

**Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting
Wednesday, March 11, 2026**

MINUTES

The Special Education Advisory Committee of the Upper Grand District School Board met on Wednesday, March 11, 2026 at 7:05 p.m. in a hybrid meeting in the Boardroom at the Guelph Board Office.

Members Present: Laurie Whyte, Chair; Alethia O'Hare-Stephenson, Trustees; Melissa Williamson, Community Member-at-Large; Jennifer Tremaine, Easter Seals 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; Brent Bloch, Secondary Principal; Kate Languedoc, Elementary Vice-Principal; Mark Howe, Melissa Legault, Amanda Prinnigar, Special Education Consultants

Absent: Denise Helm, Canadian Mental Health Association (regrets); Andrea Wyshniowsky, Dufferin Child & Family Services (regrets); Maren Vsetula, FASD 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

Amanda Prinnigar, Special Education Consultant, read the land acknowledgment statement and Melissa Legault, Special Education Consultant, read the Human Rights and Action statement.

Approval of Agenda of March 11, 2026

Moved by: Melody Dekorte

Carried

Approval of the Minutes of February 11, 2026

Moved by: Shelley Marks

Carried

Action Items

Wendy Donaldson provided the following updates:

- Review current systems and supports in place for students with FASD in partnership with DCAFS as well as Level 1 ASD – The committee has agreed to pause further action until the regional restructuring is complete and will reconvene once lead has been assigned.
- Educational Assistants – Dianna Secord and Wendy Donaldson met with various board personnel, including union leads and PLC to work towards opportunities for EAs to provide direct feedback on the current model design which is scheduled for the end of April. Results to be shared with SEAC once completed.
- Parent Portal – Mark Howe to share updates at April SEAC meeting.

Correspondence (Appendix A & B)

The committee reviewed the letter from Brandy Rafeek, Chair, SEAC, Simcoe County District School Board advocating for improved funding for students with special education and mental health needs.

Jennifer Tremaine put forth a motion to support Simcoe County DSB with a similar letter from SEAC.

Motion carried

The committee reviewed the letter 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.

Melody Dekorte put forth a motion to support Thames Valley District School Board with a letter from SEAC. Wendy Donaldson, along with Kristen Smith, Manager, Communication, Language and Speech Services will collaborate with the Chair to draft letter.

Motion carried

Open Forum – Best Practice and Good News

Jennifer Tremaine, Easter Seals Ontario Policy Review Update –It's Easter Seals month

Policy Review Update

At the February 24th Board meeting, the following updated policy was approved:

Policy 518 - Supporting Students with Serious and Life-Threatening Medical Conditions *(new name)*

- Updated procedures and Plans of Care forms are pending

The Upper Grand District School Board has released the following policies for public consultation and feedback is welcome on the draft documents until **March 26, 2026**. Please use the policy links to view the policy drafts.

Policy 302 - Purchasing

Policy 324 - Data Governance and Security *(new)*

Policy 413 - Safety (Behaviour Prevention and Intervention)

Policy 517 - Service Animals for Students

Inclusion Action in Ontario

Melody Dekorte, Inclusion Action Ontario (IAO) representative, described Inclusion Action Ontario as a non-profit organization dedicated to the inclusion of students with disabilities in education and the community, supporting families, advocating for rights, and providing resources and workshops.

The mission of IAO is to act as a Provincial champion and the driving force for inclusive education as the essential foundation for an inclusive life. Their vision is to form a community of empowered parents who can support one another in advocating for the inclusion of students with disabilities in education and the community.

She detailed the guiding principles and objectives of IAO. Her presentation outlined the benefits of inclusive education for all students, including improved learning, peer growth, effective use of resources, friendship development, team building, individualized education, preparation for adult learning, and support of civil rights.

Melody Dekorte shared the core principles and benefits of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a framework of inclusive education. She referenced the 5 P's of Inclusion by Dr. Shelley Moore and provided resources for educators and parents.

She shared her personal motivation for involvement, highlighted her daughter Scarlett's experiences and the importance of inclusive education, challenging misconceptions about nonverbal students and emphasizing the value of high expectations.

Human Rights Report

Alicia Ralph, Human Rights, Equity Advisor & Accessibility Commissioner, noted that the update being presented is in relation to the review that was undertaken. She requested that the review be circulated as an appendix to her report for SEAC's consideration.

Human Rights work is embedded in our Multi-Year Plan. The Vision of 2026+ is to be recognized as leaders in creating unparalleled, agile and inclusive learning experiences for all and the purpose is to inspire a love of learning and develop engaged, globally literate citizens.

The third-party review was commissioned to strengthen transparency and public confidence, identify systemic barriers, ensure coherence across policies and practices and to ground improvements in legal and ethical obligations with a focus on supporting students with disabilities and special education needs.

