



Special Education Advisory Meeting

Thursday, September 16 21, 2021 6:00 PM

MS Teams Meeting

MINUTES

Present: Chair W. Rose, L. Boswell, C. Brady, T. Buchanan, B. Bruce, R. Collver, L. DeJong, A. Detmar, M. Gatopoulos, J. Gemmill, K. Jones, F. Lainson, K. Mertins, W. Rose, L. Sheppard, L. Thompson, M. Vosburgh, T. Waldschmidt, J. White, T. Wilson.

Regrets: P. Boutis, A. Csoff, L. Nydam, L. Scott, J. Trovato.

Recorder: P. Curran

A - 1 **Opening**

(a) **Welcome**

Chair Rose called the meeting to order at 6:03 and welcomed everyone. She informed members the meeting would be recorded.

The Land Acknowledgement Statement was read by Chair Rose.

(b) **Agenda Additions/Deletions/Approval**

Add E-1 Other Business (b) Shortage of Ontario Nurses - L. Thompson

Moved by: C. Brady

Seconded by: M. Gatopoulos

THAT the SEAC 21-01 Agenda for Thursday, September 16, 2021 be approved as amended.

CARRIED

B - 1 **Timed Items**

(a) **A Day in the Life of the Attendance Counsellor**

K. Mertins explained that the Education Act mandates all schools to have an attendance counsellor. This is an important function to help safeguard the education of children. Attendance also drives funding for the operation of schools.

Tier One resides with parents and teachers. Parents are responsible for ensuring their child attends school; the classroom teacher records attendance and all school staff help set the tone of a welcoming environment to help keep children engaged.

School administrators get a weekly attendance report which alerts them to burgeoning concerns about students showing signs of disengagement and non-attendance. At the Tier Two level, they may request early intervention from Attendance Counsellors as the establishment of positive relationships between Attendance Counsellors and parents can often prevent problems from developing and can frequently turn things around for the student. They look at who is most vulnerable to determine where to begin planning to help students be successful through regular attendance.

When Attendance Counsellors receive consecutive absence referrals, they will initiate home visits, launch an investigation, facilitate meetings and connect with families to discuss options for alternative school programming at 15 days of consecutive absences, administrators must initiate a referral or student is removed from the roll.

1. How Many Students do you Support in a Week?
Attendance Counsellors see anywhere between 25 and 50 students each week, depending on the level of support that is required.
2. How Many Students do you Support in a Year?
Each Attendance Counsellor supports approximately 350-500 students each year. There was a significant increase in attendance referrals during the 2020-2021 school year.
3. How do Schools Access Your Support?
Schools access their assigned Attendance Counsellor by sending a LITE referral. Referrals go directly to the Attendance Counsellor assigned to the school. Attendance Counsellors are mandated through the Education Act, no consent is required.

A Day in the Life of an Attendance Counsellor (AC)

Mr. Vosburg outlined the importance of remaining flexible no two days are the same. He begins the day by reviewing the weekly case load so he can prioritize contacts and establish two-way communication with families.

On a usual day AC will meet with students and parents either somewhere in the community, the home or in the school, whichever is most comfortable for family. They may also communicate by phone call or text if the family has the technology. They work with community partners to collaboratively develop plans that support families and works with farmers who employ 14-16-year-old students to ensure they don't lose their education while they are working.

If AC are unable to contact a parent, they will continue trying to find anyone who can connect them with the parent.

Mr. Vosburg noted he has sometimes visited homes to speak with parents about one or two children only to find three or four others who are also of school age.

Supporting Students in Classroom

Absences are usually a symptom of a bigger problem. AC try to understand what is happening to prevent attendance. Determining factors affecting attendance can be a slow process, but they use a team approach with teachers, administrators and community partners to support students and remove barriers to attendance and help students feel more comfortable in the classroom and the school.

Questions:

L. Boswell asked if there is a red flag number in the Tier Two Level

M. Vosburg advised there is no hard and fast rule, but a student having one absence every week would indicate early intervention is required.

