

# SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Wednesday, December 4, 2024, at 6:00pm**

**Hybrid Meeting:**

In-Person: St. Francis Room (2<sup>nd</sup> Floor) Catholic Education Centre

Online: [Join the meeting now](#)

## WCDSB Mission Statement

*As disciples of Christ,  
we educate and nurture hope  
in all learners  
to realize their full potential  
to transform God's world.*

**Co-chairs: Cindy Benedetti and Laura Shoemaker**

## MEMBERS

WCDSB Trustee - **Bob Sikora**

WCDSB Trustee - **Conrad Stanley**

Waterloo Regional Down Syndrome Society - **Kim Murphy**

Waterloo Regional Police - **Amanda Hennig**

Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region - **Cindy Benedetti**

Waterloo Region Family Network - **Karen Applebee**

Centre for ADHD Awareness - **Daina Colbourne**

International Dyslexia Association Ontario - **Laura Shoemaker**

Autism Ontario - **Monica Wenzlaff**

Member at Large - **Jeanne Gravelle**



**Waterloo Catholic  
District School Board**  
Quality, Inclusive, Faith Based Education

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## SEAC Committee Meeting Agenda

<b>Date&amp; Time:</b>	December 4, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.
<b>Location (Hybrid)</b>	In-Person: St. Francis Room (2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor), Catholic Education Centre Online: Via Teams : <a href="#">Join the meeting now</a>
<b>Next Meeting:</b>	January 8, 2025, @ 6:00 pm
<b>Committee Members:</b> Kim Murphy, Amanda Hennig, Cindy Benedetti, Karen Applebee, Daina Colbourne, Laura Shoemaker, Jeanne Gravelle, Monica Wenzlaff, Bob Sikora, Conrad Stanley	
<b>Administrative Officials:</b> Gerald Foran, Erin Lemak	

<b>1. Opening Prayer</b> Welcome	Erin Lemak
<b>2. Approval of Agenda</b> Motion by: Seconded:	
<b>3. Declared Pecuniary Interest</b>	
<b>4. Approval of the November minutes:</b> Motion by: Seconded:	
<b>5. School System Operational Business</b> 5.1. Mental Health Update	Andrea Snyder Mental Health Lead
<b>6. Ministry Updates (10 min)</b>	
<b>7. SEAC Committee Functions</b> 7.1. Grace For All family event update	SEAC
<b>8. Policy Advice to the Board</b>	
<b>9. Updates</b>	
<b>10. Pending Items</b>	
<b>11. Adjournment</b> Motion by: Seconded:	
<b>12. Action Items Place Holder</b>	



**SEAC Committee Meeting Minutes**

<b>Date&amp; Time:</b>	November 6, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.
Location (Hybrid)	In-Person: St. Francis Room (2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor), Catholic Education Centre Online: Via Teams : <a href="#">Join the meeting now</a>
<b>Next Meeting:</b>	December 4, 2024, @ 6:00 pm
<b>Committee Members:</b> Kim Murphy, Amanda Hennig, Cindy Benedetti, Karen Applebee, Daina Colbourne, Laura Shoemaker, Jeanne Gravelle, Monica Wenzlaff, Bob Sikora, Conrad Stanley	
<b>Administrative Officials:</b> Gerald Foran, Erin Lemak	
<b>Regrets:</b> Kim Murphy and Cindy Benedetti	

<b>1. Opening Prayer</b> Welcome	Erin Lemak	
<b>2. Approval of Agenda</b> Motion by: Jeanne Gravelle Seconded: Amanda Hennig		
<b>3. Declared Pecuniary Interest</b> N/A		
<b>4. Approval of the October minutes:</b> Motion by: Karen Applebee Seconded: Monica Wenzlaff		
<b>5. School System Operational Business</b> N/A		
<b>6. Ministry Updates (10 min)</b> N/A		
<b>7. SEAC Committee Functions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>7.1. Promoting Sacraments Kits for students with special needs. Event planning session.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Session Title: <b>Grace for All: Celebrating the sacraments with those with special needs</b></li> <li>➤ Task List (working version):</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	SEAC & Lisa Denomme Religion and Family Life Consultant	
<b>TASK</b>	<b>PERSON RESPONSIBLE</b>	<b>DATE to be completed</b>
<b>LOGISTICS</b>		
Date of Event: Feb 5, 2025	SEAC	Nov 6, 2024



