



MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Wednesday, February 25, 2026
Room 308, Education Centre**

Present - Association Representatives – voting members

- Dawn Danko, Trustee Ward 7
- Judy Colantino, Down Syndrome Association of Hamilton, SEAC Chair
- Lindsay Bray, McMaster Children’s Hospital Developmental Pediatrics and Rehabilitation Portfolio, SEAC Vice Chair
- Melanie Roberts, Association for Bright Children of Ontario
- Nancy Silva Khan, Autism Ontario (Central West Chapter)
- Samantha Sweet, Centre for Diverse Learners
- Sarah Pennington, Community Living Hamilton
- Susi Owen, CNIB Hamilton and Niagara
- Vanessa Doslea, Lynwood Charlton Centre

Regrets

Danielle Dion-Broadley, FASD Parent & Caregiver Support Group

Staff

- Angela Giardino, System Principal, Special Education, Inclusion & Equity
- Heather Fudge, Hamilton-Wentworth Elementary Teachers Local (HWETL)
- Jennifer Bibby, Canadian Office and Professional Employees (COPE 527)
- Julie Anderson, System Principal, Special Education, Inclusion & Equity
- Julie Boulton, Hamilton-Wentworth Principals’ Council - Elementary
- Krista Brodersen, Hamilton-Wentworth Principals’ Council - Secondary
- Sharon Stephanian, Superintendent of Special Education, Inclusion & Equity

Item	Discussion/Decision
1. Welcome and Call to Order	Judy Colantino called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm welcoming everyone
2. Land Acknowledgement	Judy Colantino, Chair of SEAC
3. Approval of Agenda	On the motion of Melanie Roberts, seconded by Sarah Pennington, the Committee recommends that the agenda be approved CARRIED.
4. Budget Priorities	Matthew Gerard, Associate Director, Business Services and Treasurer of the Board, Jagoda Kirilo, Senior Manager, Business Services, Wenqi Zhou, Budget Manager, presented an overview of the 2026-2027 budget development process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget development objectives include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Supporting the Board’s Mission, Values, Strategic Directions and Board Improvement Plan ○ Focusing on serving students in the most effective way possible ○ Alignment of Resources to Ministry of Education priorities ○ Collective Agreement requirements ○ Capital Plan ○ Enveloping of funds ○ Transparency and accountability ○ Fiscal responsibility (Balanced Budget) • Some of the funding pressures include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Unplanned Absences

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ School Operations ○ WSIB ○ Learning Materials ○ Special Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Budget consultations are taking place with Board committees - a survey will be conducted on the Board’s Engage website, and a link will be provided to Committee members for feedback ● Moved by Judy Colantino, seconded by Vanessa Doslea, that the Committee write a letter to the HWDSB Board of Trustees requesting continued prioritization and commitment from the 2026-27 budget to be allocated to Special Education <p style="text-align: right;">CARRIED.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Moved by Judy Colantino, seconded by Susi Owen, that the Committee write a letter to the Minister of Education copied to all SEACs and HWDSB Trustees, requesting additional funding for Special Education and highlighting the historic and ongoing underfunding of Special Education <p style="text-align: right;">CARRIED.</p>
<p>5. REALISE – Recreation and Leisure in Special Education-Realize your Joy! Realize your Friends! Realize your Potential!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Natalie Spain, Occupational Therapist, Special Education, Inclusion & Equity, Brian Mason, Manager, Special Education, Inclusion & Equity ● An overview of the REALISE (Recreation and Leisure in Special Education) program for secondary students, designed to foster social connections, meaningful engagement, health and well-being, through activities like cooking, drumming, physical games, puzzles etc., ● The program is intended to promote joy in learning for students and staff, using play as a foundation for learning, skill development, exploration of interests, and increased opportunities that support belonging ● Schools have partnered with Jay's Care Challenger Baseball adaptive baseball program, delivered in partnership with Little League Canada and Baseball Canada, specifically designed to empower children, youth and adults living with physical and/or cognitive disabilities – students receive a large kit of baseball equipment, team shirts & ribbons ● All secondary schools have received Bocchia sets to support and introduce in classes, with plans for inter-school tournaments ● The process for loan and implementation of REALISE kits is a request form – an introductory email to classroom teacher, REALISE kit distribution & introductory lesson including pre-survey, lesson plan, then a 2 week check in – the final session includes a post survey, adaptive rec & leisure guide and an interest checklist
<p>6. Approval of the Minutes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ January 28, 2026 	<p>On the motion of Sarah Pennington, seconded by Susi Owen, the Committee recommends that the minutes be approved</p> <p style="text-align: right;">CARRIED.</p>
<p>7. Business Arising from the Minutes</p>	

<p>8. Updates</p> <p>a) Trustees</p> <p>b) Local Association Representatives</p> <p>c) Superintendent</p>	<p>Dawn Danko, Trustee, Ward 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board of Trustees approved the 2026–2027 school year calendar. The calendar includes two PA days prior to Labour Day, resulting in the first day of school for students being the Tuesday following Labour Day - as a result, there will be fewer PA days scheduled in the fall <p>Judy Colantino, Down Syndrome Association of Hamilton</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 21 is World Down Syndrome Day, an internationally recognized day to raise awareness and promote inclusion for individuals with Down syndrome - schools will participate in the Rock Your Socks campaign, encouraging students and staff to wear colourful or mismatched socks to celebrate diversity, inclusion, and belonging <p>Sharon Stephanian, Superintendent of Special Education, Inclusion & Equity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An in person Entry to School event was held, with ten families in attendance - appreciation extended to Lindsay Bray for representing both the Ron Joyce Centre and SEAC • Planning has begun for staffing for the upcoming school year • The Ministry of Education conducted SIP/SEA monitoring visits at Glenwood and Mount Albion - feedback highlighted strong alignment between school practices and Ministry expectations, the thoroughness of documentation, and the consistency of system processes • The four part professional learning series for learning resource teachers and special education class teachers is ongoing, along with sessions for new ASD teachers - outcomes will be shared at the end of the school year • The Gifted Review process will begin in September, focusing on effectiveness, and potential recommended changes • System IPRCs are underway for the upcoming school year, with approximately 150 students anticipated to come forward • John Manzin will be retiring at the end of March - planning is underway to appoint a temporary retired principal through to the end of June
<p>9. Correspondence</p>	
<p>10. Other Business</p>	
<p>11. Adjournment</p>	<p>On the motion of Melanie Roberts, seconded by Sarah Pennington, the Committee recommended that the meeting be adjourned, the meeting was adjourned at 7:37 pm.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">CARRIED.</p>