K. Mertins noted 15-day absences mandate AC intervention, but they will not usually intervene if school staff is working with the student to improve attendance.

R. Collver asked if there was an increase in disengaged students and was there any indication of how successful AC were at re-engaging students during COVID.

M. Vosburg noted they averaged an increase of 100-150 additional students not actively participating in virtual education. AC were fairly successful in making contact but found many parents were frustrated in the process which impacted student engagement. Parents seemed very happy to speak with staff.

Chair Rose thanked Mr. Vosburg for sharing the valuable information on the work AC have done.

(b) **Grand Erie's Multi Year Strategic Plan**

Superintendent Thompson presented a Bold New Vision for Grand Erie - Introducing our Multi-Year Strategic Plan for 2021-26. Members R. Collver, L. DeJong, T. Waldschmidt, and W. Rose participated in developing the plan during a comprehensive consultation process.

W. Rose commented on the new look of the plan and was pleased to note how the board's commitment translates into tangible actions in schools.

C - 1 **Business Arising from Minutes and/or Previous Meetings**

(a) **Ratification of Minutes June 17, 2021**

Moved by: L. Boswell

Seconded by: K. Jones

THAT the SEAC 20-10 Minutes for Thursday June 17, 2021 be approved as circulated.
CARRIED

(b) **Special Education and Well-Being Summer Programs Update**

L. Thompson introduced F. Lainson, the new Program Coordinator for Special Education who is now in the role formerly held by L. Boudreault.

P. Bagchee explained that Child and Youth Workers (CYW) provided virtual Mental Health support for 86 students and their families over the summer months. They also conducted summer school transition programs; virtual workshops for parents and caregivers and understanding anxiety and successful return to schools.

Thirty-six Educational Assistants received training in Shanker and Hopkins Self-Regulation in schools

Resources developed / or provided by Grand Erie staff include:

- "A Grand Return" colouring sheets & Video
- Welcoming and Inclusive Classrooms Tip Sheet for Educators
- The first 20 Days - Activities that Support a Welcoming and Inclusive Return to School
- Distributing fidgets and squishable objects to schools & students
- Providing links to School Mental Health Ontario - Student Re-engagement resources.

L. Boswell asked if parent workshops were well attended and P. Bagchee informed that attendance was limited but confirmed approximately 15 attendees who stayed after the presentation to ask more detailed questions.

R. Collver shared she attended one of the sessions and noted the virtual workshop was a superb creation that provided clear and concise information.

R. Collver asked if all the resources are tracked to determine if they are being used. P. Bagchee presented resources to Dr. Clinton who thought they were valuable. Schools did not receive the resources until the first PD day so may have been challenged to review and plan for implementing ideas.

K. Mertins presented data on the seven psycho-educational and 31 complex language assessments conducted over the summer when parents brought their children into the school.

L. Boswell asked if more parents are now seeking psycho-educational assessments. K. Mertins advised that parents will ask the school principal who would make a decision as to whether it should be reviewed at the in school resource team meeting. The first response is to always review information on hand. There is sometimes a flurry of requests.

K. Mertins advised members that two Attendance Counsellors worked for seven days straight in an effort to reach families of the most vulnerable students. Two way communication is a critical starting point for success. She provided data that indicated the elementary student/parent contact was successful in 71 out of 124 attempts and the secondary student/parent contact was successful in 61 out of 101 attempts.

AC helped many families with registration questions which prepared students for returning to school in September.

L. Sheppard and F. Lainson presented an overview of the summer programs provided in August 2021. Ministry of Education provided funding to support the transition of students with special education needs. Three in person programs and three virtual programs were offered. Data on effective strategies taught was collected with interest into how these skills were transitioned into the September classroom program.

i. In Person Programs

Hello Classroom was offered to students in Life Skills and for alternative programs and intensive Support – Autism support self-contained classrooms to help them transition back after virtual learning and the summer break. Thirty students participated in this program at six locations. Lessons were engaging fun and helped students build relationships and learn routines.