Location of Event: St Anthony Daniel/St Mary's/opportunity for online access	SEAC	Nov 6, 2024
Title of Event: Grace for All: Celebrating the sacraments with those with special needs	SEAC	Nov 6, 2024
Room Booking	Erin	Nov 7, 2024
<b>CONTENT PREPARATION</b>		
Liturgy	Lisa/Richard	
Content	Erin and SLP/SEL/BA	
Planning Tool	Erin	
<b>ONE MONTH PRIOR TO EVENT</b>		
Administrator Meeting/Rough numbers from schools	Erin and Gerald	Nov 2024
Parent Flyer: registration closed mid Jan	Erin	Dec 2024 School Messenger Dec/Jan Social media
Information to Parishes	Erin/Lisa	Deanery meeting Mailing list
Meet with Parishes/Deanery	Erin/Lisa/Richard/Gerald/Jeanne	January 2025
Request kits from schools	Erin	December 2024
<b>FOR THE NIGHT OF...</b>		
Parent Feedback Survey	Erin	
Kit Set up	SEAC	
<p>➤ Update at the December meeting</p>		
<p><b>8. Policy Advice to the Board</b> N/A</p>		
<p><b>9. Updates</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>9.1. WRFN Updates:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Lisa Cook has been hired as the new Family Resource Coach at Waterloo Region Family Network. You can reach her at <a href="mailto:lisa.cook@wrfn.info">lisa.cook@wrfn.info</a>. Introduction for Lisa Cook – <a href="#">November Family Pulse Newsletter</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ <b>9.2. AUTISM Updates:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Pathways to Special Education Support: Meet &amp; Greet for Families sessions</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ <b>9.3. ADHD Updates:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <a href="#">Youth Peer-facilitated Support Group - Pilot (Age 16-24)</a></li> <li>➤ <a href="#">Program for parents and guardians of students with learning disabilities and/or ADHD in Grade 7 or 8 in Ontario.</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>		



<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>9.4. IDA Updates:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ <a href="#">IDA Ontario Conference April 25-27, 2025</a></li></ul></li><li>• <b>9.5. Trustee Update:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Chair Sikora updated SEAC on October events</li></ul></li></ul>	
<b>10. Pending Items</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Suggestion to review the recently published census results at on of the upcoming meetings so that SEAC can advocate the needs of students of special needs with the Trustees.</li></ul>	
<b>11. Adjournment</b> <p>Motion by: Jeanne Gravelle Seconded: Karen Applebee</p>	
<b>12. Action Items Place Holder</b> N/A	



**Date:** December 4, 2024  
**To:** SEAC  
**From:** Director of Education, Superintendent of Learning: Special Education  
**Subject:** Mental Health Update

**Type of Report:**  Decision-Making  
 Monitoring  
 Incidental Information concerning day-to-day operations

**Type of Information:**  Information for Board of Trustees Decision-Making  
 Monitoring Information of Board Policy **XX XXX**  
 Information only of day-to-day operational matters delegated to the CEO

**Origin: (cite Education Act and/or Board Policy or other legislation)**

Regulation 306 Special Education Programs and Services

**Policy Statement and/or Education Act/other Legislation citation:**

Policy 1001 - Ends

**Special Education Plan:**

Pg.79

**Alignment to the MYSP:**

**Awaken to Belong**

- Every student can see themselves reflected in their learning.
- Staff experiences a positive, healthy, and inclusive workplace.
- Are aware of and/or use the available resources to assist in navigation of the school system.

**Ignite to Believe**

- Every student experiences the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations (OCSGEs) and the WCDSB pastoral plan within their learning environments.
- Staff are welcomed and invited to continue to be a partner in their adult faith formation journey.
- The relationship between home, parish and school is strengthened.

