

Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting

Wednesday, May 13, 2026

MINUTES

The Special Education Advisory Committee of the Upper Grand District School Board met on Wednesday, May 13, 2026 at 7:01 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; Jennifer Tremaine, Easter Seals Ontario; 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); Ted Fransen, Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society

Staff Present: Wendy Donaldson, Superintendent of Student Achievement; Dianna Secord, Principal of Special Education; Alicia Ralph, Human Rights, Equity Advisor & Accessibility Commissioner; Catherine Borland-Kerr, Manager, Mental Health & Addictions; Kristen Smith, Manager, Communication, Language & Speech Services; Brent Bloch, Secondary Principal; Rochelle Murray-Cako, Elementary Principal; Melissa Legault, Melissa Mitchell, Nisha Patmanathan, Special Education Consultants

Absent: John McNamara, Learning Disabilities Association of Wellington County; Alethia O'Hare-Stephenson, Trustee (regrets)

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 statement and April King, Principal of Care & Treatment and Special Education Accessibility, read the Human Rights and Action statement.

Approval of Agenda of May 13, 2026

Moved by: Mandi McCreary

Carried

Approval of the Minutes of April 8, 2026

Moved by: Mandi McCreary

Carried

Laurie Whyte welcomed Ted Fransen, Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society representative, to SEAC and asked the committee to introduce themselves. Ted Fransen thanked everyone and provided details of his personal and professional experience.

Action Items

Wendy Donaldson provided the following updates:

- LRC 8 & 16 classes and next steps – Review is underway with the feedback collected. Review to be completed by June with recommendations being presented to SEAC in September 2026.
- Gather Data on student outcomes in LRC 8 classes – next steps to support Gap Reduction – present current achievement data for students in the EMPOWER program
- Review current systems and supports in place for students with FASD in partnership with DCAFS as well as Level 1 ASD – presentation in June on the achievement levels of students identified with FASD
- Educational Assistants next steps – the draft plan is being completed early June with principal feedback from EAs in June and Admin in July. EA Best Practice document will come to SEAC in September.
- Parent Portal – presentation in June
- Human Rights Review – presenting each month on the work being done around Human Rights focus
- Student Transportation Services Presentation – Brent McDonald, Associate Director will arrange presentation around student transportation and next steps for September 2026

Correspondence

Laurie Whyte explained the process for submitting letters to Board for approval prior to drafting support letters from SEAC.

The Board, at its meeting on April 28, 2026, approved the following resolution respecting the March 11, 2026 SEAC minutes:

That the Chair of SEAC write letters in support of the correspondence from the Simcoe County District School Board and the Thames Valley District School Board regarding the need for increased provincial funding for students with special education and mental health needs, as well as the significant wait times for community-based Speech and Language Pathology (SLP) services, and to advocate for a more integrated and efficient service delivery model

1. Draft letter of support from UGDSB SEAC expressing their full support for the funding priorities recently outlined by the Simcoe County District School Board (SCDSB). Draft letter reviewed by SEAC and amended. The committee approved the amended letter to be sent out.
2. Letter addressed to Honourable Paul Calandra, Minister of Education and Honourable Michael Parsa, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, from Alison Morse, Chair, SEAC, Thames Valley District School Board, expressing their growing concern about significant wait times for community provided Speech and Language Pathology (SLP) services and to advocate for a more integrated and efficient service delivery model. Draft letter to be written in collaboration with Kristen Smith, Manager, Communication, Language & Speech services and presented at June SEAC meeting for SEAC's review and approval.
3. Emailed letter dated February 25, 2026 (received April 6, 2026) from David Lepofsky, Chair, TDSB SEAC to the Honourable Paul Calandra, Minister of Education, asking for the TDSB Supervisor to attend TDSB SEAC meetings. The representatives of parents with students with disabilities/special education needs, wish an opportunity to address him directly, to have him hear of their concerns and to work collaboratively with him on finding solutions.

Motion: (Appendix A)

By: Melody Dekorte

That the UGDSB Special Education Advisory Committee supports the letter from David Lepofsky, Chair, TDSB, dated February 25, 2026, regarding the recurring unmet needs of students on behalf of UGDSB Special Advisory Committee; and That the Chair of SEAC be requested to send a letter to Paul Calandra, Minister of Education regarding the recurring unmet needs of students on behalf of UGDSB Special Education Advisory Committee.

