



SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday, October 21, 2021

VIRTUAL

Google Meet Link: meet.google.com/ody-hahv-axn

6:30 P.M. – 8:00 P.M.

Chairperson: Arlene Godby

Vice-chairperson: Melissa Gillespie

Members: Arlene Godby (Chair), Shawna Belcourt, Sandra Scott, Clare Paterson, Helen McCarthy, Emmanuel Pinto, David Bernier

Guests: Joan Carragher Jennifer Angelo, Mandy Hamu, Sean Heuchert

Administration: Laurie Corrigan, Laura Di Ianni, Cynthia Chan Reynolds

Recorder: Vicki Blakely

Absent (by motion): Melissa Gillespie

A. Call to Order:

1. Land Acknowledgment: Clare Paterson

As we continue to learn together in these exceptional circumstances, I (we) would like to acknowledge, as we do at school, that this land on which we live and learn daily, is the traditional territory of the Michi Saagig (Mississauga) Anishnaabe. All of PVNC Catholic District School Board lies within the Williams Treaty territory and we are all Treaty people. We offer our gratitude to the First Peoples of this land who continue to care for, and share their teachings about, our earth and our relations. May we honour those teachings.

2. Opening Prayer: Clare Paterson

3. Additions to the Agenda

None

4. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by: Shawna Belcourt
Seconded by: Sandra Scott
That the agenda be approved as presented.

Carried

5. Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

None noted.

6. Motion for Excusal from Attendance

Moved by: Shawna Belcourt
Seconded by: Sandra Scott
That Melissa Gillespie be excused from attendance at the October 21, 2021 Special Education Advisory Committee meeting.

Carried

7. Motion for Approval of the Minutes of September 16, 2021 Meeting.

Moved by: Sandra Scott
Seconded by: Shawna Belcourt
That the minutes of the Special Education Advisory Committee Minutes held on September 16, 2021 be approved as amended. These [minutes](#) reflect the requested amendments.

Carried

8. Business Arising from the Minutes:

Response to the Letter from SEAC to the Board of Trustees dated August 27, 2021
By David Bernier, Board Chairperson (full statement attached to the minutes)

Board Chairperson Bernier read a response to the Letter from SEAC to the Board of Trustees dated August 27, 2021 in regards to the pride flag decision. The Board of Trustees and Board Administration believes in equity for all students as seen in the Strategic Priorities and through We Are All Wonderfully Made. The Board will continue to support students so they know they are safe and loved. Context around the process and result from the motion originally brought forward in May by Trustee McCarthy was given. Board Chairperson Bernier thanked the members of SEAC for their dedication and hard work.

The committee members thanked Board Chairperson Bernier for his response.

B. Recommended Actions/Presentations:

1. Remarks: Chair – Arlene Godby

Offered sincere condolences on the sudden passing of St. Elizabeth Catholic Elementary School Principal Gerard van den Wildenberg on behalf of the SEAC committee members. Discussion topics have been listed below for the rest of the year that will be discussed later in the meeting. [The Equity Census](#) is on the board website. Members were asked to visit the PNVCCDSB website 1-2 times/month. Thanked members for their role on SEAC this year. Members were asked to review the [Provincial Parent Association Advisory Committee on SEAC Effective Practices for SEAC Members](#) Section 3: SEAC Roles and Responsibilities.

2. Remarks: Superintendent of Learning/Special Education Services – Laurie Corrigan

September saw and welcomed the return of approximately 1900 of the 2500 students from the virtual school back into the bricks and mortar schools. PVMC marked the National Truth and Remembrance with the first week remembrance and reconciliation.

Visits to all schools of the board are underway, a wonderful and welcomed experience.

The Being Well Strategy is in the process of renewal, which will be presented later in the meeting to members. This has been aligned through the vast strategic priorities process led by the Director of Education, Joan Carragher, that included the SEAC. The large scope, knowledge and experience of all who worked on this is reflected in the documents. Thank you to SEAC for their involvement in the Strategic Priorities process. The final document can be found on the PNVCCDSB website: <https://www.pvnccdsb.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Strategic-Plan-2021-2025.pdf>

Special Education and Mental Health and Well Being has been reviewed this fall. From this review, special education support staff have been increased by approximately 30 educational assistants throughout our schools with the hope of securing Covid funding announced but is currently held back from the Ministry of Education. There is an unprecedented need for support in our schools. This need is especially evident in younger students whom have been impacted by social isolation during closures and virtual school transitions. These needs and repeated requests for funding for support have been communicated through regular reports to the Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education.