**Strengthen to Become**



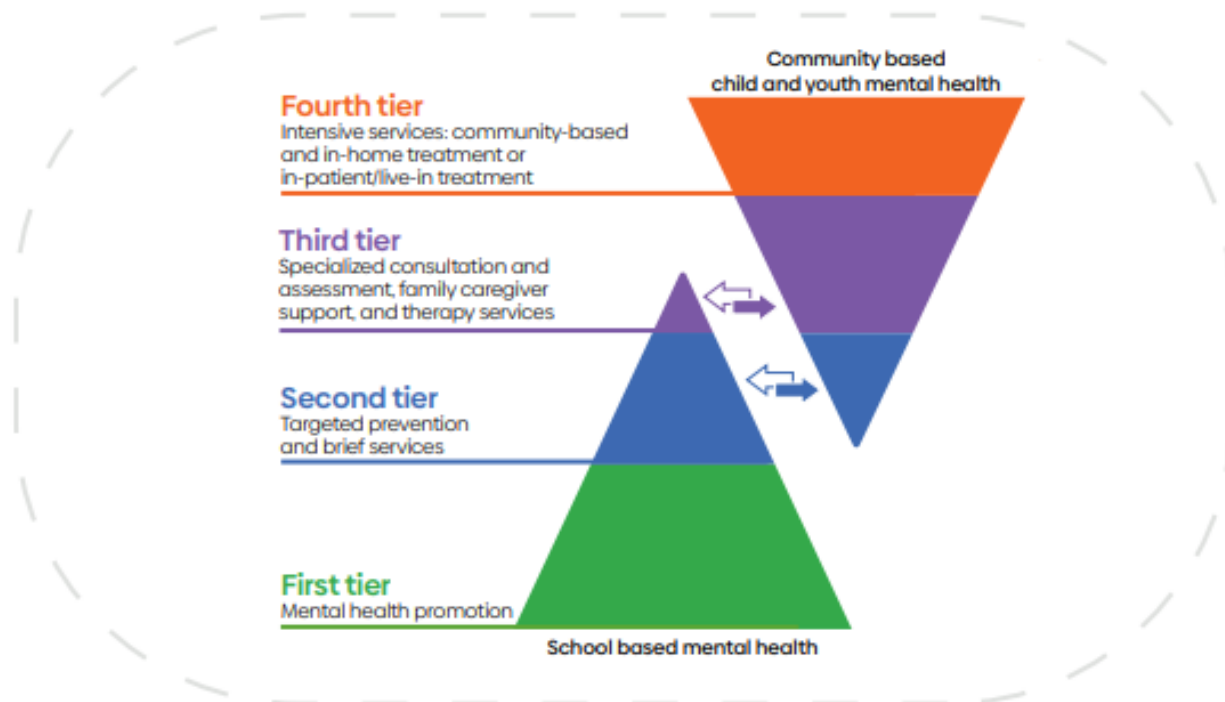
- ☒ Every student reaches their full potential.
- ☒ Staff see their impact on student achievement.
- ☒ Are engaged as active partners in our students' Catholic education journey.

**Background/Comments:**

The 2024-2025 school year marks a pivotal moment in the Waterloo Catholic District School Board’s commitment to enhancing mental health and wellbeing across our school communities. Building on previous successes, the Board has developed an updated Annual Mental Health and Addictions Plan, aligned with the Ministry of Education’s Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) 169 and School Mental Health Ontario (SMHO)’s 2022-2025 strategy. Grounded in a multi-tiered system of care, this plan aligns with *Right Time, Right Care: A Guide to Strengthening Ontario’s Mental Health and Addictions System of Care for Children and Young People* by SMHO, the Lead Agency Consortium (LAC), The Knowledge Institute, and Children’s Mental Health Ontario.

In addition, the plan incorporates insights from our 2024 Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI) data, School Achievement Plan indicators, and feedback from key stakeholders, including students, families, board mental health professionals, and local community-based child and youth mental health providers.

Multi-tiered system of care:



The WCDSB Annual Mental Health and Addictions Plan for 2024-2025 builds on the foundation of the 2023-2024 initiatives, while introducing new strategies to address the evolving mental health needs of students, staff, and families. The plan is structured around five strategic priorities: Parent, Caregiver, and Community Connections & Support; System, School, and Classroom Mental Health Leadership; Strength-Based Mental Health Promotion, Mental Health Literacy, and Stigma Reduction; Student Leadership, Participation, and Agency; and Early



Identification Support & Service Pathways. These priorities guide our comprehensive approach to fostering mentally healthy school environments and ensuring that all community members have access to the support they need.

