



MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

**Wednesday, May 27, 2026
Room 180 A, Education Centre**

Present

Association Representatives – voting members

- Amanda Fehrman, Trustee, Wards 11 & 12 (on behalf of Trustee Danko and Trustee Felix Miller)
- Danielle Dion-Broadley, FASD Parent & Caregiver Support Group
- 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

- Dawn Danko, Trustee Ward 7
- Maria Felix Miller, HWDSB Chair, Trustee Ward 3

Staff

- Angela Giardino, System Principal, Special Education, Inclusion & Equity
- Heather Fudge, Hamilton-Wentworth Elementary Teachers Local (HWETL)
- Jennifer Bibby, Canadian Office & Professional Employees (COPE 527)
- Julie Anderson, System Principal, Special Education, Inclusion & Equity
- Sharon Stephanian, Superintendent of Special Education, Inclusion & Equity
- Todd Graves, System Principal, Special Education, Inclusion & Equity

Item	Discussion/Decision
1. Welcome and Call to Order	Judy Colantino called the meeting to order at 5:39 pm welcoming everyone
2. Land Acknowledgement	Judy Colantino, Chair of SEAC
3. Approval of Agenda	On the motion of Danielle Dion-Broadley, seconded by Melanie Roberts, the Committee recommends that the agenda be approved CARRIED.
4. Achievements in Special Education	Sheryl Robinson Petrazzini, Chief Executive Officer An overview of achievements in special education was shared: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alignment with Board Priorities & Inclusive Approach: Special Education is fully embedded within the Board Improvement Plan and Multi-Year Strategic Plan, supporting literacy, numeracy, well-being, engagement, and future preparedness. The system emphasizes inclusive practices, early identification, individualized planning, and strong partnerships with families to ensure all students experience belonging and reach their potential • Student Achievement (Literacy & Numeracy): Targeted supports such as early screening (K–Grade 2), structured literacy approaches,

	<p>assistive technology, and specialized interventions are improving outcomes for students with special education needs. In numeracy, Universal Design for Learning and differentiated instruction are helping remove barriers, strengthen confidence, and promote steady academic growth aligned with individual IEP goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-Being & Engagement: Trauma-informed, inclusive practices and equity-based approaches are fostering safe, supportive environments where students can thrive. Increased student voice, person-centered planning, and strong home–school collaboration are improving engagement, attendance, and overall student well-being, with positive feedback from families highlighting these impacts • Future Preparedness & Transitions: Strong transition planning and pathway development support students in building independence, self-advocacy, and real-world skills. Programs such as Project SEARCH demonstrate success in preparing students for employment and community inclusion, reflecting a broader focus on life skills as key indicators of achievement. • System Initiatives & Community Engagement: Ongoing professional learning for leaders strengthens system capacity. Successful events (e.g., Family Carnival celebrating World Autism Awareness Day with 613 attendees), new accessible board and school websites, and capital projects (new schools in Waterdown and Binbrook) highlight continued investment in inclusive environments, communication, and community growth • An engaging and inspiring video was shared during the meeting showcasing a diverse group of HWDSB students. The video highlighted student voice, and wide range of experiences across our schools. Through candid footage and student perspectives, it emphasized themes of inclusion, resilience, creativity, and belonging - the video underscored HWDSB’s commitment to equity and inclusive education, illustrating how students are supported to thrive and express their identities - the piece served as a powerful reminder of the impact of current initiatives and reinforced the importance of continuing to center student voice in our work
<p>5. IPRC Experience Feedback</p>	<p>Julie Anderson, System Principal, Special Education, Inclusion & Equity An overview of the IPRC process was provided, outlining key stages: before, during, and after the meeting, including legal requirements, timelines, documentation, and roles of the committee and families. This presentation will also be shared at the May and June learning sessions with principals and vice principals</p> <p>SEAC members provided feedback, emphasizing the importance of ensuring the process is communicated in a clear, concise, and accessible manner for families, while maintaining a strong focus on student voice, family engagement, and equitable, inclusive practices throughout</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before the IPRC (Preparation & Family Engagement): All legislative requirements are met, including advance notice, documentation, and confirmation of guardian participation. Families are provided with resources, informed of rights (including appeal), and given opportunities to ask questions. Schools prioritize early, inclusive

