UPPER GRAND DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting
Wednesday, October 14, 2026
MINUTES

The Special Education Advisory Committee of the Upper Grand District School Board met on Wednesday, October 14, 2026 at 7:04 p.m. in a hybrid meeting in the Boardroom at the Guelph Board Office.

Members Present: Alethia O'Hare-Stephenson**,** Trustee; Melissa Williamson, Community Member-at-Large; Andrea Wyshniowsky, Dufferin Child & Family Services; Jennifer Tremaine, Easter Seals Ontario; Melody Dekorte, Inclusion Action in Ontario (IAO); Tina MacPherson, Autism Ontario (Alternate); Ted Fransen, Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society

Staff Present: Wendy Donaldson, Superintendent of Student Achievement; Dianna Secord, Principal of Special Education; Becky Mantynen, Manager, Counselling & Attendance & Social Work; Kristen Smith, Manager, Communication, Language & Speech Services; Rochelle Murray-Cako, Elementary Principal; Nisha Patmanathan, Melissa Mitchell, Special Education Consultants

Absent: Laurie Whyte, Trustee & Chair (regrets); Denise Helm, Canadian Mental Health Association (regrets); Maren Vsetula, FASD Ontario (regrets); John McNamara, Learning Disabilities Association of Wellington County; Mandi McCreary, Kerry's Place Autism Services (regrets); Shelley Marks, OPVIC (Ontario Parents for Visually Impaired Children)

Call to Order

Andrea Wyshniowsky, Vice-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 Dianna Secord, Principal of Special Education, read the Human Rights and Action statement.

Approval of Agenda of October 14, 2026

Moved by: Ted Fransen

Carried

Approval of the Minutes of September 9, 2026
Moved by: Ted Fransen

Carried

Action Items
Wendy Donaldson provided the following updates:

- LRC 8 & LRC 16 – information to be shared with SEAC regarding LRC 8 and LRC 16 and next steps following last month's presentation on the research findings and community input
- Review current systems and supports in place for students with FASD in partnership with DCAFS as well as Level 1 ASD - An update is placed in the action items folder for SEAC's review. The document outlines the goals and focus areas to strengthen practices supporting students identified with FASD
- Educational Assistants next steps – presentation tonight outlining the work completed to date and activities planned for the fall
- Parent Portal – Mark Howe will return to update SEAC on the revised layouts from feedback received at September meeting
- Student Transportation Services Presentation – feedback from SEAC has been taken into consideration and Dianna Secord will return in the New Year with updates
- Mentally Healthy Return to Schools – as a follow-up, the comprehensive Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy will be presented in November as part of planning and implementation moving forward into 2026-2027

Open Forum – Best Practice and Good News
Ted Fransen, Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society – Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society recently held its annual fundraising walk-a-thon, marking 25 years of community support and advocacy. The growth has been remarkable: the very first event raised $4,000**,** while this year's event brought in an incredible $76,421.

Wendy Donaldson, Superintendent of Student Achievement, shared that she will be retiring on December 31, 2026. The recruitment process for both internal and external candidates started this week.

Policy Review Update
No policies currently out for public consultation.

Budget Update
Scott Keys, Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer, provided an overview of the Ministry of Education's funding framework, including core education funding, special education funding, and the impact of enrolment on funding allocations, including the components of the Special Education Grant, per-pupil funding, differentiated needs funding, supports for students with complex needs, and specialized equipment funding. For 2026-27, Upper

Grand DSB is projected to receive just under $32 million in per-pupil special education funding and just over $65 million in total special education funding, through the Core Education Fund.

He noted that much of the year-over-year increase in special education funding is attributable to provincially negotiated and funded salary and benefit benchmark increases for educational assistants, paraprofessionals, teachers, and other support staff. As a result, a significant portion of the additional funding is committed to maintaining existing staffing and services. The benchmark for 2026-27 will be increased after the central negotiations have been completed.

Scott Keys also shared that the Ministry of Education has recently cautioned school boards about future enrolment trends. He reviewed Upper Grand DSB's enrolment patterns, noting that enrolment has declined in three of the past several years, with growth occurring only in 2023-24.

The committee was advised that student enrolment remains a key driver of provincial education funding. Continued enrolment declines could have implications for future funding allocations and will require ongoing monitoring to assess potential impacts on board resources and service delivery.