*Key Elements of the 2022-2025 School Mental Health and Addictions Strategy*



The mental health needs of our students have become more complex. The MDI Wellbeing Index reveals a noticeable trend in student wellbeing levels over the years. In 2019, 40.7% of students were classified as having low wellbeing, a figure that rose to 47.6% by 2022. Currently, the data shows a positive shift, with 46.0% of students now falling into the low wellbeing category, approaching pre-COVID baseline levels.

While this improvement is encouraging, the gap between 2024 and pre-COVID rates underscores the importance of ongoing efforts to promote social-emotional learning, reduce stigma, and build resilience among students.

This report provides an overview of our progress in the 2023-2024 school year, outlines key initiatives for 2024-2025, and highlights the strategies we are implementing to strengthen mental health leadership across our system.

**Summary of 2023-2024 Mental Health Supports**

The 2023-2024 school year was a period of significant growth and development in our mental health strategy. Initiatives aligned with our five strategic priorities resulted in meaningful improvements across the Board.

**Parent, Caregiver, and Community Connections & Support:**



Key initiatives to engage parents, caregivers, and the broader community included:

- **Parent Education Events:** In collaboration with public health partners, we participated in all secondary school Grade 8 nights, providing information on the Aligned and Integrated Model (AIM), mental health literacy, and identity-affirming pathways. These events equipped families with knowledge and resources to support their children's mental health.
- **Resources for Parents:** Mental health videos, articles, and tip sheets addressing issues such as substance use, mental health literacy, and coping strategies were developed and disseminated through school newsletters, email, and the WCDSB Mental Health and Wellbeing website to ensure broad accessibility.
- **Webpage Utilization:** The Mental Health & Wellbeing webpage was regularly updated with current SMHO resources, including information on the Grade 7 & 8 mental health modules and our Annual Action Plan, ensuring that parents and caregivers had access to up-to-date information.

### System, School and Classroom Mental Health Leadership

Our efforts to strengthen mental health leadership across the system were focused on expanding trauma-informed practices, promoting equity, and providing professional development for school leaders:

- **Trauma-Informed Practices:** The Trauma Informed Course on D2L was accessed over 600 times by educators in the 23/2024 school year and monthly content and resources were provided to all schools through school-based Mental Health and Wellbeing Champions as well as the Deep Learning collaboration. Additionally, ten pilot schools received intensive training and resources to increase educator and student knowledge and strategies. This increased learning board-wide, and success of the pilot schools has paved the way for full implementation of trauma-informed practices across all WCDSB schools in 2024-2025.
- **Equity-Centered Approaches:** All trauma-informed training included a focus on equity and anti-racist approaches. Resources from SMHO's Identity-Affirming framework were embedded into classroom practices and mental health programming, ensuring that the mental health needs of Black, Indigenous, Racialized, and 2SLGBTQIA+ students were addressed, and diversity was embedded into all mental health initiatives.
- **Administrator Training:** We provided ongoing resources through presentations, slide decks, and embedded deep-learning materials focused on implementing school-specific social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies based on MDI data. This training empowered administrators to lead their teams in fostering mentally healthy school environment

### Strength-Based Mental Health Promotion, Mental Health Literacy and Stigma Reduction

The 2023-2024 school year saw a significant expansion in our efforts to promote mental health literacy and reduce stigma across the Board

- **Administrator Support:** We supported administrators in leading mentally healthy schools by providing them with access to SMHO's Mentally Healthy Back to School package. The importance of relationships, re-establishing a sense of safety, belonging and connection were again highlighted with resources. Monthly content for staff meetings and resources were provided through Mental Health and Wellbeing Champions and through the Deep Learning collaboration. In January 2024, WCDSB launched a week of focused Mental-Health Anti-Stigma learning and school activities, including building and launching a



D2L course accessed over 15,000 times reflecting a strong commitment to promoting mental health literacy at all levels of the organization.