Teachers were provided with a licence to a Lesson Pix account, an online resource, to assist with preparing visual materials to address the individual student needs.

Data on the effectiveness of this program to support the transitions was collected through surveys to staff, parents, and where appropriate, students and information is being collated.

Summer School Transition Program (SSTP) – 24 programs ran with 203 students participating. The focus was helping Senior KG – G3 students develop communication, self-regulation, and friendship skills.

Data on the program was collected through various means and will be reviewed to determine if the program is viable for the future and to know the effectiveness of the program, i.e., how the program actions translate to classroom behaviours.

This is My New School– 30 students in 10 locations were provided with opportunities to learn and practice school routines. The program was offered to students with autism or other pervasive needs and helped staff understand the language and skills of the students starting school.

Data on the program was gathered through surveys to staff, families and students and information is being collated.

T. Waldschmidt asked if there was a significant wait list for the programs. L. Sheppard advised all who registered were accommodated other than the two programs which were cancelled due to construction. Parents of those two programs were informed ahead of time.

M. Gatopoulos shared his son participated in the summer transition program and noted it really helped him get back into the school rhythm.

ii. Virtual Programs

- a) LEXIA Reading - Lexia trained teachers were hired to monitor and support student progress in grades 2-8. Many students advanced their own reading skills.
- b) LEARNstyle – elementary teachers ran each program for five days in two hour sessions either involving a small group or a single student. 69 students were registered in total.
 - a. Assistive Technology (AT) Literacy - 9 programs were provided for 30 students in G4-G12 with a goal of using assistive technology to help foster engagement, independence and skill development.
 - b. Technology Journeys in Math – use of AT and technology tools to support learning. 24 students registered but only 16 participated. Each student created a resource binder for themselves using One Note.
 - c. High School Transition Program – three programs were offered and 12 students participated in creating a self advocacy portfolio they could share with their new teacher. One student commented they "felt they were getting a road map for their brain"; another student remarked they "now had a better understanding of how they were different but not in a bad way". Educators were astounded at the profound thinking generated by these programs.

Chair Rose thanked staff for the engaging programs and offered SEAC support if necessary to secure funding for next year's programs.

(c) **Education Standards 2021 Initial Recommendations**

A SEAC sub-committee including W. Rose, P. Boutis, R. Collver and K. Jones met over the summer to review the proposed standards. The deadline for feedback is now November 1, 2021 and the sub-committee advised members they will take recommendations from the overall documents and will bring them back to the SEAC.

K. Jones explained the points on creating a more accessible education were often vague and difficult to understand.

R. Collver praised the work done by sub-committee members and noted each contributing group wrote their own section for the document which contributed to the document's cumbersome aspects.

K. Mertins encouraged sending feedback to the Ministry asking for the document to be more searchable. She noted the Accessibility Committee is meeting soon and will share the discussion comments and feedback from SEAC.

W. Rose will ask the sub-committee to meet prior to September 30 with the aim of a follow up with the Standards Committee on the language that is plaguing accessibility.

D -1 **New Business**

(a) **New in our Department 2021-22**

Priorities 2021-22: Special Education

1. Asset-based focus to support accessible learning for all students.
2. Schools will use Universal Design and Responsive Instruction and Assessment to build conditions for full participation.
3. Schools will provide opportunities for tiered approaches to strategies and supports.

Priorities 2021-22: Mental Health and Well Being

1. Students have the knowledge and skills to tend to their own well-being.
2. School personnel have the knowledge and skills to support students' wellbeing using school board and community pathways to mental health support and services.
3. Staff have the knowledge and skills to tend to their own well-being.