The review identified identity-based disproportionality in achievement, overrepresentation in suspensions, inconsistent school level implementation in programming, lack of clarity in complaint pathways and fear of retaliation in reporting with specific implications for students with disabilities regarding access, discipline and complaint processes.

Planned changes include standardized intake procedures, defined response timelines, public complaint pathway, Hate Incident protocols, annual Human Rights reporting and school-level tracking of identity-based incidents, as well as the Human Rights Early Identification & Student Success Initiative (HREISSI) for early identification.

Mandatory annual Human Rights training, ground-specific training, and intersectional data review are being implemented, with a focus on moving beyond compliance to foster positive environments and address professional learning gaps related to special education and human rights.

Alicia Ralph posed key questions to SEAC for their consideration in thinking about Human Rights and the specific disability indicators that should be included in the annual reporting.

She concluded that this is about establishing a foundation of the work that we're doing, helping to affirm the progress that we've achieved and identifying the gaps that continue to exist. It's also about thinking what implementation looks like across our board and ensuring that Human Rights is embedded into every facet of the work that we're doing, whether it's governance or student achievement, or even looking at indicators of well-being for our students and thinking about what that means from a Human Rights perspective.

Laurie Whyte proposed that Human Rights become a standing item on the agenda to discuss the key questions outlined in the presentation in future meetings.

Wendy Donaldson and Alicia Ralph will meet to develop a proposal for next steps. Members were encouraged to review the full report.

Mental Health Week

Catherine Borland-Kerr, Manager, Mental Health and Addictions, presented the upcoming Mental Health and Education Week plans, detailing the slogan, 'Feel Well, Think Well, Learn Well Together' for 2026.

Each day of the week will focus on a specific theme—self-care, calming the mind, building confidence, strengthening connection, and community celebration—with age-appropriate activities and resources provided for all grade levels.

Resources, including slide decks, special education considerations, and links to School Mental Health Ontario, will be distributed to staff in advance to facilitate integration into lessons, with materials available for all classrooms, including LRC and French immersion.

SEAC members were invited to review the materials thoroughly and provide feedback/suggestions by the end of March in preparation for the dashboard that will be shared with the system. Suggestions to be emailed directly to Catherine at catherine.borlandkerr@ugdsb.on.ca.

Special Education Plan Review

Dianna Secord, Principal of Special Education, updated SEAC on the review and revision process for the 2026-2027 Special Education Plan. She noted that the edits will align with Human Rights work in consultation with Alicia Ralph, Human Rights, Equity Advisor & Accessibility Commissioner.

Updates include collaboration with the Psychology Department on the Urgent Response System, third-party agreements with community teams, as well as plans to enhance parent access to community supports through direct links in the plan.

SEAC members were asked to provide recommendations and feedback by April 1st to Dianna Secord at Dianna.secord@ugdsb.on.ca. Updates and edits will be presented at the April SEAC meeting.

Trustee Report

Laurie Whyte –

- The Human Rights Report was presented to the Policy and Procedures Committee last week
- Waiting on Ministry approval for the name for the new high school

Updates from Superintendent of Education

Wendy Donaldson provided the following updates:

1. WELLNESS WORKS: WHY IS SELF-ADVOCACY IMPORTANT? LEARN THIS MARCH

This March, UGDSB's Wellness Works focus is self-advocacy. Self-advocacy is the ability to understand and communicate your strengths, needs, interests, and goals. It also includes recognizing when extra support may be helpful and knowing how to seek it.

2. GRAND VALLEY PS HEARS POWERFUL MESSAGES DURING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

On February 27, 2026, the Grand Valley and District Public School community had the incredible opportunity to welcome Shaun Boothe for a powerful and inspiring Black History Month presentation.

3. UGDSB APPROVES DRAFT SCHOOL YEAR CALENDARS FOR 2026-27

At the February 24, 2026, Board Meeting, the Upper Grand District School Board approved draft calendars for the 2026-2027 school year for elementary and secondary schools in the Upper Grand DSB. The draft calendars will now be submitted to the Ministry of Education for final approval.

4. IMPORTANT UPDATES FROM WDG PUBLIC HEALTH

Wellington Dufferin Guelph Public Health updates shared with the community included information on Poison Prevention Week and resources and tips for Nutrition Month.

5. UGDSB SCHOOLS PARTICIPATE IN COLDEST NIGHT OF THE YEAR FUNDRAISING EVENTS

At the end of February, Guelph Collegiate Vocational Institute and John F. Ross Collegiate Vocational Institute participated in Coldest Night of the Year (CNOY) fundraising events.

