

OUR MISSION

The Toronto Catholic District School Board is an inclusive learning community uniting home, parish and school and rooted in the love of Christ. We educate students to grow in grace and knowledge to lead lives of faith, hope and charity.

OUR VISION

At Toronto Catholic we transform the world through witness, faith, innovation and action.



MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE PUBLIC SESSION

HELD WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025

PRESENT:

Trustees:

F. D'Amico
A. Kennedy

External Members:

G. Wedge, Chair
G. Feldman, Vice Chair
R. De Belchior – Virtual
J. Di Francesco - Virtual
L. Mastrogiuseppe – Virtual
A. Pabon – Virtual
M. Seymour - Virtual

Staff:

A. Della Mora
C. Fernandes
M. Meehan
F. Cifelli
V. Cocco
A. Coke
D. Comacchio
O. De Figueiredo
M. Gendron
R. Macchia
K. Morra

S. Hinds-Barnett, Acting Recording Secretary

4. Roll Call and Apologies

An Apology was extended on behalf of Tyler Munro. Trustee Rizzo, Lisa Mason and Ivona Novak were absent.

5. Approval of the Agenda

MOVED by Jennifer Di Francesco, seconded by Geoffrey Feldman, that the Agenda, as amended to include Member Statement, Item 9a) From Jennifer Di Francesco regarding Heartfelt Gratitude to Volunteers on the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) and throughout the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB), in Celebration of Volunteer Month, April, be approved.

The Motion was declared

CARRIED

6. Declarations of Interest

Trustee Kennedy declared a Conflict of Interest in Item 10a) 2025 – 2026 Budget Framework – R. Putnam, Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer, as she has family members who are employees of the Board. Trustee Kennedy indicated that she would neither participate in discussions regarding that Item nor vote.

7. Approval and Signing of the Minutes

MOVED by Trustee Kennedy, seconded by Geoffrey Feldman, that the Minutes of the Meeting held March 5, 2025 be approved.

The Motion was declared

CARRIED

9. Member Statements

- 9a) **From Jennifer Di Francesco regarding Heartfelt Gratitude to Volunteers on the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) and throughout the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB), in Celebration of Volunteer Month, April.**

Trustee Kennedy left the virtual room at 7:09 pm due to a Declaration of Interest in Item 10a) below, as earlier indicated.

10. Presentations

MOVED by Geoffrey Feldman, seconded by Jennifer Di Francesco, that Item 10a) be adopted as follows:

- 10a) **2025 - 2026 Budget Framework - R. Putnam, Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer** received.

The Motion was declared

CARRIED

Trustee Kennedy returned to the horseshoe at 7:34 pm.

11. Notices of Motions

MOVED by Jennifer Di Francesco, seconded by Trustee D'Amico, that Item 11a) be adopted as follows:

- 11a) **From Jennifer Di Francesco, representative of Centre for ADHD Awareness Canada (CADDAC), regarding Improved Accommodation Process for Students with Neurodivergent Differences (Disabilities) / Special Education Needs** that this be considered at the May 21, 2025 Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Meeting:

WHEREAS: The Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) serves over 20,000 students with neurodivergent differences (disabilities) and special education needs;

WHEREAS: The TCDSB has a duty under the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Charter of Rights to accommodate the learning needs of students with neurodivergent differences (disabilities) up to the point of undue hardship;

WHEREAS: If a parent /guardian is concerned that TCDSB is not delivering accommodations included in the child's Individual Education Plan (IEP) or is otherwise not effectively accommodating their child's learning needs, they require a swift, user-friendly, independent, and fair avenue equipped with the needed expertise to address their concerns; and

WHEREAS: The current procedures of TCDSB are insufficient, as they are not tailored to the needs of students with neurodivergent differences (disabilities) and do not ensure that the TCDSB official addressing the issue has the necessary expertise or authority to implement needed accommodations.