Summer Mental Health Programs

Becky Mantynen, Manager, Counselling & Attendance and Social Work, reported that the Ministry of Education provided $253,000 for 2026 Summer Mental-Health programming. This funding allowed for the delivery of online and community-based programs, serving 221 students through partnerships with DCAFS, CMHA, and other providers.

It also paid for UGDSB clinical and educator staff to support program development over the summer for:

- Grief Resources and Supports for use during the school year
- Early Years Project to build capacity within schools
- Development of Clinical Groups and materials over the summer for use during the school year

The online TRAILS anxiety group served 15 students in Grades 7 and 8; in-person offerings included Sunrise Stables with 38 participants; Fiddleheads Care Farm with 75; Ubuntu for Black youth with 20; Therapeutic Riding with 30; Camp Create through DCAFS with 14; GLOW for 2SLGBTQ youth with 17; and CMHA’s Tools for Life and Her Circle with six students each.

Three hundred referrals came primarily through child-and-youth counsellors, social workers, principals, and other staff already supporting students. Some families declined; some students did not complete participation; and some referrals were not appropriate for

camp because the student required a higher level of supervision or one-to-one support than the setting could provide.

Becky Mantynen noted that for future planning, the Summer Mental Health team would need to consider extending the program to rural areas (costly due to bussing considerations) and to balance programs staffed directly by Upper Grand DSB versus funding community agencies to deliver services.

Video of the Summer Mental Health program experiences was shared with SEAC. Student feedback emphasized relationships, animals, creative activities, and new experiences, while also requesting longer programs, full days, and more interaction with horses.

Model Change

Dianna Secord, Principal of Special Education, described the shift from the previous Support Model to a new model designed to provide earlier, more consistent, relationship-based support for students by embedding consultants in schools while allowing regional consultants to focus on academic programming, IEP quality, and system-wide consistency.

The previous model used nine special education consultants assigned to schools across the board and five itinerant consultants who responded to referrals involving students or classrooms experiencing significant difficulty. Itinerant consultants generally worked in a school for four to six weeks, and a dedicated Kindergarten to Grade 3 team.

The new model has five regional consultants responsible for Tier 3 literacy and mathematics interventions, IEP development, data analysis, and collaboration to identify trends and improve consistency across schools. Ten school-based consultants are attached to approximately seven or eight schools each and are expected to work alongside administrators, teachers, educational assistants, and SERTs in classrooms, to observe students in their learning environments, identify barriers, model strategies, and strengthen staff capacity. They provide direct support for students presenting with struggle, regulation, behavior, participation, or other significant challenges. Regional and school-based consultants are teachers with additional special education qualifications and experience in roles such as SERT, LRC 10, and/or LRC 16.

The key benefit to this model is that the school-based and regional consultants now provide a more intentional and responsive approach to supporting our students with special education needs across our board.

EA Best Practices

Dianna Secord, Principal of Special Education, outlined the development and September launch of an Educational Assistant Professional Practice Framework. Initial work began in January 2026 with Educational Assistants reviewing the framework during professional development sessions and contributing final wording in June. The framework defines

expectations across four domains: Inclusion and Independence, Care, Safety and Well-Being, and Collaboration.

The final EA Professional Practice Framework was distributed to school administrators and made available in digital and printer-friendly formats so school teams can use it to understand and support educational assistant practice.

Trustee Report
Laurie Whyte –

- No update

Updates from Superintendent of Education
Wendy Donaldson provided information on the following:

- Wellness Works: October 2026 Focuses on Building Relationships
- Information for Elementary (Only) Parents/Guardians: October 26, 2026, PA Day
- Let's Walk & Roll! October is IWalk and IWheel Month
- October is K-12 Cyber Awareness Month
- New this year, the Financial Literacy Graduation Requirement
- Two Students go Above and Beyond for National Accessibility Week Project
- UGDSB students continue strong gains in key EQAO results (presentation on students with special education needs EQAO data coming to SEAC)

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

- Presentation in November – Communication, Language & Speech Services model of intervention and supports

Other
Next meeting – November 11, 2026

Adjournment:
Moved by: Jennifer Tremaine

That the meeting be adjourned at 8:20 pm.

Carried