



GREATER ESSEX COUNTY DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

The Special Education Advisory Committee meeting was held on Wednesday, November 12, 2025, at the Administration Building, 451 Park Street W., Windsor, ON.

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Tim McCarthy, Autism Ontario

Kim McKinley, Trustee

Joanna Conrad, Windsor-Essex Down Syndrome Association

Martha Vukov, Community Living Essex County

Mary-Ann Fuduric, Learning Disabilities Association Windsor-Essex County

Sarah Yang, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder/Ontario Network of Expertise

BOARD PERSONNEL IN ATTENDANCE

Vicki Houston, Director of Education

Chris Mills, Superintendent of Schools/Special Education Program and Services

Laura Bates, Supervising Principal of Special Education

Marc Crundwell, Supervisor of Psychological and Speech Language Services

Jodi Burgon, OPC Elementary Representative

Cathy Ruggirello, Specialist Teacher of Students Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

REGRETS

Theresa Williams, OPC Secondary Representative

ABSENT

Nancy Armstrong, Trustee

Chelsey Lackovic, Windsor Council of Home and School Association

RECORDER

Melissa Beaton

1. Call to Order

Chairperson McCarthy called the meeting to order at 1:02 pm.

2. Acknowledgement of Traditional Lands and Water

K. McKinley read the approved GECDSD Land Acknowledgement.

3. Approval of Agenda

Moved by: M. Fuduric

Seconded by: K. McKinley

That SEAC approve the agenda for November 12, 2025.

The motion was carried.

4. Declaration of conflict of interest

None

5. Approval of Minutes

Moved by: J. Conrad

Seconded by: K. McKinley

That SEAC approve the Minutes of October 8, 2025.

The motion was carried.

6. Business Arising as a Result of the Minutes

There was no new business as a result of the minutes.

7. Special Education Advisory Committee Handbook

Moved by: M. Fuduric

Seconded by: M. Vukov

That SEAC approve the SEAC Handbook.

The motion was carried.

8. Special Education Presentation

- Deaf/Hard of Hearing Role and Services presented by Dr. C. Ruggirello
The department supports students with documented hearing loss, based on audiological assessments, and works collaboratively with school teams on programming, IEPs, transitions, and parent engagement. Services include reviewing audiological reports, managing hearing assistive technology, and providing tailored strategies to support language development (American Sign Language or English), literacy, and self-determination. Students receive varying levels of support—consultative, monitoring, or direct—based on a service delivery rubric.
The team consists of qualified specialist teachers certified by the Ontario College of Teachers, all trained in Deaf Education. The presentation emphasized the distinction between ASL and English, highlighted community and provincial resources, and outlined partnerships with organizations such as CAEDHH to promote professional standards and awareness. Hearing assistive technology and alternative programs at provincial schools were also discussed as key supports for students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.
- Breaking Barriers Grant presented by C. Mills
We are happy to share the approved Barrier Grants for the 2025-2026 school year. These projects aim to enhance accessibility, promote inclusive education, and support students with diverse learning needs. Developed in collaboration with community organizations, educational institutions, and specialized foundations, the initiatives reflect a strong commitment to equity and improved educational outcomes. Funding allocations cover a range of targeted supports, including literacy interventions, professional learning, experiential programs, and assistive technology.
Key projects include:
 - Adapted Literacy Kits - To improve book accessibility for students with physical disabilities
 - Empowering Transitions - Building self-advocacy skills for Grade 7-8 students with learning disabilities
 - Empowering Transitions - STRIVE: Board-wide event for students, families and educators to prepare for high school transitions
 - Anti-Ableism Professional Learning - To strengthen inclusive practices across the system
 - Experiential Learning & Transit Access - Enhancing independence and community engagement for developmental learners
 - Literacy Pilot 2026 (Grades 4-8) - Structured literacy coaching for Grades 4-8 - (in-class supports)

- Inclusive Futures - Harnessing brain computer interface technology for autonomy and accessibility in the classroom
- Breaking Barriers - System-wide training on Accept Identify Move (AIM) behaviour analytic self-regulation curriculum.

9. Special Education Update

- Update for Supports on Tier 3 Students shared by C. Mills
This update outlined strategies and progress for students requiring intensive interventions. Key areas of focus include academic supports, classroom supports, social-emotional supports, and monitoring systems. Academic strategies involve targeted IEPs, baseline data collection, and differentiated instruction using resources like Mathology and JUMP Math. Classroom supports emphasize collaboration between homeroom teachers and Learning Support Teachers (LSTs), flexible groupings, and embedded interventions. Social-emotional supports include monthly themes (e.g., inclusivity, stress management, perseverance) and the identification of caring adults for each student, supported by School Mental Health Ontario resources.
Monitoring is achieved through regular team meetings, scheduled IEP checkpoints, and data tracking tools such as UFLI, Quick Phonics Screener, Acadience, and Lexia. Reported successes include improved academic safety, stronger IEPs, enhanced teacher capacity, and positive student outcomes such as increased independence and a sense of belonging. Teachers have engaged in professional learning and integrated innovative tools, including AI, to support students. Families report satisfaction with homeroom instruction and smoother transitions.
Next steps focus on expanding teacher capacity, strengthening IEP development, continuing social-emotional initiatives, and ensuring adequate staffing and training for both teachers and students. Emphasis will remain on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiated instruction, and direct progress monitoring with students and families to sustain positive outcomes.