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees the TCDSB should establish a prompt, user-friendly, fair, and effective process for parents/guardians of students with neurodivergent differences (disabilities)/special education needs to seek a resolution if they believe that TCDSB is not providing accommodation for their child's learning needs. This includes cases where TCDSB is not delivering on IEP commitments or has refused an accommodation requested by the parent/guardian;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees the TCDSB official who receives and addresses complaints from parents/guardians of students with neurodivergent differences (disabilities)/special education needs should: a) Have expertise and experience with the education of students with neurodivergent differences (disabilities)/special education needs; b) Be independent of those TCDSB staff who have dealt with the student's needs in question; c) Have expertise and training in effective mediation/alternate dispute resolution; d) Have the authority to direct any corrective action they deem necessary;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees that if, after review, the TCDSB decides not to provide the requested accommodation, the TCDSB shall provide written reasons for this decision;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees that every effort should be made to mediate and resolve disagreements between the family and TCDSB. If the matter cannot be resolved, there should be an option for the Parent/Guardian and the TCDSB to appoint an external mediator or review body to consider the issue within a short time frame;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees that this process should be designed to address the needs of students with neurodivergent differences (disabilities)/special education needs and should not include unrelated student complaints;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees that this motion outlines the guiding principles for the proposed process while allowing flexibility in its design and implementation to align with Ministry requirements. The new process should become available to parents/caregivers or students after they have first brought their concerns to their teacher and principal; and

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees that the process should be available on the TCDSB website, easily found and accessible. The information should also be emailed to all parents in the TCDSB, via multiple avenues, which includes, but is not limited to principals, teachers, SEAC, school messenger, etc.

MOVED by Jennifer Di Francesco, seconded by Trustee D'Amico, that Item 11b) be adopted as follows:

- 11b) From Jennifer Di Francesco, representative of Centre for ADHD Awareness Canada (CADDAC), regarding Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a “Superpower” not a Disability** that this be considered at the May 21, 2025 Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting:

WHEREAS: Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) should no longer be categorized as a "disorder" or "disability" but instead recognized as a cognitive difference within the framework of neurodiversity. By shifting this label, we aim to reduce stigma, highlight strengths, and promote supportive environments that empower individuals with ADHD to thrive;

WHEREAS: Scientific research increasingly identifies ADHD as a variation in cognitive functioning rather than a pathological condition. Studies highlight that ADHD traits such as impulsivity, hyperfocus, and risk-taking have evolutionary roots, which may have been advantageous in dynamic environments. Viewing ADHD as a

difference rather than a deficit aligns with the growing neurodiversity movement, which recognizes diverse cognitive profiles as part of human variation;

WHEREAS: ADHD individuals frequently exhibit traits that can be powerful assets, including creativity, spontaneity, and innovation. Research shows that individuals with ADHD excel in fields requiring dynamic thinking, adaptability, and unconventional problem-solving. Labeling ADHD as a "disorder" focuses disproportionately on weaknesses rather than fostering environments where ADHD traits can be leveraged for success;

WHEREAS: Challenges associated with ADHD often stem from traditional education and work systems that prioritize prolonged focus, rigid routines, and low stimulation settings. ADHD individuals may thrive when provided with flexible structures, engaging tasks, and creative outlets. By framing ADHD as a cognitive difference, institutions can shift from imposing conformity to nurturing strengths;

WHEREAS: The "disorder" and "disability" labels contribute to stigma, reducing self-esteem and reinforcing negative stereotypes. Reframing ADHD as a cognitive difference encourages individuals to embrace their unique abilities and seek environments where they can excel; and

WHEREAS: ADHD should be categorized as a Cognitive Difference under the broader umbrella of Neurodiversity. This terminology acknowledges the unique cognitive profile of ADHD individuals without pathologizing their experiences. ADHD is a Superpower!

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees that by recognizing ADHD as a cognitive difference rather than a disorder or disability, we can foster inclusive environments that highlight strengths, reduce stigma, and promote positive outcomes for individuals with ADHD. This motion calls for the TCDSB to adopt this revised perspective, ensuring students with ADHD are valued, respected, heard, and supported in their growth and achievements;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees to write a letter to the Ministry of Education from the TCDSB Board of Trustees asking the Ministry of Education to recognize ADHD under the neurodiversity framework in the Education Act. Research shows that ADHD individuals have unique strengths—such as creativity, problem-solving, and adaptability—that can thrive in the right learning environments. By reframing ADHD, implementing inclusive educational strategies, and training teachers, staff, and administration on the research, development, and

evolution in thought on ADHD, we can better support students to reach their full potential; and

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees that the TCDSB provide targeted support and professional development for educators to deliver curriculum using strength-based, neurodiverse-informed approaches. This includes strategies that engage creativity, problem-solving, adaptability, and other executive functioning skills, while also offering flexible accommodations that empower students with ADHD to thrive academically and socially.