It is with great sadness that the death of beloved St. Elizabeth Catholic Elementary School Bowmanville Principal, Gerard van den Wildenburg, be shared with the committee.

3. Update from Trustees:

Updates from both Trustees were heard, including local government week, the trustee vacancy and the [survey](#) through the Diocese of Peterborough Pastoral Planning Committee. It also included updates about mandatory vaccinations and Administrative Policy on Students Wearing Masks.

C. Discussion Items:

A. SEAC Meeting Presentation(s)

1. Being Well Strategic Plan Update – Mental Health Leaders; Jennifer Angelo and Mandy Hamu, Board Psychologist Dr. Cynthia Chan Reynolds, and Manager of Information Technology Sean Heuchert

Mental Health Leader, Jennifer Angelo, presented the Board's renewed Being Well Strategy Plan which focusses on the Centre Pillar from the new Strategic Plan, Being Well. Wellness is being viewed from a holistic approach incorporating mind, body and spirit, looking to the board with the same lens. Wellness is being sought through encouragement, helping one another, and ensuring access to individuals requiring support. The vision continues to be the same but graphics have changed, placing the student at the centre having families, educators, staff and faith community wrap around and support the student as they learn and grow within the PVNCCDSB system to achieve the Catholic Graduate Expectations. Tier two includes more supports for students, and the third tier providing stronger pathways to meet the students needs and links to community supports. The Being Well strategy continues to build on the momentum from the previous Be Well strategy. Mental Health and Well Being becoming a part of everyday school life for everyone.

Manager of Information Technology, Sean Heuchert, introduced the launch of the new Being Well portal: <https://beingwell.pvnccdsb.on.ca/> that provides students, staff and families with community-specific mental health resources in an easy-to-navigate online resource. Mental Health Leader Mandy Hamu discussed how resources will be added and expanded and invited members to provide any suggestions for further resources.

Moved: Emmanuel Pinto

Second: Clare Paterson

That the Special Education Advisory Committee meeting be extended from 8:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Carried

Discussion Items from the presentation:

The committee discussed the key learnings from the presentation, and how important this information will be for parents to access and needs to be shared once approved at the next PVNCCDB Board meeting. This learning will be shared through social media and school newsletters.

B. Correspondence Items:

1. None

C. Information Items:

1. Information items/updates were received by the following organizations as per the attachments to the October 21, 2021 Agenda Package:
 - i. Autism Ontario – October Update
 - ii. Down Syndrome Association Update
 - iii. Shift Your Thinking Re-Introduction - Supporting Parents, Youth and Educators (attached) – Trustee McCarthy

D. Old Business:

1. Topics for Presentations to SEAC 2021-2022

Date	Topic
November 18	Success of Students Through Technology – Jeff Hockett & Chantal Bouillon
January 20	PAAC on SEAC – no presentation, group review and set actions
February 17	Equity Census Update – Superintendent of Learning Jeannie Armstrong
March 24	Transitions from Grade School to High School, High School and Beyond, and ECPP – Mandy Hamu, Sharon Davenport, and Laura Di Ianni
April 21	Update from Social Workers regarding support of Mental Health Dr. Cynthia Chan Reynolds
May 19	Budget Review – Superintendent of Learning/Special Education Services Laurie Corrigan and Superintendent of Business Finance/Plant Isabel Grace
June 16	Special Education Plan Review
10 th Meeting	TBD

E. New Business:

1. Review of SEAC [Terms of Reference](#): Laurie Corrigan
 - i. The Terms of Reference were read and reviewed with the committee members.
 - ii. There is one potential new member, but awaiting confirmation.
2. How can the committee have a better presence?
 - i. Asked if SEAC could expand the presence through PVNCCDSB social media, including utilizing DID YOU KNOW through Twitter.
 - ii. DID YOU KNOW
 1. Add as item to discussion from presentations section
 2. Ensure something comes from each meeting from SEAC
3. How can the committee gather data in regards to gaps, priorities and/or even a wish list?
 - i. Extensive data was collected through the strategic priorities process.
 - ii. Be mindful of the purpose of collecting data – research policy and research ethical frameworks upon we collect data.
 - iii. Looking to better support the PVNCCDSB community.
 - iv. Discuss further with our agencies to ensure we are capturing what families need and bring back to SEAC.