Motion carried

4. Letter dated March 3, 2026, addressed to the Honourable Paul Calandra, Minister of Education, from Melaine Brynaet, Chair, SEAC, Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB, expressing their concern regarding the impact of Bill 33, Supporting Children and Students Act 2025 and its potential impact on school Boards.
No action required

Open Forum – Best Practice and Good News

Dianna Secord– Principal of Special Education - Education Support Personnel Day is Friday, May 15, 2026, and she expressed her sincere thanks to all educational assistants in

Upper Grand. The compassion and dedication, patience, and unwavering commitment our Education Support Personnel have for our students makes such a profound difference in their lives each and every day. Education Support Personnel play an essential role in fostering inclusive, safe, and supportive learning environments where students are empowered to grow in confidence, independence, and success. She added that we are deeply grateful for the countless ways they support our students, collaborate with our school teams, and contribute to the well-being of our school communities. We thank all our Education Support Personnel for the important work they do and for the positive impact they have across Upper Grand.

April King, Principal of Care & Treatment and Special Education Accessibility –

Guelph - very successful Special Olympics with Upper Grand and Wellington Catholic today in Guelph at St. James Catholic High School. There were over 650 athletes that participated, over 500 peer coaches, and another additional 100 volunteers. Dufferin will host Special Olympics next week on Thursday, which will have another over 350 athletes at that event as well.

Maren Vsetula, FASD Ontario – highlighted the 'Flip the Script on Stigma and FASD' campaign by Harrison's Hope, encouraging participation to reduce stigma.

Policy Review Update

Policy update following the April 28, 2026 Board meeting

At the April 28th Board meeting, the following policy updates were approved:

Policy 322 - Safe Operation of Schools and Board Sites

The following policies were rescinded:

Policy 307 - Outdoor Play Spaces (*procedures for Outdoor Play Spaces moved under Policy 322*)

Policy 605 - Cooperative Education

The following policy was released for public consultation:

Policy 205 - School Volunteers

Deadline for public input is May 13, 2026 at 4 pm EST.

Human Rights Report Review

Alicia Ralph, Human Rights, Equity Advisor & Accessibility Commissioner, presented on the intersection of human rights, special education, and 2SLGBTQIA+ identities.

She explained how students may navigate multiple identities simultaneously, such as disability, neurodivergence, sexuality, gender, race, and faith, and highlighted the need for SEAC to consider these intersections in their work.

The presentation addressed how students with special education needs may feel invisible or unsafe if only one aspect of their identity is supported and stressed the importance of holistic approaches to belonging and dignity.

SEAC was encouraged to elevate parent and student voices, identify intersectional barriers, and advocate for psychologically safe and inclusive environments.

Committee members discussed experiences related to exclusion from activities, the need for accessible curriculum on boundaries and relationships, and the challenge of holding space for diverse identities, with Alicia Ralph emphasizing that inclusion should not come at the expense of any group.

Canadian Mental Health Association Presentation

Denise Helm, CMHA Mental Health Worker in schools and SEAC representative, described the structure of mental health services, including counseling and treatment teams for different age groups, psychiatry for assessment and group and individual interventions.

The presentation covered intensive Case Management, Youth Outreach, Mental Health and Justice programs, Family Consultation, Mental Health Workers in Schools (CTEP) and Support Coordination for navigating community services.

She introduced the Interactive Substance Use Program (ISUP) for youth aged 12-25, and outlined developmental services such as Infant and Child Development, Mental Health Consultants in childcare, Specialized Assessments, Family Support Options and Behaviour Therapy.

Information was provided on walk-in and single session services, the Here4Kids and Here 24/7 access lines, and the Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario (YWHO) locations in Wellington County (Palmerston, Fergus & Erin) and Guelph (Woolwich Street, YMCA of Three Rivers, University of Guelph and Shelldale Family Getaway).

Special Education Plan 2026-2027 – Final Draft

Dianna Secord, Principal of Special Education, informed the committee that the Draft Special Education Plan 2026-2027 has been updated based on feedback and the final version including the staff updates will be presented at the June SEAC meeting.

Board Mental Health & Well-Being Strategy

Catherine BorlandKerr, Manager, Mental Health & Addictions, presented the review of the current three-year mental health and well-being strategy.

The current strategy focuses on student well-being promotion, engagement, inclusive approaches, Indigenous well-being, intervention pathways, and early identification, with relationships and community connections as foundational principles.

She explained that feedback is being collected from students, families, staff, and community partners through a survey, with questions designed to collect the same information, but specific to the participant.

The strategy review incorporates data from various sources, including public health surveys, School Mental Health Ontario survey, human rights reports, and community partners, with the survey open beyond May 15 to maximize responses. The new strategy will be finalized by June 30. Individuals with multiple roles (e.g. parent and community partner) can complete the survey from both perspectives. The survey was sent out to SEAC to share with community partners, parents and caregivers.

