

**GREATER ESSEX COUNTY DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
REPORT OF THE  
SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

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The Special Education Advisory Committee meeting was held on **Tuesday, March 9, 2021** via Microsoft Teams Meeting.

**MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE**

Aimee Omstead, Trustee  
Cathy Cooke, Trustee  
Martha Vukov, Community Living Windsor-Essex County  
Jan Matte-Gasparovic, Autism Ontario  
Bette Turner, Home and School Instruction  
Monica Gilles, Windsor-Essex County Down Syndrome Association  
Mary-Ann Fuduric, Learning Disabilities Association of Windsor-Essex County  
Sheila Ruggaber, Epilepsy Southwestern Ontario

**BOARD PERSONNEL**

Mike Wilcox, Superintendent of Special Education Services  
Kristie Sweet, Supervising Principal of Special Education Services  
Michelle Lowes, OPC Elementary Representative  
Theresa Williams, OPC Secondary Representative

**REGRETS**

Suzanne Kovach, Parents for Children's Mental Health  
Kimberly John, Indigenous Community Representative

**ABSENT**

**RECORDER**

Peggy Russette

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 1:04 p.m.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by: B. Turner

Seconded by: S. Ruggaber

That SEAC approve the agenda for March 9, 2021.

The motion was carried.

3. Approval of Minutes

Moved by: S. Ruggaber

Seconded by: M. Vukov

That SEAC approve the minutes for February 9, 2021.

The motion was carried.

4. Business Arising as a Result of the Minutes

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

March 9, 2021

5. Special Education Presentations

**Virtual School Survey-** Dr. Clara Howitt, Principal Laura Bates, Vice Principal Heidi Horn-Olivito

Dr. Howitt opened the presentation explaining the function of the Virtual School Education Committee. This committee includes administrators in our system as well as our union partners.

The focus of the committee is:

- Virtual School under Covid
- Virtual School beyond Covid
- Innovations for the New Normal

This survey gathered input from staff, students and families.

L. Bates went over some of the positive feedback received from the survey such as:

- Access to more digital resources
- Adaptability of staff
- Students' choice of learning models
- Advanced use of technology

The SEAC committee was then asked for their input:

- Parents may be concerned that it was too much screen time for the younger students learning virtually. This time has also caused much stress and strain on parents as they became part of their child's daily school learning routine.
- Some parents appreciated being able to be home to share in their childrens' virtual learning experiences.
- There was positive communication, and relationship building between staff and families. They worked together to best suit the needs of their children to learn virtually.
- Because of workshops provided to staff, there were many resources for staff and families to access for virtual learning.
- Separating work from home and ensuring their child(ren) had the appropriate technology and learning environment was sometimes difficult.
- Staff have been unbelievable in keeping students and parents engaged.
- Students and staff have come up with innovative ways to stay connected with their friends, teachers and home school. This would be a great option to continue in September.

What practices and structures worked well/not well that could taken back to consider in September.

- It would be beneficial to use fewer platforms and ensure that teachers are using accessible visual content, like providing transcripts or closed-captioning.
- Grade 8 students moving to grade 9 in September did not have an opportunity to socialize/prepare as in previous years.
- In person assessments should continue, as virtual assessments are difficult to follow online, and it may not be as accurate of an assessment. Would like the possibility of the virtual assessments that were done, to be followed up with an in person assessment.

These suggestions will be shared with the GECDSD Virtual School Education Committee.

### **Virtual GAINS Classroom Presentation – Amanda Laforet and Jennifer Newton**

J. Newton presented an introduction to the Virtual GAINS classrooms. IEPs were given to staff prior to the students starting virtually. It was important to try to keep the student with the same teacher regardless of learning model. Teachers were given 3 weeks' worth of lesson plans prior to the start of school. There were also 2 workshops offered in the summer, Synchronous Learning in Self-Contained Classrooms and How to Teach Robotics/Coding Virtually. Following this there were many more workshops offered to get brick and mortar teachers ready for teaching virtually:

- Make that Digital
- Boardmaker
- Boom Cards
- Exploring Websites
- Using QR codes in a Digital Environment
- What a Virtual Day Looks Like
- Using Power Point to Deliver Instruction
- How to Find Premade Activities/Where to Look

Workshops were continued throughout the school year with "Mondays with Amanda", which focused on Power Point features and how to make digital interactive activities.