New Positions in our Department

1. Itinerant Teacher – Special Education Classroom Technology
 - Worked with our ITS department to create sustainable process for technology in self-contained classrooms.
 - Supports all aspects of the technology renewal each year
 - Supports teachers in the effective use of technology in their programming for students in Intensive Support and Life Skills classrooms.
2. Itinerant Teacher – Inclusion -Intellectual Disabilities
 - Supports teachers to appropriately integrate students from self-contained classrooms into mainstream classes.
 - Supports teachers to program effectively for students with intellectual disabilities in mainstream classrooms and to maintain student programming on provincial curriculum.
3. Teacher Consultant Secondary Alternative Programming
 - Supports teachers in self-contained, intensive support and life skills classrooms with IEP development, program planning and implementation.
 - Begins supports and plans for the development of employability skills and opportunities.
 - Transition planning for exit from school to community.
4. Developmental Disabilities Pilot: Student Transitions
 - Grand Erie was one of the school boards selected to receive Ministry of Education funding in 2021-22 and 2022-23 to explore the possibility of running a *Project SEARCH* site in their community.

- The transition to work model is a one-year employment preparation program targeting independent students with developmental disabilities who are planning to pursue paid employment upon graduation and who are in their final year of secondary school. This is a collaborative model involving school boards, business/site hosts and community partners.
 - Year one will be determining viability and if viable, beginning the process.
 - Year two will start working with *Project SEARCH*, finalizing partnerships and developing processes for full implementation.
<https://projectsearchcanada.org/index.html>
5. Virtual THRIVE Teacher
T Transferrable Skills; **H** Higher Order Thinking Skills; **R** Research Skills; **I** Innovation and Inquiry Skills through a **V** Virtual **E** Experience
 - Providing regular mode virtual learning experience for students who require engagement with like-minded peers and programming which cannot be provided in the regular classroom.
 6. Itinerant Supply Education Assistants (8)
 - Through daily assignments will provide support to address gaps in safety and support due to unfilled EA absences.
 7. Additional Staffing Increases
 - 0.5 Attendance Counsellor
 - 0.5 Speech Language Pathologist
 - 1.5 Child and Youth Workers

(b) **Naming our Department – A Bold New Vision**

What's in a name? For many the addition of the word 'special' to the Education Act in 1982 was seen as a good thing because the needs of students who learn differently for a variety of reasons was expressly acknowledged and a framework that requires each board to meet those needs was established.

In present times, the word 'special' has come to represent oppression and may stigmatize students who learn differently as if those with disabilities require something that is so out of the ordinary that it cannot be provided unless some 'special' effort is made.

Reflecting on the voices from the disability community and our Multi-year strategic plan, where belonging and full participation of all learners is articulated in our organizational goals, we are considering renaming our department so that the name identifying us, also conveys our commitment to inclusion.

Q1 – What Value is there in moving away from the term, “Special Education”?

When members were asked if there was value moving away from the Special Education language, many believed it created stress and seclusion for many students; term can be stigmatizing.

Q2 – What concerns arise from removing the term, “Special Education”?

Concerns were raised about a lack of consistency with Ministry language if the term was removed and that parents may be challenged when searching for resources on the Grand Erie DSB website.

Q3 – What Suggestions do you have for change?

N.B. – L. Thompson shared most school boards have changed their department names, e.g., DSB of Niagara is now under 'Learning Services', while Hamilton Wentworth DSB is now under 'Specialized Services' and Thames Valley DSB is now under 'Learning Support Services'.

Committee suggestions included changing the name to 'Learning Support Services' and getting feedback from students and parents. L. Thompson will bring ideas back to SEAC by year's end.

E - 1 **Other Business**

(a) LDAO Conference 2021

LD@School is a partnership between the Ministry of Education and the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) which provides professional learning to educators throughout the school year and in a summer institute about teaching students with learning disabilities.

The 2021 summer institute was held virtually, and each school board received seven (7) tickets for staff. In Grand Erie four (4) Learning Resource Teachers (LRT), two (2) program staff and one psychological services staff attended the conference.

All attendees sent back rave reviews commenting on diverse sessions that included a talk about learning disabilities in mathematics, the science of reading, supporting the development of executive functioning in whole class settings (Tier 1), building resilience, and strategies to engage students with learning disabilities in on-line learning.