MOVED by Jennifer Di Francesco, seconded by Trustee D'Amico, that Item 11c) be adopted as follows:

- 11c) From Jennifer Di Francesco, representative of Centre for ADHD Awareness Canada (CADDAC), regarding Motion to Reform Disciplinary Practices for Students with Learning Differences (Disabilities) and Special Education Needs** that this be considered at the May 21, 2025 Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting:

WHEREAS: Students with learning disabilities and special education needs, including ADHD, autism, and other neurodivergent conditions, often face disciplinary actions that do not align with their educational and developmental needs;

WHEREAS: punitive measures such as withholding recess, detentions, and exclusion from classroom activities disproportionately impact these students and do not address the root causes of behavioral challenges;

WHEREAS: Research from the American Academy of Pediatrics and educational psychologists highlights that recess and movement are essential for self-regulation, focus, and emotional well-being, particularly for students with ADHD and other learning differences; and

WHEREAS: Traditional punitive approaches often exacerbate behavioral challenges rather than support students in developing self-management skills. A shift toward positive, inclusive discipline aligns with human rights laws, Ontario's Education Act, and best practices in special education.

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees that the policy prohibits the removal of recess and other physical activity as a form of punishment for students with learning disabilities or special education needs;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees that staff are training on trauma-informed and neurodiversity-affirming disciplinary approaches;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees that the policy encourages restorative practices, including conflict resolution and behavioral support strategies tailored to individual student needs;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees that the policy Implements a review system to track and assess disciplinary actions taken against students with special education needs to ensure compliance with equitable practices;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees that a Positive Discipline Policy is adopted and ensures all schools within its jurisdiction implement the outlined practices by September 2025 for the new school year;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees the policy prohibit the use of regulation-based support - such as scheduled breaks, sensory room access, or movement opportunities, etc. - as contingent rewards. Resources that these children need to self-regulate should never be taken away because of not completing work or behavior discipline;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees that all school-based staff are training on trauma-informed and neurodiversity-affirming disciplinary approaches; and

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC further recommend to the Board of Trustees that the adoption and implementation of preventative, strength-based strategies that foster emotional regulation, connection, and engagement. These proactive approaches minimize the need for reactive disciplinary measures and contribute to more inclusive, supportive learning environments for all students.

12. Consent and Review

The Chair reviewed the Order Page and the following Items were held:

13b) Special Education Plan April 2025

Section for Discussion:

16) Coordination of Services with Other Ministries or Agencies –
J. Di Francesco; and

14b) Special Services Superintendent Update - April 2025 – Trustee Kennedy.

MOVED by Geoffrey Feldman, seconded by Trustee Kennedy, that the Items not held be received.

On the Vote being taken, the Motion was declared

CARRIED

ITEMS NOT HELD AS CAPTURED IN THE ABOVE MOTION

13a) Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Annual Calendar (Draft);

13b) Special Education Plan April 2025

Sections for Discussion:

17) Specialized Health Support Services

18a) Staff Development

18b) Professional Learning Plan;

14a) Annual Report on the Accessibility Standards Policy, A.35; and

19a) Centre for ADHD Awareness Canada (CADDAC) – Attention Deficit
Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Education Advocacy Resources.

13. Annual Calendar Items

MOVED by Trustee Kennedy, seconded by Jennifer Di Francesco, that Section 16) of Item 13b) be adopted as follows:

13b) Special Education Plan April 2025:

Section for Discussion:

16. Coordination of Services with Other Ministries or Agencies received.

On the Vote being taken, the Motion was declared

CARRIED

14. Reports of Officials for Information by the Board/Other Committees

MOVED by Trustee Kennedy, seconded by Geoffrey Feldman, that Item 14b) be adopted as follows:

14b) Special Services Superintendent Update – April 2025 received.

On the Vote being taken, the Motion was declared

CARRIED

22. Adjournment

MOVED by Geoffrey Feldman, seconded by Jennifer Di Francesco, that the meeting be adjourned.

On the Vote being taken, the Motion was declared

CARRIED

SECRETARY

CHAIR