

Upper Grand District School Board  
**Special Education Advisory Committee**

**Minutes**

**Wednesday, March 6, 2024**

The Special Education Advisory Committee of the Upper Grand District School Board met on Wednesday, March 6, 2024 at 7:01 p.m. in a hybrid meeting in the Boardroom at the Guelph Board Office.

**The following Association Members were in attendance:** Andrea Wyshniowsky, Dufferin Child & Family Services; Dianna Landry, Easter Seals Ontario; Mandi McCreary, Kerry's Place Autism Services; Shelley Marks, OPVIC/VIEWS (Ontario Parents for Visually Impaired Children); Melody Dekorte, Inclusion Action in Ontario (IAO); Maren Vsetula, FASD Ontario; Laurie Whyte, Alethia O'Hare-Stephenson, Trustees

**Present from staff:** Wendy Donaldson, Superintendent of Education; Peggy Blair, Superintendent of Education; Jennifer Meeker, Principal of Special Education; April King, Principal of Special Education 12-K; Jenny Marino, Mental Health and Addictions Lead; Alicia Ralph, Human Rights, Equity Advisor & Accessibility Commissioner; Rochelle Murray-Cako, Elementary Principal; Special Education Consultant, Jill Milrose

**Regrets:** Melissa Williamson, Community Member-at-Large; Amber Barens, Waterloo Wellington Down Syndrome Society

**Absent:** Denise Helm, Canadian Mental Health Association

Laurie Whyte, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and spoke about Michael Jacques, a young man that was a guest speaker at the System Leaders meeting in February. He has written a book 'Can't Read, Can't Write, Here's my Book I Belong, Can I play' using an iPad's speech to text function. His book is told through the eyes of a compassionate and determined young man with autism and an intellectual disability. It's a collection of compelling life stories and discoveries that teach us how to embrace and celebrate our differences. Michael never surrenders to the idea of can't and speaks about topics such as learning, inclusion, advocating independence and the power of perseverance. Laurie Whyte encouraged members to check out the book.

Jennifer Meeker, Principal of Special Education, read the land acknowledgment statement and April King, Principal of Special Education 12-K read the anti-racism statement.

**Approval of Agenda of March 6, 2024**

Mandi McCreary moved that the agenda of March 6, 2024, be approved.

**The motion carried.**

Upper Grand District School Board  
**Special Education Advisory Committee**

**Approval of the Minutes of February 14, 2024**

Maren Vsetula moved that the minutes of February 14, 2024, be approved.

**The motion carried.**

**Action Items**

Wendy Donaldson provided the following updates:

- Human Trafficking presentation – moving to April 2024
- Mental Health Literacy Modules for Gr. 7 & 8 – Presentation tonight. Wendy Donaldson thanked SEAC for their input in helping to develop the work being done between Program and our Mental Health Lead, Jenny Marino.

**Correspondence**

No correspondence this month.

**Open Forum – Best Practice and Good News**

**Dianna Landry, Easter Seals Ontario** – March is Easter Seals Month. A change this year is the province wide initiative to change the paper Easter eggs at the retailers, to images of children with physical disabilities, mainly due to the connotation with Easter and trying to remove it from the reference to Christianity. The Easter Seals Scholarship program is opening up this week and registrations are due in by April 19<sup>th</sup>. Information was sent out to schools about the scholarship program.

**April King, Principal of Special Education 12-K** - there were approximately 180 athletes from UGDSB and two Wellington Catholic schools that participated in the Special Olympics Baci Ball tournament. It was a great turnout!

**Maren Vsetula, FASD Ontario** – The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference will be held on Wednesday May 29<sup>th</sup>. The theme for this conference is balancing risk and building resilience and each of the speakers will speak about FASD and neurodiversity from their perspective and from their own experience.

**Wendy Donaldson, Superintendent of Education** – attended the Calgary Special Olympics while on vacation. It was a great opportunity to see kids from across the country regardless of age coming together to celebrate as a community and to compete to the best of their ability across many of the different events.

Maren Vsetula asked if Special Olympics is made available to schools outside the board.

Wendy Donaldson replied that it's an opportunity as a board to follow up on this because it is a community-based event, and we work alongside our Catholic partners in

Upper Grand District School Board  
**Special Education Advisory Committee**

this area. She added that she'll check if this is a communication or structural issue that we can work to address.

**Melody Dekorte, Inclusion Action in Ontario (IAO)** – An online Inclusive Schooling Conference on March 27 & 28 is being offered by Illume Learning and some of the presenters include Dr. Ross Green and Dr. Shelley Moore. Free registration closes March 22. The conference is in Australia and they're making it available for free for 72 hours afterwards so that anyone can easily catch up. There's a cost for an extra 90 days access. It looks like a fantastic resource for teachers and educators in brainstorming and becoming more inclusive in meeting the needs of the various students with different abilities in the school board. Information to be sent to SEAC.