Some key discussion points from the Committee

- Training and Resources: Emphasis on classroom training through LDAWE and Lexia refreshers for principals; discussion on creating a Special Education resource hub for easier access to information
 - Barrier Grants and Supports: highlighting the importance of utilizing approved barrier grants to support struggling learners, particularly at the Junior/Intermediate level, and aligning these initiatives with Tier 3 supports.
 - Tiered Support Model: Clarification provided on Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 interventions, with Tier 3 offering intensive classroom-based support and strategies for teachers.
 - Transition Planning: Concerns and suggestions around Grade 7/8 transitions to high school, including IEP information sessions, open houses, virtual nights, and collaborative planning between elementary and secondary schools.
 - Social-Emotional and Caring Adult Connections: Discussion on documenting caring adults for students and strategies to strengthen these relationships, including bulletin boards and structured check-ins.
- Professional Development Updates shared by L. Bates
November PD includes Tackling Racism and Being Safe, Seen, and Successful. This session will focus on Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy with connections to the principles of Safe and Accepting Schools Framework.

10. Items for Future Agendas

Suggestions for future agenda items were shared for consideration, including the role of the Transition Navigator.

11. Association Reports

- S. Yang, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder/Ontario Network of Expertise – our next FASD Caregiver Support Group is November 19, 2025 with the topic of FASD and Sexuality. The flyer was shared with the Committee.
- M. Fuduric, Learning Disabilities Association Windsor-Essex County – we launched our new Thrive Coaching program. Thrive Coaching supports youth and young adults with learning disabilities and ADHD as they transition from high school to post secondary education, employment, and independent living. Through individualized coaching, participants work on executive functioning skills, time management, self-advocacy, and confidence building – empowering them to reach their goals and thrive in life beyond school. LD at School is part of LDAO, they have a lot of great resources to use in the classroom that is evidence based. Visit <https://www.ldatschool.ca/resources/> for more information.
- M. Vukov – Community Living Essex County – an application for a SEAC alternate was submitted.
- J. Conrad, Windsor-Essex Down Syndrome Association – Several upcoming events include: Teen Group Meet-Up September 20th at Farrow Riverside Miracle League Park, Teen/Adult Dance Program Mondays from 6-7pm at WFCU Centre from September 22nd through December 15th, Adult Cooking Program at Gino Marcus Community Centre every other Thursday from September 18th – December 11th, Reading Program for elementary age children Wednesdays beginning October 1st for 8 weeks, Celebration of Life event on October 4th at Colasanti's, Caregiver Series – Self-Care for Caregivers on October 5th at Sohum Scent Bar, Caregiver Series – Paint the Afternoon Away on October 25th at Painting Perfection, Children ages 6-12 Gym Program, Sunday's at John Atkinson Memorial Centre from October 19th to December 7th and Christmas Party November 30th at Ciociaro Club.

New Initiatives include: Reading Program: an 8-week literacy program for elementary-age children with Down syndrome designed to enhance reading confidence, vocabulary, and social interaction through multi-sensory instruction. Caregiver Series: ongoing workshops that support parent and caregiver well-being through creative and self-care activities. Education Navigation Support (DSAO Pilot): parents can now book free Zoom or phone consultations with former education administrators to navigate school processes (IEPs/IPRCs). Legal referrals available if needed.

Down Right Inspiring Conference (October 2025) highlights included shift toward disability as a social identity rather than a deficit, encouragement to foster inclusive language and challenge ableism, health insights included updated AAP guidelines on atlanto-axial instability, sleep apnea, and celiac screening and financial planning reminders (DTC, RDSP, Henson Trusts) and resources through Partners for Planning and planningnetwork.ca.

Family Resources: Partners for Planning <https://www.planningnetwork.ca/>, Educaide <https://dsao.ca/educaide/introduction/> and Canadian Down Syndrome Society (CDSS) and CARED Network

<https://careds.org/?vcrmeid=2pUQ4Ey1sEqCLCc22R9LCA&vcrmiid=5ZHJ5NSwPUyxA-CHeHhYLQ>

- T. McCarthy, Autism Ontario – upcoming events November 12, 2025: Provincial – “Paperwork Party” supporting caregivers with Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities (ACSD) <https://www.autismontario.com/civCRM/event/info?id=11198&reset=1>
ACDS: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/assistance-children-severe-disabilities-program>

12. Distribution

- Durham District School Board – Timing of Release of Core Education Funding Documents to School Boards

13. Adjournment

Chairperson McCarthy adjourned the meeting at 2:33 pm.



NEXT MEETING, December 10, 2025

Board Meeting Minutes available on [GECDSD website](#).

Vicki Houston, Director of Education

Chris Mills, Administrative Liaison

Tim McCarthy, SEAC Chairperson

[Ministry SEAC website](#)