May Speech and Hearing Month

Kristen Smith, Manager of Communication, Language & Speech Services, provided an overview of Communication, Language and Speech Services and Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services within a Multi-Tiered System of Support. Services are delivered across three tiers: universal (Tier 1), targeted (Tier 2), and highly individualized and intensive (Tier 3), with examples of supports and interventions provided at each level.

The presentation focused primarily on Tier 1 (universal) supports, highlighting universal and capacity-building approaches for all students. These included collaboration between Child and Youth Counsellors (CYCs) and Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs), language and literacy webinars, professional learning through book studies, and accessible online resources for educators and families.

In recognition of May as Speech and Hearing Month, Kristen Smith outlined system-wide initiatives aimed at promoting awareness of communication, oral language, and hearing needs. Activities included Google Classroom promotions, staff awareness buttons, and visual campaigns emphasizing the importance of communication while celebrating diverse voices and communication methods.

Kristen also highlighted Season 2 of the *Social Learning Road Trip* podcast, hosted by UGDSB Speech-Language Pathologists. This season focuses on Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) and features expert interviews alongside practical strategies to support educators and families.

Trustee Report

Laurie Whyte –

- Laurie Whyte reminded the committee about the upcoming Trustee elections and encouraged individuals to consider running on October 26, 2026

Updates from Superintendent of Education

Wendy Donaldson provided the following updates:

1. WELLNESS WORKS: PUTTING EMPATHY INTO ACTION THIS MAY

In May our theme for Mental Health & Education Week is "Feel Well, Think Well, Learn Well....Together!". When we practice empathy, we help each other feel well by creating safe and supportive spaces, think well by understanding different perspectives without judgment, and learn well...together by growing through shared experiences and mutual care.

2. UGDSB STUDENTS EXCEL AT INTERNATIONAL DECA COMPETITION IN ATLANTA

Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) is proud to celebrate the outstanding achievements of 19 students from Centennial CVI, Guelph CVI and John F. Ross CVI who recently travelled to Atlanta, Georgia to compete at the DECA International Career Development Conference (ICDC).

3. SUSTAINABILITY SPOTLIGHT: TRANSPORTATION — GETTING TO SCHOOL IN GREENER WAYS

The Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) is continuing to highlight the seven focus areas of our Sustainability & Climate Action Plan (2025–2030). This month, we're focusing on Active Transportation.

4. KINDNESS MATTERS: UGDSB STUDENTS HEAR MESSAGES OF HOPE AND KINDNESS AT 2026 EMPOWERMENT SERIES

This year, Upper Grand District School Board students in grades 7 and 8 came together between March 5th to May 5th for the 2026 Empowerment Series.

5. UGDSB SECONDARY STUDENTS EXCEL AT SKILLS ONTARIO COMPETITION

Between May 4-5, 2026, many Upper Grand District School Board students participated in the Skills Ontario competition at the Toronto Congress Centre.

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

- Correspondence – draft letter of support for Thames Valley DSB for June
- Mental Health Survey – complete as your organization and as parent

Other

Wendy Donaldson expressed a big thank you for SEAC's contributions to the Special Education Plan and their ongoing partnership to support and inform the Mental Health 3 Year Strategy. She noted that input for Policy 205 – School Volunteers be sent to her.

Adjournment:

Moved by: Mandi McCreary

That the meeting be adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Carried

Appendix A

David Lepofsky, Chair, TDSB Special Education Advisory Committee

February 25, 2026

To: The hon. Paul Calandra, Minister of Education minister.edu@ontario.ca

Ministry of Education
14th Floor, 315 Front Street West
Toronto, ON M7A 0B8
Canada

Dear Minister,

Re: Recurring Unmet Needs of K-12 Students with Disabilities/Special Education Needs

I write on behalf of the Toronto District School Board's Special Education Advisory Committee SEAC. We seek your help for TDSB's 40,000 students with disabilities/special education needs, because you are now the elected official with ultimate responsibility for TDSB operations while under provincial supervision.

Under longstanding provincial law, each school board must appoint a SEAC to advise it on the development and implementation of special education, including, among other things, on the board's special education budget and Special Education Plan. Our SEAC members bring to bear extensive community connections and lived experience with the challenges in the school system facing students with disabilities/special education needs and their parents/guardians.

Too often, students with disabilities/special education needs face recurring barriers in Ontario's K-12 schools. The Government received a comprehensive report over four years ago from a Government-appointed panel that extensively documented these barriers and recommended reforms to remove and prevent them. TDSB's student population comes from Canada's largest and most diverse city. The intersectional disadvantages that its students with disabilities/special education needs are thereby intensified.

Since the Government removed the TDSB's school board trustees and appointed the provincial TDSB Supervisor, the situation facing TDSB students with disabilities/special

education needs has not demonstrably improved. In several ways, things have gotten worse for them.