**Policy Review Update**

Wendy Donaldson noted that some policies have been rescinded or removed and the parts that were in those policies have been built into the policies that were recently approved. Policies approved at the February Board meeting are:

[Policy 200 - Community Use of Schools and Facilities](#) *(new name)*

[Policy 216 - Communications](#) *(new)*

[Policy 322 - Safe Operation of Schools and Board Sites](#) *(new)*

[Policy 520 - Continuity of Learning](#) *(new)*

[Policy 709 - School Generated Funds](#) *(new policy category/number)*

**Special Education Plan - Updates**

Jennifer Meeker, Principal of Special Education shared the suggested edits to the Special Education Plan and asked for the committee's feedback. April King, Principal of Special Education 12-K noted that the Accessibility (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act) section was updated as part of the Multi Year Plan and no changes are required at this time. Josh Boden, Manager, Psychology & BCBA highlighted some of the changes to the early identification and prevention strategies through the In School Team (IST) and Consultant Support Team (CST) and special class placements. The revised Special Education Plan will be presented at the April SEAC meeting for consultation and in May for SEAC's approval before being presented at the June Board meeting.

**Mental Health Literacy Update**

Jenny Marino, Mental Health & Addictions Lead provided the background of the Ministry mandated Mental Health Literacy Modules and explained the work that has been done to enhance the design and delivery of the current curriculum in Health Physical Education for Grade 7/8. This was done in consultation with SEAC as well as School

Upper Grand District School Board  
**Special Education Advisory Committee**

Mental Health Ontario and Student Support Services departments. Information was shared on the Board and school websites. Tips sheets in multiple languages were available on the parent portal. A news release was communicated out and information was posted on social media.

Maren Vsetula commented that not all students in LRC classes have their health and physical education classes with the integrated students. She added that they are not getting their full health programming because of their schedule between integrated classes.

Laurie Whyte thanked Jenny Marino for her presentation.

*PowerPoint Presentation uploaded to the SEAC folder on UGCloud.*

**Project SEARCH**

Peggy Blair, Superintendent of Education and April King, Principal of Special Education 12-K shared the details of UGDSB's partnership with the YMCA of Three Rivers Guelph, WCDSB, the University of Guelph and March of Dimes scheduled to begin in 2024-2025. Project SEARCH was developed at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center in 1996 and is a school-to-work training program for students with disabilities. The program reports that approximately 75% of Project SEARCH students are employed within a year of graduation.

Several Project SEARCH employers include Halton DSB & Oakville Trafalgar Memorial Hospital; Halton Catholic DSB & Milton General Hospital; Toronto DSB & Holland Bloorview and Toronto Rehab-UHN; Hamilton-Wentworth DSB, YMCA/YWCA & Ron Joyce Children's Treatment Centre. Since September 2022, the Ontario Ministry of Education has continued to provide seed money for 20 new sites.

Alethia O'Hare Stephenson thanked the presenters for the great information and the exciting program. She commented that there's a lot of focus around the students and getting them to employment. She asked if there was anything done at the organizations that these students are now potentially going to.

Peggy Blair replied that the employer will be provided with education and training for their staff to ensure that our interns have the supports to be successful. April King added that Project SEARCH will visit the site and provide a full two-day visit explaining their standards so that the employer and staff are following their fidelity model. Project SEARCH has a full repository of resources that is used with the business partners.

Peggy Blair added that there was no infrastructure in the province when Project SEARCH started, now it's across Canada. The host business partners meet about once a month with the other host businesses, and they go through the things they're working on and some of the challenges they're facing.

Upper Grand District School Board  
**Special Education Advisory Committee**

Laurie Whyte commented that it's not just a program that you can just drop in, there's lots of support around it for the individual and all parties to make the program successful.

Maren Vsetula commented that it would be a great opportunity for middle school students, who may one day become part of Project SEARCH, to learn about the amazing things that Project SEARCH is doing. It would make them feel less lonely knowing that there is an option available to them.

April King replied that in her full day training with Project SEARCH, the first year is harder to advertise when you're launching the project. They discussed having a class T-shirt that they could wear with their peers and potentially come back and visit their feeder schools and share what it was like to be accepted.

Melody Dekorte asked if this can be expanded. Is it difficult to find businesses to partner with? And what happens if an employer offers jobs to the interns and there are no more left? Do the other interns have to find another business?

Peggy Blair replied that when searching host businesses, they look for a wide breath of the types of jobs they offer so there is a variety of jobs for interns and that the host business is interested in partnering with us. She added that we continue to look for partnerships.

Laurie Whyte thanked the presenters for the great information.

*PowerPoint Presentation uploaded to the SEAC folder on UGCloud.*

**Cooperative Education Pilot for Students with Disabilities**

Peggy Blair, Superintendent of Education and April King, Principal of Special Education 12-K shared the details of the Ministry of Education funded pilot project specifically for secondary students with disabilities to earn credits. This is a great opportunity for them to gain practical experience in an area of their interest thereby improving their chances of finding employment after graduation.

