

# SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Wednesday, March 5, 2024, at 6:00pm**

**Hybrid Meeting:**

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

Online: [Join the meeting](#)

## 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

35 Weber St. W., Unit A  
Kitchener, ON, Canada N2H 3Z1  
519-578-3660  
info@wcdsb.ca



**SEAC Committee Meeting Agenda**

<b>Date&amp; Time:</b>	March 5, 2025, 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</a>
<b>Next Meeting:</b>	April 2, 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 February minutes:</b> Motion by: Seconded:	
<b>5. School System Operational Business</b> 5.1. MYSP Visioning Session	J. Speedie Project Lead- Maximum City
<b>6. Ministry Updates (10 min)</b> 6.1. OCSB - Inadequate Special Education Funding & Educational Assistant Shortage (letter to the Ministry of Education and the letter addressed to SEAC chairs) 6.2. Algoma District School Board SEAC letter to the Ontario College of Teachers re: Teacher training in special education	G. Foran
<b>7. SEAC Committee Functions</b>	
<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>	February 5, 2025, at 5:00 p.m.
Location	In-Person: St. Anthony Daniel Parish Hall
<b>Next Meeting:</b>	March 5, 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 Regrets: Monica Wenzlaff, Daina Colbourne, Amanda Hennig	

<b>1. Opening Prayer</b> Welcome	Erin Lemak
<b>2. Approval of Agenda</b> Motion by: Jeanne Gravelle Seconded: Karen Applebee	
<b>3. Declared Pecuniary Interest</b> N/A	
<b>4. Approval of the January minutes:</b> Motion by: Jeanne Gravelle Seconded: Cindy Benedetti	
<b>5. School System Operational Business</b> N/A	
<b>6. Ministry Updates (10 min)</b> 6.1. MACSE – feedback required – fillable form shared with the members 6.2. Gerald to get the update about the status of the Ontario Autism Program (OAP) waitlist and to share with the committee	G. Foran
<b>7. SEAC Committee Functions</b> 7.1. Grace for All: Celebrating the sacraments with those with special needs	Presentation from 6:30-8:30 pm
<b>8. Policy Advice to the Board</b> N/A	
<b>9. Updates</b> <b>9.1. WWDSS Updates:</b> ➤ The Down Syndrome Society is celebrating World Down Syndrome Day March 21. ➤ Teacher resources are available through the Canadian Down Syndrome Society website, as well as the WWDSS website ➤ DS Day celebration at the Alpine club (tickets are available on the WWDSS website)	



<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ March 22 from 2-4 Cambridge Library will be doing a screening of DECADE and quest presentation, tickets are available through Event Brite</li><li>➤ WWDSS is continuing to offer a number of programming options to its members including its one week summer school program in August, ongoing Speech &amp; Music Social Group, and a 6 week course in partnership with KW Habilitation on Relationships: "Sex and your body"</li></ul>	
<b>10. Pending Items</b> N/A	
<b>11. Adjournment</b> Motion by: Jeanne Gravelle Seconded: Karen Appleby	
<b>12. Action Items Place Holder</b>	

January 27, 2025

Via Email

Hon. Jill Dunlop Ministry of Education



## **Re: Inadequate Special Education Funding & Educational Assistant Shortage**

Dear Minister Dunlop,

I am writing to express serious concerns regarding the significant challenges facing special education in the Ottawa Catholic School Board and across all Ontario schools. Specifically, the insufficient funding for special education programs and services in combination with the critical shortage of Educational Assistants (EA) severely impacts the quality of education and support provided to exceptional students. These act as barriers to these students' rights, as per the Human Rights Code, to access education. Furthermore, the lack of adequate funding for special education has ramifications negatively impacting the entire student population in Ontario, as further explained below.

### **Funding Challenges:**

- **Special Education Grant Shortfalls:** The current Special Education Grant is insufficient to meet the complex and diverse needs of exceptional students. This chronic underfunding forces school boards to reallocate resources from other areas, therefore compromising the overall educational experience for all students. As an example, the Ottawa Catholic School Board (OCSB) currently spends \$26 million more than it is funded to support students with special education needs. This financial strain limits the board's ability to provide essential services and support to its students.
- **Inadequate Transportation Funding:** Transportation costs for students with special needs continue to exceed the funding provided by the Ministry. This shortfall places an additional burden on school boards and families of students who require specialized transportation and acts as a barrier to access education.

### **Educational Assistant Shortages:**

- **Critical Staffing Gaps:** The province is facing a severe shortage of qualified Education Assistants. This shortage results in significant challenges in providing consistent and adequate support to students with special education needs. Staff absences due to illness and stress often cannot be filled, leaving vulnerable students without the necessary assistance and supervision. This situation poses a direct risk to the safety and well-being of these students and disrupts the learning environment for all students in our schools not only in our board but across the province. This lack of support denies special needs students their legally protected right to access the same level of education as their peers without disabilities.
- **Students Unable to Access Educational Institutions:** A lack of appropriate staff and support can also result in requests to keep students at home. Results from [People for Education's 2023-2024 Annual Ontario School Survey](#) showed that 72% of elementary schools who had daily EA shortages recommended that students receiving EA support stay home and 67% of secondary schools did the same.