D. Next Meeting:

1. Selection of Members for Territorial Recognition, Opening and Closing Prayers
 - a. Territorial Recognition & Opening Prayer: Sandra Scott
 - b. Closing prayer: Emmanuel Pinto

2. 2021-2022 Meeting Dates:

Thursday, November 18, 2021

Thursday, January 20, 2022

Thursday, February 17, 2022

Thursday, March 24, 2022

Thursday, April 21, 2022

Thursday, May 19, 2022

Thursday, June 16, 2022

10th Meeting TBD

Location: TBD

Time: 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

E. Conclusion:

1. Closing Prayer: Shawna Belcourt
2. Adjournment

Moved by: Sandra Scott

Seconded by: Shawna Belcourt

That the meeting held on October 21, 2021 be adjourned at 8:28 p.m.

Carried

Attachment to the Minutes from Business Arising to the Minutes:

Response to the Letter from SEAC to the Board of Trustees dated August 27, 2021

By David Bernier, Board Chairperson

Good evening Thank you Madame Chair

I wanted to take this time this evening to provide a response to the letter sent on behalf of this committee to the board of trustees dated August 27, 2021 regarding the pride flag issue.

Firstly, let me say that this committee, while it is mandated by the Education Act, is a highly respected and much appreciated group of stakeholders and are highly regarded members of the PVNCCDSB community. Special Education has always been a top priority for this board particularly at the Board of Trustees table. In my 15 years here and for many years prior that I sat as a member of Catholic School Councils, Special Education programs and resources have always been prominent parts of our governance and allocation of funds. Each and every year, our board budget is passed with funds for the Special education department that exceeds the envelope of funds provided by the ministry. That meant trimming other departments to add to Special Education. It also often included the use of board reserve funds to balance a budget that spending in Special education exceeded ministry funding.

I know that the committee is reviewing the terms of reference for Special Education Advisory Committee later in the agenda tonight. It is a good time to gain an understanding the role of members and the mandate of the committee. I am concerned that the committee members met outside the mandate of the committee and forwarded a letter to trustees on behalf of committee members without an official agenda and recommended action to do so within the purview of a sanctioned committee meeting. That being said, it was brought forward to the September SEAC meeting to formalize it and it has subsequently been received at the Board table at our September 28, 2021 meeting. Following discussion, it was determined that I would attend this meeting to respond to your concerns.

The Board of Trustees and the Board Administration are firmly committed to ensuring a safe, inclusive, and caring, faith filled environment in all of our schools. Every child is accepted and loved as a child of God.

In response to concerns about a lack of communication to this committee on the matter of the pride flag I would like to add some context and order of events.

The agenda at our May 25, 2021 board meeting included a presentation from our Senior Administration as a matter under old business. The information shared was in regard to steps taken to date and planned actions regarding equity and diversity. This was a follow up from a memo out of the Institute for Catholic Education (May, 2020), 'Affirming our Commitment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusive School Communities'

As part of the trustee discussion following the presentation, Trustee McCarthy put forth a motion to fly the Pride Flag at all of our schools and the Catholic Education Centre. The motion had not previously been on the agenda nor discussion at a meeting of the trustees. Vice Chairperson Griepsma requested that the motion not be received and that it required a notice of motion to allow Trustees adequate time for reflection on the matter before discussion and decision making. As a matter of parliamentary procedure this was granted.

The notice of motion was then forwarded to the Chairperson's committee for inclusion in the agenda for the June board meeting. There was a great deal of attention to this matter across the system and indeed across the province. As I noted at the June meeting I received the most amount of input on one single issue in all my years as a Trustee. We had 4 delegations to the June board meeting to speak to the motion.

I am unaware as to why Trustee McCarthy did not bring her motion to the attention of this committee for input prior to the June 22, 2021 board meeting.

