

SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, November 5, 2025, at 6:00pm

Hybrid Meeting: [Join the meeting](#)

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

Online:

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**

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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info@wcdsb.ca



SEAC Committee Meeting Agenda

Date& Time:	November 5, 2025, at 6:00 p.m.
Location (Hybrid)	In-Person: St. Francis Room (2 nd Floor), Catholic Education Centre Online: Via Teams : Join the meeting
Next Meeting:	December 3, 2025 @ 6:00 pm
Committee Members: Kim Murphy, Amanda Hennig, Cindy Benedetti, Karen Applebee, Laura Shoemaker, Jeanne Gravelle, Monica Wenzlaff, Bob Sikora, Conrad Stanley	
Administrative Officials: Gerald Foran, Erin Lemak	

1. Opening Prayer Welcome	Erin Lemak
2. Approval of Agenda Motion by: Seconded:	
3. Declared Pecuniary Interest	
4. Approval of the October minutes: Motion by: Seconded:	
5. School System Operational Business 5.1. Self-Regulation Support and Resources	A. Snyder
6. Ministry Updates (10 min)	
7. SEAC Committee Functions: 7.1. Letter of Support for Summer Spec Ed Funding (5 min) 7.2. AI Parent Guidelines Survey (20 min) 7.3. Sacramental Kits Event (5 min)	Chair/All
8. Policy Advice to the Board	
9. Updates	
10. Pending Items	
11. Adjournment Motion by: Seconded:	
12. Action Items Place Holder	



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

Agenda



SEAC Committee Meeting Minutes

Date& Time:	October 1, 2025, at 6:00 p.m.
Location (Hybrid)	In-Person: St. Francis Room (2 nd Floor), Catholic Education Centre Online: Via Teams : Join the meeting
Next Meeting:	November 5, 2025 @ 6:00 pm
Committee Members: Kim Murphy, Amanda Hennig, Cindy Benedetti, Karen Applebee, Laura Shoemaker, Jeanne Gravelle, Monica Wenzlaff, Bob Sikora, Conrad Stanley, Gillian Hadden	
Administrative Officials: Gerald Foran, Erin Lemak	
Regrets: Kim Murphy	

1. Opening Prayer Welcome	Erin Lemak
2. Approval of Agenda Motion by: Bob Sikora Seconded: Conrad Stanley	L. Shoemaker
3. Declared Pecuniary Interest N/A	L. Shoemaker
4. Approval of the September minutes: Motion by: Amanda Henning Seconded: Jeanne Gravelle	L. Shoemaker
5. School System Operational Business 5.1. AI-How Can It Help Our Students Draft Parent Guidelines & Survey Q&A • Allocate 20 minutes to the next SEAC meeting for committee to review Parent Guidelines and complete the survey.	W. McKinley K. Gouett L. Shoemaker
6. Ministry Updates (10 min) 6.1. Letter of Support for Summer Spec Ed Funding • Gerald to share the letter with the chairs.	G. Foran
7. SEAC Committee Functions: 7.1. Sacramental Kits • Suggestion to replicate last year's event. • Erin to find out if kits can be used for the presentation. • Waiting to hear if CPIC can provide funding.	All 15 min
8. Policy Advice to the Board N/A	L. Shoemaker



<p>9. Updates</p> <p>9.1. Autism Updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Please review the webpage to find out about monthly updates. <p>9.2. WRFN Updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding Your Child’s IEP workshop in partnership with WCDSB and WRDSB took place on Sept 23 - thank you to Gerald and Erin and other WCDSB Board staff for participating. Smaller group this year but all were very appreciative of the information shared and opportunity to ask questions. FLYER• WRFN Camp Day in partnership with YMCA of three Rivers took place last Sunday – Sept 28 – out at Camp Ki-Wa-Y. It was a beautiful day for enjoying camp activities. Over 80 attended the annual event.• School Navigation Workshops – series flyer attached and Making Your IEP Work session being offered Oct 15. FLYER• Kaleidoscope Kids – continues to be offered one Saturday afternoon per month at Oak Creek EarlyON – FLYER• WRFN Annual General Meeting – Oct 23 – Save the Date FLYER <p>9.3. WWDSS Updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• October is Down Syndrome Awareness month and in collaboration with One for the Wall, the Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society has rolled out their "I belong" campaign. Every day for the month of October WWDSS will be posting a photo and quote from the campaign.• WWDSS continues to offer a variety of programs and bursaries for its members and families with Down Syndrome <p>9.4. Trustee Updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trustee Sikora shared September updates	
<p>10. Pending Items N/A</p>	L. Shoemaker
<p>11. Adjournment Motion by: Conrad Stanley Seconded: Jeanne Gravelle</p>	L. Shoemaker
<p>12. Action Items Place Holder</p>	