Andrea Wyshniowsky commented that she's excited about the co-ops and that students are excited at school. She asked what were the challenges? Was it getting employers? Was it getting the schools excited in this? How do you tackle a large project like this recognizing that there's so many logistics to deal with?

Peggy Blair replied that they received funding for one person and decided to hire two Disability Support Workers (DSW) for the second semester so they could support students effectively instead of spreading it over the year with one. She added that they wanted to ensure that the employer, the student, and the school team were experiencing success.

Upper Grand District School Board  
**Special Education Advisory Committee**

April King added that she was able to pull the data of all our Grade 9 students (through year seven) and look at the students who were eligible for co-op now. She met with the Special Education Heads to discuss who was independent enough to work some days without the support as the DSW wasn't with them every day.

They discussed regions and even though they approached businesses in other areas, they recognized that a lot their host businesses for Project SEARCH were in Guelph. She added that they wanted to ensure that they were still offering the co-op like opportunities for the other regions who may not necessarily be able to access Project SEARCH.

Andrea Wyshniowsky responded that she's excited to see the project expand. She added "I think it's going to be great!"

*PowerPoint Presentation uploaded to the SEAC folder on UGCloud.*

### **Trustee Report**

#### **Laurie Whyte –**

- A decision was made to not rename the Guelph Board office but to find a more living, vibrant and representative way of honouring Dr. Martha Rogers. As part of this process, there was a recommendation that UGDSB have a policy review of the policy on naming of buildings and schools.

### **Updates from Superintendent of Education**

Wendy Donaldson highlighted the following updates:

#### **1. Wellness Works: March is the time to focus on Self-Advocacy**

As we move closer to the end of the school year, the Upper Grand District School Board and Wellness Works committee are using March as a time to reflect on self-advocacy. <https://www.ugdsb.ca/blog/wellness-works-march-is-the-time-to-focus-on-self-advocacy/>

#### **2. UGDSB introduces new grade 7/8 Mental Health Literacy Modules to support student mental health and well-being**

The Upper Grand District School Board will be delivering modules to grade 7/8 students to enhance mental health literacy.

Earlier this year, the Ministry of Education introduced a series of modules to support the existing mental health literacy expectations within the grades 7 and 8 Health and Physical Education curriculum. It is important to note that this is not new learning; this is a way to enhance the delivery of the existing curriculum and focus on mental health literacy. <https://www.ugdsb.ca/blog/ugdsb-introducing-new-grade-7-8-mental-health-literacy-modules-to-support-student-mental-health-and-well-being/>

Upper Grand District School Board  
**Special Education Advisory Committee**

**3. EQAO offering parent information webinars for primary and junior assessments**

In a bid to ensure student success and offer support for parents, EQAO has announced a series of webinars focusing on the Primary and Junior assessments of Reading, Writing and Mathematics.

These webinars aim to inform parents/guardians about the purpose and format of Ontario's large-scale assessments, while also providing valuable resources and opportunities for direct interaction with EQAO staff.

<https://www.ugdsb.ca/blog/eqao-offering-parent-information-webinars-for-primary-and-junior-assessments/>

**4. UG students and staff celebrate Special Olympics Bocce**

Hundreds of student athletes from across the Upper Grand District School Board came together on March 5, 2024, at the Royal Distributing Athletic Performance Centre to participate in Special Olympics Bocce.

<https://www.ugdsb.ca/blog/ug-students-and-staff-celebrate-special-olympics-bocce/>

**5. John F. Ross students host a school event to empower youth action**

*As global issues increase yearly, their effects on the younger generation grow as well. Despite many young students having been told that their influence is minimal, John F. Ross CVI students were determined to increase awareness amongst their peers. This year, the school is running its first ever "Global Awareness Symposium," an event designed to inspire curious students to make an impact by introducing them to those dealing with global issues of many types.*

Students were quick to take a liking to the organized "Global Awareness Symposium," seeing it as a starting place for how they can help their community. Many students are passionate about social justice but feel helpless in the face of disaster, not knowing how they can be a part of the solution. With the Global Awareness Symposium, JFR students are given a chance to learn about the adversities faced by others globally and locally, and how they have overcome or dedicated their lives to helping the cause.

<https://www.ugdsb.ca/blog/john-f-ross-students-host-a-school-event-to-empower-youth-action/>

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

- Scheduling of LRC 8 & LRC 16 classes to ensure central programming being offered to same age peers remain accessible to students in these congregated settings.
- Collaboration on proactive and responsive approaches that can be taken between the school board and members of SEAC to support students with

## Upper Grand District School Board

### **Special Education Advisory Committee**

intellectual disabilities and their safety in relation to concerns of Human Sex Trafficking.

- Invitation to Special Olympics for special needs students that are outside of our Board
- Training opportunity for office staff around trauma informed training

#### **Adjournment**

Dianna Landry motioned for adjournment of the meeting at 8:40 p.m.