- **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Programming:** SEL programming was integrated into board-wide initiatives such as Anti-Bullying Week, Anti-Stigma Week, and Mental Health Week. Activities from SMHO's classroom-based resources were woven into these initiatives, promoting empathy, active listening, and conflict resolution skills among students. All of these initiatives were cross-portfolio collaborations with Faith, Equity and Healthy Active Living.
- **Mental Health Modules for Grades 7/8:** The introduction of the Grade 7 & 8 SMHO Mental Health Modules was a significant achievement and were supported by in-class Sources of Strength Presentations to every grade 7 classroom by Waterloo Suicide Prevention Council.

### Student Leadership, Participation, and Agency

Student leadership continued to be a cornerstone of our mental health strategy in 2023-2024, with a focus on empowering students to take an active role in promoting mental health and wellbeing:

- **Secondary Student Leadership:** We expanded the scope of Secondary Student Safe Schools Ambassadors to elevate their voice in co-planning and leading mental health and wellbeing initiatives in their schools on topics such as cannabis, vaping, and opioid awareness, human trafficking awareness and anti-bullying strategies. This initiative reached over 50 secondary student leaders, who then led peer education campaigns in their schools.
- **Youth Cannabis Initiative:** The Youth Cannabis Initiative, a partnership with Waterloo Region Public Health, was expanded based on student feedback, with new training modules that included education on opioids and other substances. The initiative culminated in a spring feedback session, where students shared their experiences and provided input on future directions.

### Early Identification, Support & Service Pathways

Our work in early identification and service pathways ensured that students with emerging or ongoing mental health needs received the support they needed in a timely manner:

- **Suicide Prevention Training:** We expanded our suicide prevention efforts by providing SMHO's Suicide Prevention Life Promotion Training to over 240 staff members. This training equipped staff with the skills to identify students at risk of suicide and connect them with appropriate supports.
- **Pathways to Support:** A key goal was for every student to understand mental health, feel comfortable discussing it, and know how to seek help. To support this, a "Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Course" on D2L was created, featuring lessons on mental health, personal care plans, and building support networks using SMHO resources. A slide deck for educators accompanied the course and was promoted during Mental Health Anti-Stigma Week to encourage classroom discussions. Since January 2024, the course has been accessed over 15,000 times, helping reduce stigma and build trust between students and staff.
- **Joint local planning with community service providers:** WCDSB maintains ongoing partnership, protocols and memoranda of understanding with a number of community agencies in support of pathways to care for student mental health and addiction needs. In addition, members of the mental health leadership team and/or regulated mental health professionals participate and contribute on committees with community agencies that guide children and youth mental health and wellbeing.



## **2024-2025 Mental Health Supports**

WCDSB 2024-2025 Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan was updated to align with the key elements of School Mental Health Ontario's new Action Plan as follows:

**Six Focus Areas:**

- 1.** Centre the needs of students who are **disproportionately impacted** by the social determinants of health, racism, and/or marginalization through an explicit focus on reconciliation, equity, and identity-affirming school mental health.
- 2.** Enhance **wellness and life promotion, mental health literacy, and engagement** within the context of mentally healthy learning environments through meaningful connections with parents, caregivers, and community.
- 3.** Create opportunities for meaningful **consultation, contribution, partnership and leadership**, to engage students in identity-affirming mental health promotion and stigma reduction.
- 4.** Strengthen the **knowledge** and confidence of system and school staff to promote student wellness, **identify** and **support** students experiencing mental health problems and **facilitate help-seeking** when needed.
- 5.** Support school mental health professionals to take an **identity-affirming approach** to use brief, evidence-informed prevention and early intervention protocols, including suicide risk assessment, intervention and postvention.
- 6.** **Prioritize** system and school leadership across the **service continuum**, in collaboration with community partners, to contribute to an improved system of care for child and youth mental health, following *Right Time, Right Care* principles.

Our annual [2024-2025 Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan](#) provides the broader objectives of what we hope to achieve over the course of the year, while remaining flexible and adaptive as the needs of our students and system evolve.

In preparation for Fall 2024, Mental Health and Trauma Awareness presentations were provided to NTIP (New Teacher Induction Program) educators in August. In September, board-wide resources were shared to support a mentally healthy return to school. Educators were encouraged to focus on building strong connections, embedding social-emotional skills into the daily routine, and incorporating regulation activities throughout the day to benefit both students and educators through focused attention practices.