Please direct the TDSB Supervisor to attend TDSB SEAC meetings. The representatives of parents of students with disabilities/special education needs wish an opportunity to address him directly, to have him hear of their concerns and to work collaboratively with him on finding solutions.

Previously, we had trustees attending every SEAC meeting, some as members, and often, simply as interested trustees. At some of the school boards that the Ontario Government has taken control over, your appointed Supervisor has attended at least some of their SEAC meetings. In sharp contrast, the TDSB Supervisor has not attended any of the monthly TDSB Special Education Advisory Committee Meetings, even though he stepped into the shoes of the school board trustees. Several trustees were members of SEAC. The Supervisor has been invited to attend each of our monthly SEAC meetings since He assumed his role last year.

Since the Supervisor was appointed, we have raised several issues with him in writing that are major concerns for students with disabilities/special education needs. We have asked him to take action to address these concerns. He has not taken any of the actions that SEAC requested. He has given no reasons for this.

Under Ontario Regulation 464/97, the elected trustees must afford SEAC an opportunity to be heard before making a decision on a SEAC recommendation. Trustees make those decisions in public, after a SEAC representative gets a chance to address the trustees, also in public. Trustees' discussions and decisions on any SEAC recommendation were conducted in public meetings, and live streamed to the public.

In contrast, in several cases, the provincial Supervisor has made adverse decisions on SEAC recommendations without affording SEAC a chance to be heard before the decision was made. Each such adverse decision was made behind closed doors. No reasons were given.

Making this worse, the provincial TDSB Supervisor has made decisions that are adverse to the needs of students with disabilities/special education needs, overturning earlier decisions of the trustees. He increased the maximum size of two categories of special education classes. He also overturned the ceiling of 32 students which the trustees had set for the size of any individual Grade 4 to 8 class. As long as TDSB maintains the overall average size of those classes, there is now no limit on the maximum size of any individual Grade 4 to 8 class. This can only hurt individual

students with special education needs who are placed in a mainstream Grade 4 to 8 class.

TDSB's SEAC has repeatedly emphasized that there is need for more staff to support the learning needs of students with disabilities/special education needs. TDSB budget officials have told SEAC every year that provincial funding for special education is less than the amount TDSB actually must spend to serve students with disabilities/special education needs. We have no indication that the provincial Supervisor has attempted to get any increase in provincial funding for TDSB.

It has become much harder for TDSB's SEAC to reach parents of students with disabilities/special education needs. For years, TDSB live streamed SEAC meetings. This helped SEAC and TDSB staff reach more parents of students with disabilities/special education needs and get helpful feedback from them. It helped SEAC members, TDSB staff and members of the public who missed a SEAC meeting but want to see what happened at it. Last October, you banned TDSB from livestreaming SEAC meeting. This has made things worse for parents of students with disabilities/special education needs.

Under the provincial Supervisor, TDSB has now cut back on the scope/content of its much-needed multi-year Special Education Review. This hurts students with disabilities/special education needs. SEAC was never consulted on this cutback, nor were parents of students with disabilities/special education needs. If anything, TDSB needs to far more inclusively involve SEAC in the plans for this Special Education Review and to expand that Review, not further limit it.

In SEAC's experience, it is important for there to be broad public accountability for the management of TDSB. The removal of the trustees and the elimination of their public meetings substantially undermine this, to the disadvantage of all students, and especially to the disadvantage of vulnerable students with disabilities/special education needs. It would benefit students with disabilities/special education needs for there to be far stronger and more effective democratic oversight of the schoolboard.

We urge you to broadly consult with parents of students with disabilities/special education needs, including with TDSB SEAC and other SEACs, about any future changes being considered to the governance and oversight of the publicly-funded school system. We are eager to work with you on this.

TDSB's Student and Family Support Office requires important additions to ensure that it effectively serves the learning needs of students with disabilities/special education needs and the accessibility needs of parents with disabilities. A staff complement as low as two at the TDSB's Student and Family Support Office, reported on City TV, is far too

small to serve 250,000 students including 40,000 students with disabilities/special education needs. The Student and Family Support Office staff should have expertise in education of students with disabilities. The Student and Family Support Office should offer to accommodate the needs of parents with disabilities in using its services.

Any delay in rectifying this situation can only compound the disadvantages that these vulnerable students too often face. We seek your intervention now to repair this situation. We welcome any opportunity to assist you in doing so.

Sincerely,

David Lepofsky CM, O. Ont

Chair Toronto District School Board's Special Education Advisory Committee

CC: Chairs of each Ontario school board's Special Education Advisory Committee.

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