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

- Human Rights – Alicia Ralph and Wendy Donaldson will collaborate on next steps for advancing Human Rights work within the board. This will be a standing item on the agenda
- Correspondence – two letters to be drafted and presented at April meeting

Other**Adjournment:**

Moved by: Melody Dekorte

That the meeting be adjourned at 8:12 pm.

Carried

January 14, 2026

Appendix A

Honourable Paul Calandra
Minister of Education
5th Floor 438 University Avenue
Toronto, ON M7A 2A5

VIA EMAIL: minister.edu@ontario.ca

Subject: Funding Support for Students with Special Education and Mental Health Needs

Dear Minister Calandra,

The Simcoe County District School Board's Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), recognizes the Ministry of Education's continued commitment to Ontario's students and appreciates the recent funding announcement. As one of Ontario's fastest-growing boards, timely and adequate funding is essential in order for the board to meet the increasingly complex needs of students while maintaining a balanced budget in accordance with Ministry requirements.

SEAC has identified a number of priorities, and we respectfully urge the Minister to consider the following in future funding models:

1. **Alignment with current needs:** Funding should reflect up-to-date demographic and community data rather than legacy census information, ensuring resources match the realities of today's student population.
2. **Sustained investment post-pandemic:** The complexity of student needs, particularly in special education and mental health, has grown significantly since COVID-19. Long-term funding is critical to mitigate these impacts and provide equitable access to supports.
3. **Accessibility commitments:** With the *2025 Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) deadline approaching, boards require clear plans and financial support to address infrastructure needs such as elevators, ramps, accessible washrooms, and transportation.
4. **Community partnerships:** Student success depends on wrap-around services. We strongly emphasize the need for sufficient funding from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services for our Care and Treatment Education Partners such as NewPath, Kinark, and Mackenzie Health to ensure these programs remain viable and cost-effective. These partnerships are essential for providing timely mental health, medical, and therapeutic supports that schools alone cannot deliver. Funding must reflect the true costs of collaboration with community agencies, including transportation, staffing, and facilities.

5. Specialized staffing and Special Incidence Portion (SIP) funding: We support recent updates to the SIP, however, we remain concerned that changes may not fully address the needs of growth boards. Additionally, hiring for specialized roles should prioritize qualifications and proficiency to ensure students receive the highest quality support.

We appreciate your leadership and commitment to Ontario's most vulnerable learners. SEAC welcomes the opportunity to discuss these recommendations further and looks forward to your response.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Brandy Rafeek
Chairperson, SEAC



Kevin Berry
Vice-chairperson, SEAC

- c: Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
Hon. Doug Downey, MPP, Barrie-Springwater-Oro-Medonte
Hon. Andrea Khanjin, MPP, Barrie-Innisfil
Hon. Caroline Mulroney, MPP, York-Simcoe
Hon. Jill Dunlop, MPP, Simcoe North
Brian Saunderson, MPP, Simcoe-Grey
Ontario Public School Boards' Association
School Board Chairs
Chairs of Ontario Special Education Advisory Committees
Board of Trustees, SCDSB
Dawn Stephens, Director of Education, SCDSB
Dean Maltby, Associate Director, SCDSB



January 19, 2025

Appendix B

Hon. Paul Calandra
Minister of Education
15th Floor
438 University Ave.
Toronto, ON M7A 2A5

Hon. Michael Parsa
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
7th Floor
438 University Ave.
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

Dear Ministers Calandra and Parsa,

On behalf of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), I write to express our 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.

The Thames Valley District School Board is currently under provincial supervision and I am writing this letter as Chair of SEAC in the absence of Trustees to raise this concern on behalf of students with special education needs.

Currently, students referred to community providers such as Thames Valley Children's Centre (TVCC) wait up to three years for support. These delays are deeply concerning, especially as more students—particularly in the early years—present with complex communication needs. The recent Preschool Speech and Language Guidelines from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS), related to preschool SLP services, have also increased referrals to school-based SLPs, further straining resources.

TVDSB's SLP team delivers a comprehensive, tiered model of support embedded within the educational environment. Our team responds quickly, collaborates closely with educators, and aligns services with curricular goals to ensure timely and relevant interventions. However, the current division of responsibilities between school boards and community providers, as outlined in PPM-81, fragments services and creates confusion for families and educators.



We urge both Ministers to adopt an integrated service delivery model that unifies all speech and language services under the Ministry of Education and employs school board based SLPs. This model would improve accessibility, shorten wait times and provide equitable, seamless support for all students.

We welcome the opportunity to collaborate on this important issue and stand ready to help develop a modern, student-centered model for speech and language service delivery.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alison Morse".

Alison Morse
Chair, SEAC
Thames Valley District School Board

Cc Ontario Public School Board Association (OPSBA)
School Board Special Education Advisory Committees (SEAC)