All attendees were appreciative of the resources provided with a plan to implement strategies learned in this school year.

(b) Shortage of Nurses in Ontario

School boards access nursing support through a program called School Health Support Services which is delivered by Home and Community Care Support Services (formerly known as Local Health Integrated Network or LHIN) to support students with significant medical needs like G-tube feeding and suctioning. These services are described in Standard 7 of our Special Education Plan

For some students the need for a medical support is present not only during school hours but also during the time it takes to transport a student to/from school. If the nursing service is not available, the student cannot come to school.

The Special Education Management Team would like SEAC to consider advocating for Grand Erie students so that attention will be drawn to the unfortunate fact that staffing shortages can prevent full participation in school for some students.

Advocacy may take the form of a letter to the Ministry of Health and/or the Ministry of Education acknowledging that the nursing shortage is impacting some of our most vulnerable students and support of any solution that is forthcoming, which may include a regulatory change allowing some specific types of medical support to be taken on by other school support services with appropriate training. Ultimately, SEAC would like to see a collaborative approach to meeting the needs of medically fragile students.

Chair Rose will draft a letter for SEAC review and approval.

Standing Items

- (a) Policy/Procedures Out for Comment
Members were advised of all policies and procedures currently under review and given instructions for commenting if they so wished.
- (b) Trustee Updates
R. Collver
- Board's New Vision – thanked L. Thompson for highlighting the strategic plan and expressed her wish that SEAC would engage in discussions on which actions they would like to see incorporated.
 - Congratulating L. Thompson who was selected to take part in school mental health Ontario strategic planning consultation group to help develop Ontario's Equity and School Mental Health Strategies.
 - Welcoming Kevin Graham, a new Superintendent of Education coming to us from Hamilton Wentworth DSB.
 - Welcoming Jennifer Tozer, a new Superintendent of Education – Human Resources coming to us from Hamilton Wentworth DSB.
 - Welcoming Dave Smouter, our new Communications Manager coming to us from the City of Brampton.
 - Dr. Jean Clinton led staff through a virtual presentation designed to stimulate thinking of the opportunities and challenges of school start up this year.
 - Recognizing Facility Services staff who worked hard this summer to get schools ready and who also install more than 700 HELP filters on the air exchangers.
 - Formed a committee to pilot a balanced school year calendar in the Brantford area for 2022-2023. It will have the same number of instructional, professional development and statutory holidays, but they will be scheduled differently. Superintendent Baker will be asked to attend a future meeting to discuss it more fully.
- T. Waldschmidt.
- Thanked R. Collver for her comprehensive report which updated everyone.
 - Thanked members for returning this fall and for their participation and interest in SEAC and assured them their voice is heard and appreciated.
 - Noted he is very excited about what is coming up this fall and in the new year.
 - He expressed gratitude that everyone is well and that they made it safely through the summer.
- (c) SEAC Orientation Handbook – Review
L. Thompson asked members to submit any ideas for revision.
W. Rose questioned if the generic email address required by the Ministry was still a valid communication link.
W. Rose reminded members of the attendance requirements outlined in the regulation and Bylaw 8. Please inform the chair if you think you may need to miss the third consecutive meeting so your membership will not be forfeited.
L. Boswell requested the term 'special needs children' be changed to 'children with special needs' on the last page of the guiding principle,
L. Thompson, W. Rose and P. Boutis will meet to discuss the revisions.
- (d) LITE Data for Students with Special Education Needs 2020-21
L. Thompson explained this is an annual report that shows trending data for five years in each of the areas.

The first chart shows Individual Education Plan (IEP) numbers for identified and non-identified students.

Referral Data for each of the Professional Support Services Personnel (PSSP) disciplines indicated the number of students involved in each area.

Referral data for each panel was also indicated in separate charts.

The increase in attendance referrals was explained by the virtual mode of learning.

L. Thompson explained the reductions in IEP referrals is related to the increase in classroom supports provided to teachers who can more often meet the needs of students. EQAO no longer requires an IEP to access accommodations, so this factors into the decrease as well.

