclusive classrooms and Universal Design for Learning
  - Using scenarios and collaborative discussion, participants worked together to explore and develop strategies to support student success and well-being
- New PST Mentoring Program – new Program Support Teachers engaged in professional development on understanding behaviour
- Topics covered during the mentoring session included understanding brain function, the five domains of self-regulation, recognizing stressors and reframing behaviours through a self-regulation lens
- Student Services Coordinators will be visiting schools throughout January and February to review student needs in preparation for the Spring EA Allocation Process
- Online Sonderly courses for Autism will be offered again this year, to all DCDSB educators. A numbered memo will provide details, in the coming weeks.
- Winter session for Friendship Lab begins this week at St. Bridget for students in Gr. 3-6. PEERS continues into February.

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

- BWell Secondary Leadership Group
  - Met on December 3<sup>rd</sup>
  - The group spent the day working on 4 different mental health/well-being promotion campaigns:
    - Poster campaign- focusing on substance use
    - Social media campaign- focusing on how to ask for help
    - Video campaign- focusing on supports available at school
    - Video campaign- focusing on how to help a friend who may be struggling
  - Materials to be ready for Catholic Education/MH Week
- New Teacher Induction Training
  - PD was offered to all NTIP educators focusing on the following areas:
    - Creating a mentally healthy classroom
    - Social Emotional Learning
    - Noticing and responding to mental health concerns

**Upcoming**

- Supporting students through grief for Chaplains: January 24th
- Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST): January 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>





**Mike O'Neill on behalf of Paula Sorhaitz presented the Superintendent's Report:**

Program Support Teacher Learning - last meeting December 10, 2024

- Psych services staff shared information on accommodations and modifications (i.e. when to consider implementing)
  - Focus on always trying accommodations first
  - Reminders re: students with LD have average to above-average reasoning skills, so consistent accommodation for areas of need
  - Multiple suggestions for supporting reading, writing, mathematical processes within classroom
- "Behaviourspeak"
  - Presented by members of Durham Catholic Behaviour Resource Team (DCBRT)
  - Focus on approaching difficult conversations with positive and objective stance
  - Focus on power of word choices when describing behaviour (i.e. "throwing things" vs. "became violent")
- Executive Functioning – Organization
  - Resources and links shared to support students with organizational challenges
  - Self assessment of organizational skills
  - PSTs who self-assessed as having outstanding organizational skills asked to share best practices with colleagues

Motion: SS-2025-01-07-06

Approval of the January 7, 2025, 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 January 7, 2025, meeting." (CARRIED)

## **2.8. Association Reports**

Trustee Robert De Souza noted that the first Board Meeting of the year is scheduled for January 27, 2025.

### **Learning Disabilities Ontario – Julie Sorhaitz**

In process of putting together Scholarship packages. Should have timeline of availability by next meeting.

### **Participation House – Mariam Maskell**

Virtual Family Engagement session coming up. Will share outcome information at next meeting.

### **Durham Down Syndrome Association – Walter Heeney and Donna Callaghan**

Delta Bingo money has been very beneficial in supporting the costs of. Speech Therapy classes. Currently are offering 8 classes and can keep the cost low at \$5 a session.

Planning a Respite Retreat for workers and parents. It will be offered as a 3 day retreat, once a month for 3 months and provide very open engagement.





## **2.9. Correspondence**

- 2.9.1.** Letter received from SEAC Ottawa Catholic School Board addressed to Ministry of Education seeking more funding and would like to add names of all SEAC Chairs in Ontario to the signature page and send by end of January 2025.

Chair Adamo asked the Committee members to review the letter. If they are all in agreement with the content of the letter, she will first ask Superintendent Sorhaitz to review as well. If she agrees, then Chair Adamo will approve request from SEAC Ottawa Catholic.

Motion: SS-2025-01-07-07

Upon approval by Superintendent Sorhaitz, Chair Adamo will approve request from SEAC Ottawa Catholic.

Motion moved by Julie Sorhaitz and seconded by Alex Massis.

“THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee upon approval by Superintendent Sorhaitz, Chair Adamo will approve request from SEAC Ottawa Catholic.” (CARRIED)

## **3. Other Business**

### **3.1. Board Communications**

None

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

Motion: SS-2025-01-07-08

Motion to Adjourn

Motion moved by Edward Secnik and seconded by Robert De Souza.

“THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee meeting of January 7, 2025, adjourn.” (CARRIED)

- 3.2.1.** The next meeting of the Special Education Advisory Committee will be held on February 11, 2025, at 7:30 pm.

### **3.3. Closing Prayer**

Closing prayer was offered by Walter Heeney. The meeting was adjourned at 8:46 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