Date: November 5, 2025
To: Board of Trustees
From: Director of Education
Subject: Supporting Student Regulation; Tier 1 Mental Health

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. 77

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:

At the Waterloo Catholic District School Board (WCDSB), our vision is that our Catholic schools are the heart of the community: success for each, a place for all. We believe that a mentally healthy learning environment begins with a strong foundation of safe and caring communities. Relational safety, the felt-sense of belonging, fairness, and care, is at the heart of students' ability to engage, learn, and thrive.

As a Catholic community, we recognize that our schools are more than places of learning. They are communities of refuge, guidance, and growth. Creating trauma-sensitive schools reflects our deep commitment to Catholic Social Teaching, particularly the principles of human dignity and solidarity. The Gospel calls us to stand with the most vulnerable, to cultivate spaces of safety and understanding, and to be shepherds of healing in a world that can often wound deeply.

Understanding Student Regulation

Student regulation refers to the ability to manage emotions, attention, and behaviour in order to meet the demands of the moment. It is the foundation for both learning and social connection. Neuroscience tells us that students can only access higher-order thinking when their brains and bodies feel calm and safe. As Dr. Bruce Perry describes, we must first “regulate, then relate, then reason.”.

At WCDSB, we recognize that all behaviour is communication and that dysregulation is often a stress response rather than defiance. Supporting student regulation begins with helping staff and students understand that calm and connection must come before reasoning and problem-solving. This understanding shapes how we respond to student needs in ways that are compassionate, relational, and restorative.

Our approach also emphasizes the parallel process: when adults model calm and co-regulated responses, students experience predictability and safety, allowing them to access learning. Regulated adults create regulated classrooms. Across the system, this shared mindset has fostered greater empathy among educators and strengthened relationships that support both learning and well-being.

Establishing a shared vocabulary for emotions and coping strategies across classrooms ensures that students can recognize and practice regulation skills in consistent and predictable ways, no matter where they are in the system. This consistency is particularly important for students with diverse learning profiles who benefit from structure and routine.

Finally, this work is deeply tied to equity and inclusion. Creating spaces where every student feels seen, understood, and valued supports both emotional safety and engagement in learning. Our focus on trauma-informed and social emotional learning ensures that regulation is not just about managing behaviour but about building belonging and trust.



Across data sources, including the Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI), student voice feedback through #HearNowON, and social work referral trends, we see that regulation is both a pressing need and a shared opportunity. While our most recent MDI results show encouraging gains in overall student well-being, with the proportion of students reporting low well-being decreasing from 47.6% in 2022 to 40% in 2025, challenges related to stress, anxiety, and behavioural challenges remain prevalent. These findings reaffirm the importance of Tier 1, universal supports that help all students develop the emotional language and coping tools to manage daily stress.

Tier 1 Framework and Focus

WCDSB's approach to mental health promotion is rooted in a multi-tiered system of support. At Tier 1, our focus is on proactive, universal strategies that strengthen the mental health and well-being of every learner while providing particular benefit for students with diverse learning profiles. The Tier 1 framework is anchored in three interconnected pillars: trauma- and stress-informed practice, social-emotional learning, and safe relationships supported by adult regulation. Together, these practices ensure that every student experiences predictable routines, a sense of belonging, and caring connections within their school community.

Current Initiatives Supporting Student Regulation

Administrator Leadership and Learning

Administrators play a pivotal role in shaping the conditions for student regulation within their schools. In 2024–2025, all administrators met in their Family of Schools groups with the Mental Health Lead to discuss and deepen the implementation of classroom regulation supports, kits, and spaces as a normalized, universal practice. These discussions also explored how WCDSB's five trauma-informed principles—connection, predictability, flexibility, delighting in students, and co-regulation—are brought to life across schools through relationships, classroom routines, and leadership practices.