Additionally, impact would be felt from the changes in 2016-17 for expectations around differentiated instruction, universal design and other strategies.

Child and Youth Worker (CYW) referrals may be lower as the model of support they provided changed due to the increase of tier one strategy implementations. Staff recognized it was more effective to teach a strategy to the entire class than it was to remove a single child from class to learn a strategy.

A reduction in behaviour and safety plans can be contributed to the virtual learning model so an increase may become apparent when in class sessions resume.

P. Bagchee noted, that following classroom programs, teachers reported students were better able to identify their own feelings. Hoping to do some targeted work on self- regulation in the primary grades that will help to reduce the number of referrals.

Special Education classroom data was included as well as Behaviour/Safety plans.

R. Collver requested the LITE referral report be included as an attachment in the minutes for this meeting. L. Thompson approved.

(e) Public Consultation for Special Education Plan

Parent consultation is implemented through a popup Microsoft form. Last year, Grand Erie received nine responses related to communication, the IEP process and the education of students, some asking why there were not more full-time classes for students with special needs. Some were questioning the current situation with COVID and asking about masks or virtual learning.

The consultation process will continue, and F. Lainson invited committee input.

R. Collver asked if the question could be posed differently to ensure we get a higher response.

W. Rose asked if the survey could be shared through school Facebook pages or twitter feed asking, "Did you know you could comment on the Special Education Plan?".

K. Jones felt the question asking parents to comment on the plan may be intimidating and suggested it may be simplified by asking "do you have any comments or concerns about special education in Grand Erie?" and "are you familiar with the plan Yes No". Is the goal to meet the Ministry mandate or to glean more information from parents?

J. White suggested, "What brought you to the Special Education Plan?".

L. Thompson suggested the Special Education Management Team take it away to discuss and that the Communications team may also have some suggestions. A revised consultation plan will be shared with SEAC members.

- (f) SEAC Representative to GEPIC (Grand Erie Parent Involvement Committee)
T. Waldschmidt outlined the responsibility for members is generally two hours at each of four meetings annually with possibly sub-committee work. Currently, meetings are virtual, but when they are in person, meetings are held at Waterford DHS.

R. Collver mentioned going forward virtual attendance may be available for those who are challenged by travel to Waterford.

Any SEAC member interested in participating in GEPIC is asked to notify the SEAC recording secretary who will inform the Director.

F - 1 **Information Items**

None.

G - 1 **Community Updates**

- (a) Inclusion Action in Ontario
W. Rose indicated P. Boutis will give a report at the next meeting. She shared their website which has been updated and invited members to visit this page.
inclusionactionontario.ca

H - 1 **Correspondence**

- (a) LDAO SEAC Circular
Includes SEAC planning and a calendar which we have already worked on. Thank you to special education management team for their staff work on helping students prepare or transition in return to school this September. We have also reviewed the K-12 Education Standards. Remember anyone can send comments directly to the Standards Committee as long as the reviewing window is open.
- (b) Ltr – Algoma DSB – Online Learning Supports / Universal Design for Learning Mar 2021
W. Rose determined a response is not necessary but noted there were some items of value in this letter.
- (c) Ltr – PVNCCDSB – Summer Special Education MH/Wellbeing Program Planning; Stabilization Funding - Declining Enrolment; Exceptional Learners – Learning Recovery and Renewal
W. Rose noted this letter contained some good points but may not be current. No response is necessary.

I - 1 **Future Agenda Items and SEAC Committee Planning**

- (a) None

J - 1 **Next Meeting**

Thursday, October 21, 2021 | 6:00 PM | MS Teams

At this time, we will continue to meet virtually as the Board Room will not be able to accommodate everyone with distancing and the Board requires attendees to follow COVID protocols.

K - 1 **Adjournment**

Moved by: M. Gatopoulos

Seconded by: K. Jones

THAT the SEAC 01-20 meeting held September 16, 2021 be adjourned at 9:08 PM.

Carried