

**Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting
Wednesday, April 8, 2026**

MINUTES

The Special Education Advisory Committee of the Upper Grand District School Board met on Wednesday, April 8, 2026 at 7:03 p.m. in a hybrid meeting in the Boardroom at the Guelph Board Office.

Members Present: Laurie Whyte, Chair; Trustee; Denise Helm, Canadian Mental Health Association; Melissa Williamson, Community Member-at-Large; Andrea Wyshniowsky, Dufferin Child & Family Services; Maren Vsetula, FASD Ontario; Melody Dekorte, Inclusion Action in Ontario (IAO); Mandi McCreary, Kerry's Place Autism Services; Shelley Marks, OPVIC (Ontario Parents for Visually Impaired Children)

Staff Present: Wendy Donaldson, Superintendent of Student Achievement; Dianna Secord, Principal of Special Education; Alicia Ralph, Human Rights, Equity Advisor & Accessibility Commissioner; Kristen Smith, Manager, Communication, Language & Speech Services; Rochelle Murray-Cako, Elementary Principal; Melissa Mitchell, Michelle Youngblood, Deborah Snow, Special Education Consultants

Absent: Jennifer Tremaine, Easter Seals Ontario (regrets); John McNamara, Learning Disabilities Association of Wellington County

Call to Order

Laurie Whyte, Chair, called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone.

Land Acknowledgement and Anti-Racism Statement

Kristen Smith, Manager, Communication, Language & Speech Services, read the Land Acknowledgment and Dianna Secord, Principal, Special Education, read the Human Rights and Action statement.

Approval of Agenda of April 8, 2026

Moved by: Andrea Wyshniowsky

Carried

Approval of the Minutes of March 11, 2026

Moved by: Shelley Marks

Carried

Action Items

Wendy Donaldson provided the following updates:

- LRC 8 & 16 classes and next steps – Presentation tonight involving discussion and feedback from SEAC for inclusion to the end of year recommendations
- Review current systems and supports in place for students with FASD in partnership with DCAFS as well as Level 1 ASD – Board moving ahead to do their own inventory on current students with FASD or suspected FASD; accommodations in place and student success outcomes.

Correspondence

Letters from Simcoe County and Thames Valley were reviewed with feedback provided to the Chair on pending draft letter from UGDSB SEAC. SEAC members indicated they are in agreement to develop and send letters to the Minister in support of these issues. Request will be made to the Board for approval to develop and send these responses.

Open Forum – Best Practice and Good News

Denise Helm, Canadian Mental Health Association – Open Doors: Wellness Night is scheduled for April 22, 2026, from 5:00 pm-7:00 pm, organized by CMHA Youth Council and the Grove Hub to view the new building at 737 Woolwich Street, Guelph and learn about the different services and supports that CMHA and the youth hubs offer. Poster sent to SEAC

Policy Review Update

No policies out for public consultation

Human Rights Report Review

Alicia Ralph, Human Rights, Equity Advisor & Accessibility Commissioner, shared that Human Rights will be a standing agenda item.

She specifically focused on Anti- Black racism and special education, highlighting how research shows that Black students with special education needs, face delayed or different identification pathways, restrictive placements and systemic barriers.

The committee discussed the need to address these issues by considering identity factors such as race in decision-making and ensuring diverse voices are represented at the table. Alicia Ralph added that there is a need to evaluate programs and services using Human Rights, and consider who is being served, who faces barriers and how decisions impact all students.

Wendy Donaldson and Alicia Ralph discussed the need for potential structural changes to SEAC, including how data is presented and how advisory work is conducted, to better support intentional change and deepen the committee's advisory role using a Human Rights perspective. The committee agreed to continue developing this approach in future meetings.

OPVIC Presentation

Helen McRobbie, OPVIC Coordinator of SEAC representatives for Ontario, thanked SEAC for the opportunity to present and for their ongoing commitment to support visually impaired children.

Ontario Parents of Visually Impaired Children is provincially recognized as the advocacy voice of parents and guardians of children with vision loss in Ontario. This includes children and youth who are blind, or who have low vision, deaf blindness, or vision loss combined with one or more disabilities.

OPVIC expects all children with sight loss have a right to equal access to education as their peers. This is rooted in the Ontario Human Rights Commission Policy on *Accessible Education for Students with Disabilities*.

A good summary of the issues faced by OPVIC and their children, is given by David Lepofsky, active member of OPVIC, in an interview with Steve Paikin of The Agenda - 'Is Ontario Doing Enough for Students with Disabilities' on YouTube.

Helen McRobbie described the disparities in access to vision itinerant teacher support across Ontario, a shortage of qualified teachers of the visually impaired (TVIs) and the need for graduate-level training programs. She also highlighted issues with classroom teachers not always accepting itinerant teacher expertise and the importance of specialist services.