- **Urgent Need for Action:** The Ministry must take immediate steps to address this crisis. We urge the government to implement strategies similar to those successfully employed in the healthcare sector to attract and retain staff. These strategies could include:
  - **Free Tuition for EA Programs:** Offering free tuition for students enrolled in Educational Assistant programs at Ontario colleges.
  - **Retention Bonuses:** Providing financial incentives to encourage EAs to remain in the education sector.
  - **Enhanced Professional Development:** Investing in ongoing professional development opportunities for EAs to enhance their skills and knowledge.
  - **Improved Working Conditions:** Addressing workload concerns and ensuring that EAs have the necessary resources and support to effectively perform their roles.
  - **Stable Employment:** Many EAs leave the profession due to lack of full-time stable positions and some are forced to take on multiple jobs to make ends meet. Providing stable funding to pay for full-time positions will enable schools to retain the best EAs and result in lower costs over time when compared to the cost of constantly having to re-staff and retrain new EAs.
  - **Increase and improve all special education resources:** Speech and Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Behaviour Analysts, Resource Teachers and other specialists are wholly insufficient in number to meet the needs of the current student population in the province - significant effort must be expended to improve children's access to the services these specialists bring to the classrooms of the province.

The current situation is unsustainable and demands urgent attention. As Chair of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) for the Ottawa Catholic School Board (OCSB), I am asking that you take immediate action to address these critical funding and staffing challenges to ensure that all students in Ontario, including those with special needs, have access to the quality education and support they deserve.

Sincerely,



Traci Clarke, SEAC Chair, Ottawa Catholic School Board

CC Members of Provincial Parliament, Ottawa Region  
Mark Mullan, Chairperson of Ottawa Catholic School Board (OCSB)  
Sue Wilson, School Board Trustee Representative, Minister's Advisory Council on  
Special Education (MACSE)  
Ontario Special Education Advisory Committees (SEAC)



January 30, 2025

Via email through Ontario Directors of Education

RE: Special Education Funding in the Province of Ontario

Dear Chairs of Special Education Advisory Committees across Ontario,

We are writing on behalf of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) for the Ottawa Catholic School Board (OCSB). As we are all aware special education funding in Ontario is inadequate for meeting the needs of our student population. This, combined with the shortage of educational assistants, has thrown our education system in Ontario into crisis mode, with all students being affected.

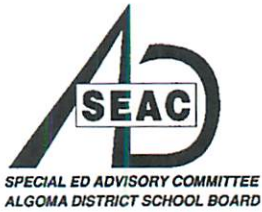
As SEAC members it is our job to provide advice and recommendations to school boards on special education programs and services. Most of us represent associations in our community consisting of exceptional students and as such we have become well versed in advocacy in the area of special education. Therefore, we would like to take this opportunity to combine our voices into one and hope that the Ministry of Education will hear us loud and clear. Together, we hope to send a clear and strong message that something has to be done to address the crisis happening with special education in Ontario.

As such we are seeking each and every one of your signatures on the attached letter in the hopes that together, our voices can be amplified and send a unified message to the Ministry of Education to impress upon them the call to action.

We appreciate your cooperation and support with this matter. We hope to have the letter signed by Friday, February 28, 2025. Please do not hesitate to contact by emailing us at [ocsbseac.advocacy@gmail.com](mailto:ocsbseac.advocacy@gmail.com) should you have any questions, comments or concerns.

Sincerely,

Mara Chapeskie  
Vice Chair, OCSB SEAC



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January 21, 2025

Linda Lacroix, Registrar and CEO  
Office of the Register  
Ontario College of Teachers

Dear Linda Lacroix,

The Algoma District School Board Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) is writing to support the November 6, 2024 letter sent by the Limestone District School Board SEAC to bring forward concerns related to teacher training in special education at faculties of education across Ontario.

The lack of consistent training in special education during initial teacher education programs is a concern for many school boards. Despite the diversity of learners in Ontario classrooms, many teachers do not receive enough preparation in this area prior to beginning their careers.

Teachers must be well-prepared to address the wide range of needs and abilities that they will encounter in the classroom. Teachers that receive special education training as part of their teacher preparation programming are far better equipped to implement the principles of Universal Design for Learning and differentiate instruction effectively for all students, including those with special education needs. Additionally, training helps to ensure that teachers understand the many diverse needs of our learners, enabling them to develop and implement Individual Education Plans (IEPs) effectively beginning with their first days in our classrooms.

The ADSB SEAC echoes the call of the Limestone DSB SEAC for the College of Teachers, in consultation with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities and the Ministry of Education, to ensure that special education training becomes a required component of all teacher preparation programs in Ontario.

Sincerely,

*Pat Mick*

Pat Mick,  
Chair  
Algoma District School Board SEAC