	<p>support using UDL, DI, and interventions, ensuring the IPRC is not the first point of contact and that accommodations can be provided without an IPRC. Strong, respectful partnerships centre student and family voice, with translation, accessibility, and support persons available</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the IPRC (Process & Decision-Making): The IPRC follows required composition and procedures, including use of board scripts, Ministry criteria, and formal documentation of strengths, needs, identification, and placement decisions. Parents/guardians are informed of their options and timelines. The process emphasizes fairness and human rights while fostering a welcoming, inclusive environment that supports collaboration, culturally responsive practices, and strength-based discussion of the student • After the IPRC (Documentation & Implementation): Required documentation is completed and shared within mandated timelines, including the Statement of Decision. Schools update or develop the IEP, coordinate supports, and plan for transitions. Families are informed of appeal processes and next steps, ensuring clarity and compliance with policies and procedures • Ongoing Family Partnership & Support: Follow-up communication ensures families understand decisions, timelines, and supports. Schools maintain open, respectful communication, provide guidance on transitions, and continue collaborative problem-solving. Families are recognized as key partners in supporting student learning, with ongoing opportunities for engagement beyond the IPRC meeting • Equity, Inclusion, and Student-Centered Approach: Across all stages, the process prioritizes dignity, belonging, and equitable access. Practices are grounded in human rights, culturally responsive supports, and inclusive environments that honour student identity, strengths, and lived experiences while ensuring meaningful participation for families
<p>6. Approval of the Minutes • April 29, 2026</p>	<p>On the motion of Vanessa Doslea, 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 a) Trustees b) Local Association Representatives c) Superintendent</p>	<p>a) Amanda Fehrman, Trustee Wards 11 & 12 (on behalf of Trustee Danko and Trustee Felix Miller)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board received the core funding allocation from the Ministry and is currently engaged in planning and developing the budget for the 2026–27 school year, ensuring alignment with system priorities and student needs • Attended Access Athletics, where students had a great time, showing enthusiasm, teamwork, and strong school spirit <p>b) Judy Colantino, Down Syndrome Association of Hamilton</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Down Syndrome Association will provide a professional learning session in the fall for teachers and educational assistants as part of the OWLS (Opportunities With Literacy and Speech) program. Led by a speech-language pathologist, the session will focus on building communication, literacy, and motor skills to support students with Down syndrome – more information will be provided in the fall

	<p>c) Sharon Stephanian, Superintendent of Special Education, Inclusion & Equity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuesday’s Access Athletics event was highly successful and engaging, with students enthusiastically participating and even school mascots joining in a friendly competition. A special thank you to Angela Giardino for her leadership in organizing this memorable and inclusive event • Henderson and Dundas Valley hosted the first annual interschool Boccia tournament for students receiving special education supports and services, where students demonstrated great joy and strong support for their teammates, all participants received ribbons and boccia stickers, and each school team was awarded a banner • Psychological Services staff presented the BRAIN (Building Responsive Approaches to Instructional Needs) document at a provincial special education conference, where it was very well received, with several boards expressing interest in the resource • Special Education and the Math team put together a Gifted Math Day, bringing students together in person for the first time - students took part in fun, hands-on math activities and it was great to see how much they enjoyed the day • The Hamilton Chapter of the Council for Exceptional Children is on pause this year, and the Yes I Can Awards will not take place - while this celebration will be missed, HWDSB remains committed to recognizing the achievements of students receiving special education supports and services. Graduating Grade 8 and secondary students will be recognized during their school commencement ceremonies, with each student receiving an Excellence in Achievement Award, that includes a medal and certificate • Lynwood Charlton is currently on a provincial strike; 24 students have been temporarily placed in HWDSB schools to ensure continuity of learning, with some attending their planned September placements - appreciation was extended to Vanessa Doslea for her ongoing support and partnership during this time • The 2026–27 Special Education Plan will be shared with the committee at the next meeting, with a focus on key sections and updates, and revised staffing information provided in September - over the summer, the plan will also undergo a review by Communications to update branding and ensure all links and formatting are current
9. Correspondence	
10. Other Business	
11. Adjournment	<p>On the motion of Melanie Roberts, seconded by Vanessa Doslea, the Committee recommends that the meeting be adjourned. The meeting ended at 7:35 pm. CARRIED.</p>