By then trustees had already received well over 100 emails on the issue with supporters of both sides. The matter before the board was very public. The distribution of the agenda for the June 22, 2021 board meeting was sent out to all stakeholders on June 17, 2021 prior to your meeting. Your question as to Trustees sitting as SEAC members bringing updates or information to the committee each month. The trustees are present to hear the concerns of the committee and share in discussion of the agenda items. They may have individual questions for the committee looking for feedback to share at the board table. They may also bring to the attention of the committee any pending matters that relate to special education programs and services. It would not be appropriate or effective management of the committee's agenda to review the entirety of the board agenda items to seek input on each item. SEAC's focus is on special education and we welcome and appreciate any and all input on related matters, which includes equity. In your May agenda, board administrators brought items that they and the Trustees were considering in regard to the annual board budget, as they impacted special education programs and services. This is one type of consultation that has been sought at SEAC each year.

When the pride flag motion came to the board table in June 2021 as I mentioned we had four delegates speak to the issue. You will see in the June board meeting minutes that an amendment to the original motion was put forward but the motion did not carry.

We then had each trustee speak to the matter from their perspective given whatever input they had received from stakeholders. Each spoke from the heart, and each statement was unique, stating their considerations leading to their vote.

Part of the considerations on voting against the motion was simply a process issue. The motion itself, as with the failed amendment was not in line with our policy development policy and processes. The proper process was part of the Director's plan as put forth at our May Board meeting.

Further considerations:

Emmanuel was correct stating that human rights and Catholic traditions can be respected at the same time and place. The daily interactions, nurturing relationships and loving support of all members of our school communities are what create the inclusive safe environments.

Something that has existed in our schools for many years. The board has a Faith and Equity committee that reviews these programs and works at updating and enhancing them. The board has an Equity and Inclusivity Plan which is currently being renewed as part of the mandate of our recently contracted Equity Advisor, Mante Molepo. Much good work has been, and continues to be done across the system. The Student Census is another piece of work that Mante will assist in. The "Every Student Counts PVNC Student Census" is to gather identity-based student data so that we can identify and address systemic barriers by focusing our programming and resources. This is a ministry wide initiative that has a specific focus but includes all students. The input on the census is strictly from students for the collection of data related to equity.

In regard to We are Wonderfully made. This initiative came out of the Institute for Catholic Education and was supported by the Catholic Bishops of Ontario. It is a means to support equity and diversity within our schools with a Catholic lens. It was introduced to our system in November of 2020 as a way of supporting everyone during the Caring and Safe Schools Week Nov 15-21, 2020. The intent was to build on this moving forward and monitor how this initiative was supporting equity and inclusion in our schools. This could have been shared by Trustees at SEAC but it is one of hundreds of programs and initiatives the board puts in place. I am confident that superintendents and trustees at SEAC meetings do their best to ensure that those programs impacting Special Education, which includes equity, are brought to the attention of this committee.

Now to the vote on June 22, 2021. Trustees who voted against the motion considered hundreds of messages from both sides. One of which is the history of the pride flag and its opposition to Catholic teachings. Another consideration was that the flag is seen as a celebration of sexuality, something that is considered inappropriate in a Catholic school or any school some would argue. We do not argue that many in our community see the flag as a symbol of inclusion and a sign of a safe place for them to be themselves. Those who voted against the motion, simply see the Cross as the only symbol that is needed to identify our schools as a loving and inclusive place, as noted by our Bishop and Cardinal Collins. We stand firmly on the understanding that our schools are places of respect, caring, and inclusion; that all students and staff are welcome members of our community and will be supported through caring relationships and support. While the flag can be seen as inclusive, it has been demonstrated to be highly divisive. Not only at the board table but across the system. Opposing views among teachers, students, parents, and even clergy. The response to the vote garnered three times the number of messages. Again from both sides. I was most saddened to read the hate filled attacks on trustees from both sides before and after the vote. There were thankfully many supportive, understanding and respectful messages from both sides.

The motion before the board in June was defeated. It is incumbent upon all seven trustees to uphold decisions of the board. I must say that I was disappointed that this committee would centre out a trustee in such an abrupt manner that took place with Emmanuel at your previous meeting. Someone with a strong sense of faith and love for everyone, who voted with his conscience and with the input of several stakeholders. It was not an easy discussion or decision but one that deserves respect even from those opposed to his view.

It is unusual for the same matter to come back to the board table unless there has been substantive changes in circumstances or information that was not available to Trustees at the time of the original vote. That is not to say that it never will. The work continues and the board will ensure that all students feel safe, included and loved.

I hope this addresses your concerns.