Additional supports were provided such as music therapy, creation of a streams channel, use of SEA grants, and community partnerships, just to name a few.

A. Laforet, then took us through a journey with her own virtual GAINS class. In this classroom, there are both verbal and non-verbal students ranging from SK to grade 8. Different communication devices are used to best support the students' learning. Virtual school teachers were thankful for being able to start slow and build up so that students and families could be more successful in the virtual learning program. There was also a DSW for the class so that small group instruction could occur. The majority of the day is spent in small groups. Students were grouped based on their IEP goals and specific learning needs. Ample opportunity to interact with other students in the class was given. Recess was added virtually so that students could communicate in an unstructured environment with their classmates and staff. A. Laforet spoke with families to learn more about the family and student to help development of the program.

Materials for activities planned for the students were provided by the school board and staff dropped off the supplies at the homes of the students. Students were also able to take part in virtual field trips.

Virtual GAINS has helped parents to view a self-contained classroom and the accomplishments that the students are achieving. There has been massive growth in all of her students and the parents are commended for this. Parents love to see the learning and accomplishments first-hand rather than reading/hearing it through a communication book.

#### 6. Special Education Update

##### **PD Update – February 2021**

- Mondays with Amanda

March 9, 2021

- Lexia Refresher

### **Special Education Plan**

At the recommendation of Chairperson Fuduric, it was decided to delay the initial review of the 2021 Special Education Plan to the April SEAC meeting due to the length of today's meeting. M. Wilcox and K. Sweet will go through the document to make necessary minor changes and will share with SEAC committee members for input and direction around what sections to review at our April and May 2021 SEAC meetings.

### 7. New Business

Letter from Durham District School Board to the Minister of Education re: Online Learning Supports/Universal Design for Learning. M. Wilcox outlined the DDSB's concerns with the SEAC committee members.

Moved by: B. Turner

Seconded: C. Cooke

That SEAC prepare and send a similar letter to the Minister of Education regarding concerns with online learning supports/universal design for learning. The motion was carried.

### 8. Association Reports

J. Matte-Gasparovic, Autism Ontario – Raise the Flag for Autism, Tuesday, April 6<sup>th</sup>.

S. Ruggaber, Epilepsy Southwestern Ontario – Purple Palooza Day, March 26<sup>th</sup>.

B. Turner, Home and School Instruction – Windsor Council has been meeting virtually. Parents are happy with communication from the virtual and brick and mortar schools.

M. Gilles, Windsor-Essex County Down Syndrome Association – Rock Your Socks March 21<sup>st</sup>.

M. Fuduric, Learning Disabilities Association of Windsor-Essex County – Starting spring session programming March 15<sup>th</sup>. Reading Buddies is full, but there are still a few spots left for 1:1 Tutoring. There is a \$500 scholarship being offered to high school students with a learning disability. Visit <https://www.ldawe.ca> for more information.

The meeting adjourned at 3:12 pm.

Mary-Ann Fuduric, Chairperson  
Special Education Advisory Committee

Mike Wilcox, Administrative Liaison  
Special Education Advisory Committee

### **NEXT MEETING April 20, 2021**

Board Meeting Minutes Available on GECDSB Website

<https://publicboard.ca/Board/Meetings/Pages/default.aspx>

Erin Kelly  
Director of Education

Mike Wilcox  
Administrative Liaison

(Ministry SEAC Website) [www.edu.gov.on.ca/enq/general/elemsec/speced/seac/](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/enq/general/elemsec/speced/seac/)