In the spring, administrators participated in a full day of professional learning with Ginger Healy, focusing on trauma-informed leadership, co-regulation, and staff well-being. Each administrator received professional resources, including copies of the book *Regulation and Co-Regulation: Creating Calm and Connection in the Classroom*, along with regulation lanyards and tools to support staff and student learning. Resources were created to help cascade this learning across school communities, including staff meeting guides, short videos for parents and caregivers, and classroom-ready strategies and activities for educators.

This intentional focus on leadership capacity ensures that every school has a consistent, faith-aligned approach to promoting regulation—one that supports educators, families, and students alike.

System and Classroom Initiatives

Several initiatives continue to deepen WCDSB's shared understanding and consistent implementation of Tier 1 regulation practices across the system.

One of the most significant new projects is the Wayfinder Initiative, developed in collaboration with the Kindergarten and Literacy teams. This school year, every Kindergarten to Grade 3 teacher will receive a 'Wayfinder Kit' containing School Mental Health Ontario's Wayfinder resource, a read-aloud book, a laminated Mood Meter, and lesson guides designed to build students' emotional vocabulary and co-regulation skills. Wayfinder is a digital, grade-by-grade guide of lessons and activities aligned with the Ontario curriculum, created by a team of Ontario educators and school mental health



professionals. It provides a sequenced framework for mental health literacy in the classroom and offers ready-to-use communication materials to strengthen home–school connections. The project strengthens the link between literacy and mental health, supporting students in deepening their emotional vocabulary and allowing them to “name it to tame it”; develop the emotional vocabulary needed to identify and manage feelings. This fall, Professional learning has already reached 62 new teachers through NTIP, 51 educators through a joint Literacy and Well-Being session, and 45 Mental Health and Well-Being Champions who are supporting implementation across schools.

The Mental Health and Well-Being Champion network, now 54 members strong and representing 44 schools, continues to meet regularly to share strategies and cascade resources that support regulation, empathy, and adult wellness. These sessions emphasize the parallel process that regulated adults create regulated classrooms.

Faith and Wellness, the Catholic daily mental health resource developed by School Mental Health Ontario and OECTA, continues to be integrated into classroom activities and system-wide events such as Anti-Bullying Week and Mental Health Week. Classrooms are using these ready-made practices to build empathy, foster healthy relationships, and teach calm problem-solving. Combined with the use of classroom calming kits and regulation spaces, these practices are helping to build a culture of safety, reflection, and care across schools.

Another important development is the closer alignment with WCDSB’s Child and Youth Care Workers (CYCWs). This fall, CYCWs joined the Safe Schools Ambassador training, where they coached secondary students on the brain and nervous-system response to stress. Building on this success, CYCWs are working toward providing Tier 1, class-wide stress and coping instruction in secondary schools throughout the year, helping to normalize emotional regulation and coping skills as part of everyday learning. This “good for all, necessary for some” approach promotes consistency, equity, and inclusion across schools.

Student leadership continues to amplify these messages. In elementary schools, the Safe and Caring Schools Ambassador (SACSA) program had a soft launch last spring and is now active in 20 schools, engaging Grade 7 and 8 students in promoting kindness and inclusion. Across all secondary schools, 73 Safe Schools Ambassadors have been trained to Notice, Think, Act, and Follow Through, supported by staff leads and CYCWs who coach students in stress awareness and coping strategies. Together, these initiatives model regulation, build belonging, and encourage students to look out for one another.

Looking Ahead

In the coming year, the focus will be implementing the Wayfinder Project , strengthening CYCW classroom instruction on stress and coping, and deepening support for educators through the Champion network and ongoing professional learning. The board will continue to embed faith-aligned, trauma-informed, and social-emotional skill-building practices across schools, while also supporting parents and caregivers in learning about co-regulation at home.

As a Catholic school system, we are called to care for the whole person—mind, body, and spirit. Through our collective focus on regulation, we continue to create classrooms that are calm, connected, and compassionate, where every student has the safety and support they need to learn, belong, and thrive.



Recommendation:

Presented for your information.

Prepared/Reviewed By: Annalisa Varano
Director of Education
Gerald Foran
Superintendent of Learning: Special Education
Andrea Snyder
Mental Health Lead

*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.