Helen McRobbie added that EAs should support students with visual impairments towards independence and peer integration, cautioning against over-support by adults. The need for clarity in roles among EAs, classroom teachers, and vision itinerants was discussed, as well as the lack of specialized EA qualifications in Ontario. The committee agreed to incorporate these principles into the development of EA best practice guidelines.

Shelley Marks, OPVIC representative and Helen McRobbie discussed the importance of accessible educational materials, the use of technology such as iPads and Brailers, and resources like AERO and CELA for alternate format textbooks. They also noted the need for timely access to materials and the benefits of programs like W. Ross MacDonald School for the Blind.

Strategies presented could also benefit students beyond those with visual impairments, such as AAC users and students with FASD.

Helen McRobbie shared various resources available to parents/guardians of visually impaired students. Shelley Marks noted that the Terry James Resource Centre at UGDSB works with CELA in providing alternate format textbooks. She added that not all school boards have this collaboration.

Class Placement Review

Blayne Primeau, Senior Manager – Research, Evidence & Innovation, explained that to gain a better understanding of class placements for LRC 8 & LRC 16 classes, it involved a multi-pronged approach. The UGDSB engaged an external researcher to do a literary review with the goal of understanding the best practices associated with special class placements. The researcher was asked to compare our current process and practices to the ones identified in the review and to make recommendations. In a separate but connected effort, we wanted to get a better understanding from students, parents and teachers about the strengths and challenges of the current process. Looking at these two sources of information separately, Student Support Services would then make recommendations to the UGDSB Executive Committee on next steps concerning class placements.

This process involved gathering feedback from students, parents, and teachers through surveys and interviews, using questions developed from research and reviewed by Student Support Services Managers.

He invited the committee to provide feedback on draft questions via a thought exchange exercise, a tool used to get feedback from a variety of people, is totally anonymous and works well in virtual environments.

Blayne Primeau and Wendy Donaldson explained that the goal is to complete data collection and analysis by June. The goal is to have this work inform programming for the fall of 2027-2028.

SEAC raised the issue of supporting students who have already been through the programs, suggesting that findings from the review could inform future interventions for students. Wendy Donaldson acknowledged this and noted the connection to the current Tier 3 interventions and ongoing program evaluation.

Special Education Plan Review

Dianna Secord, Principal of Special Education, presented the final draft of the Special Education Plan 2026-2027, highlighting updates, department goals and the process for SEAC members to provide feedback before final approval.

The Plan will be updated based on input, with a final version presented at the May SEAC meeting. In June, the Plan will be presented to SEAC for approval before being submitted to the Board.

Trustee Report**Laurie Whyte –**

- No report

Updates from Superintendent of Education

Wendy Donaldson provided the following updates:

1. WELLNESS WORKS: GRATITUDE - YOUR HIDDEN SUPERPOWER

Gratitude is more than just having “good manners.” It plays an important role in our overall well-being. People often show gratitude by saying “thank you,” but it is really about noticing and appreciating the people, experiences, and support that make our lives better.

2. 1,200 UGDSB STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN MONTH-LONG WATER SERIES, H2AWESOME

For the next several weeks, more than 1,200 students in the Upper Grand District School Board will be participating in H2Awesome, a month-long learning experience focused on understanding and protecting one of our most vital resources, water.

3. MORE THAN 1,000 UGDSB STUDENTS TO COMPETE IN HANDS-ON SKILLS SHOWCASE

The Upper Grand District School Board hosted its annual Elementary Skills Competition on April 7, 2026, at the University of Guelph Mitchell Athletic Centre.

4. A MESSAGE FROM WDG PUBLIC HEALTH: CANNABIS SAFETY STARTS AT HOME

This April, Wellington Dufferin Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) has some cannabis related information for parents and caregivers

5. SPRING INTO SPRING WITH UGDSB AND ONTARIO ACTIVE SCHOOL TRAVEL THIS APRIL

With the warmer weather beginning, spring is the perfect time to get active outdoors. Spring into Spring is an annual celebration of starting the new season which encourages students, families and staff to spend more time being active outdoors throughout the month of April.

6. Brock University Transition Newsletter

The newsletter aims to support students with disabilities in their transition from high school to Brock University. Please share this with your students, their families, and your colleagues.

Meeting Summary, Recommendation(s), Motion(s) and Action(s)

- LRC8 and LRC16 Class Placement Data: Gather student-centered data on

interventions in LRC8 and LRC16 classes to address gaps in achievement levels and add as an independent item to the action items.

- Correspondence – feedback on letters of support for Simcoe County DSB & Thames Valley DSB
- Student Transportation Services presentation - improved support during student transportation, including training for drivers, better awareness of student needs, and transition support like kindergarten bus training programs.

Other

Adjournment:

Moved by: Mandi McCreary

That the meeting be adjourned at 8:32 pm.

Carried