The 2024-2025 WCDSB Annual Mental Health and Addictions Plan introduces several new initiatives and enhances existing supports to address the evolving mental health needs of our students:

- **Parent, Caregiver, and Community Connections & Support:** We will continue to expand caregiver learning opportunities by creating and sharing mental health awareness materials through various



communication channels. Monthly communications have been provided to schools to share trauma-informed learning and activities, offering parents and caregivers opportunities to learn and practice at home. Information on support pathways, both within and outside the school community, will be refined and shared. SMHO's top resources will also be made available in multiple languages.

- **System School Classroom Mental Health Leadership:** We are shifting from a pilot to full implementation of trauma-informed practices across all schools, supported by new resources such as a Trauma-Informed Book Club and classroom activities. This initiative will be further integrated into cross-curricular collaborations like Deep Learning, ensuring a holistic approach to student wellbeing.
- **Strength-Based Mental Health Promotion, Mental Health Literacy, and Stigma Reduction:** The launch of the new Grade 10 SMHO Mental Health Modules in career studies, alongside the sustained implementation of the Grade 7 & 8 modules, will strengthen our efforts to promote mental health literacy across all grade levels. Additionally, we will continue to embed SEL programming into board-wide initiatives, with a focus on reducing stigma and promoting resilience.
- **Student Leadership Participation and Agency:** We will amplify student voice by engaging both secondary and elementary students in leadership roles focused on mental health, substance use prevention, and anti-human trafficking initiatives. The expansion of the Youth Cannabis Initiative to include education on opioids and other substances reflects our commitment to addressing emerging student needs.
- **Early Identification Support & Service Pathways: In order to ensure every student** In order to meet our goal within our Student Achievement Plan(SAP) that every student understands the concept of mental health, is comfortable talking about mental health in their classroom, and knows how and to whom they can ask for help, each student will be enrolled in WCDSB's "Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Course" on D2L where they will learn about these concepts and develop their own personal plan to care for their mental health. These lessons will be expanded in 2024-2025. Our efforts to strengthen early identification processes will continue, with a focus on expanding suicide prevention training and exploring the integration of standardized measurement tools for mental health interventions.

### **Mental Health Leadership Development for Staff Well-being**

As the Mental Health and Wellbeing Champions reconvene for 2024-2025, the Human Resources Department, including the Total Attendance Officer and Disabilities Specialist, continues to collaborate with the Mental Health Lead to support staff wellbeing. Their focus remains on highlighting available mental health resources and providing materials for dissemination during staff meetings. The Mental Health Lead also serves on the WCDSB Wellness Steering Committee. Initial next steps, based on the 2024 *Guarding Minds at Work* survey and subsequent focus groups, include validating staff concerns before moving to problem-solving, incorporating wellness as a regular agenda item in staff meetings, and leveraging the staff intranet to house wellness information. Additionally, the Communications team will visit each school to gather positive stories for staff recognition, and video vignettes will be created to highlight wellness practices. Training or mentorship on validation techniques will also be explored.

Looking ahead to 2024-2025, our work will focus on building a new three-year Mental Health and Addictions Strategy for 2025-2028, aligning with the updated Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP). This plan will continue our commitment to embedding Tier One support across key areas—mental health, safe and caring schools, healthy active living, and equity, as well as high quality Tier 2-3 support and services for students with more complex needs. By maintaining a multi-dimensional approach to wellbeing, we will ensure that mental health initiatives are seamlessly integrated into broader system-level work, providing students with cohesive and aligned



supports and services. Our efforts will continue to reflect the strong connection between student achievement and wellbeing, reinforcing our mission, vision, and catholic values.

**Recommendation:**

Presented for your information.

**Prepared/Reviewed By:** Tyrone Dowling  
Director of Education  
Gerald Foran  
Superintendent of Learning: Special Education

\*4.2 DIRECTOR Monitoring Reports: Where the Board receives from the CEO a monitoring report that flows from a responsibility delegated to the Director under Board Policy – except where approval is required by the Board on a matter delegated by policy to the Board – the minutes of the Meeting at which the Report is received shall expressly provide that the Board has received and approved of the Report as an action consistent with the authority delegated to the CEO, subject in all instances to what otherwise actually occurred.

