

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, MAY 21, 2025

PRESENT:

Trustees: F. D'Amico - Virtual
M. Rizzo - Virtual

External Members: G. Wedge, Chair
G. Feldman, Vice Chair
J. Di Francesco - Virtual
T. Munro – Virtual

Staff: A. Della Mora
C. Fernandes
M. Meehan
V. Cocco
A. Coke
D. Comacchio
O. De Figueiredo

S. Adaikpoh, Acting Recording Secretary

4. Roll Call and Apologies

Apologies for lateness were extended on behalf of Trustee Kennedy and Richelle De Belchior. Apologies for absenteeism were also extended on behalf of Lisa Mason and Lori Mastrogiuseppe. Ivona Novak and Marissa Seymour were absent.

Quorum could not be established.

The Chair declared a five-minute recess to establish Quorum.

The meeting resumed with George Wedge in the Chair.

PRESENT: (Following Recess)

Trustees: F. D’Amico - Virtual and In Person
A. Kennedy
M. Rizzo - Virtual

External Members: G. Wedge, Chair
G. Feldman, Vice Chair
R. De Belchior - Virtual
J. Di Francesco - Virtual
T. Munro - Virtual
A. Pabon - Virtual

5. Approval of the Agenda

MOVED by Jennifer Di Francesco, seconded by Tyler Munro, that the Agenda, as amended to reorder Items 15a) Consideration of Motions: 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; 15b) From Jennifer Di Francesco, representative of CADDAC, regarding Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a “Superpower” not a Disability; and 15c) From Jennifer Di Francesco, representative of CADDAC, regarding Motion to Reform Disciplinary Practices for Students with Learning Differences (Disabilities) and Special Education Needs prior to Item 8) Delegations, be approved.

Trustee Kennedy joined the horseshoe at 7:17 pm.

The Motion was declared

CARRIED

6. **Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

7. **Approval and Signing of the Minutes**

MOVED by Trustee Kennedy, seconded by Geoffrey Feldman, that the Minutes of the Meeting held April 9, 2025 be approved.

The Motion was declared

CARRIED

15. **Consideration of Motions For Which Previous Notice Has Been Given**

MOVED by Jennifer Di Francesco, seconded by Richelle De Belchior, that Item 15a) be adopted as follows:

15a) **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:**

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: The Special Education Advisory Committee (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.

Trustee D'Amico left the virtual room and joined the horseshoe at 7:37 pm.

On the Vote being taken, the Motion was declared

FAILED

MOVED by Jennifer Di Francesco, seconded by Trustee Rizzo, that Item 15b) be adopted as follows:

15b) From Jennifer Di Francesco, representative of Centre for ADHD Awareness Canada (CADDAC), regarding Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a “Superpower” not a Disability:

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 in AMENDMENT by Jennifer Di Francesco, seconded by Trustee Rizzo, that:

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 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 Education Act as a disability. Research shows that ADHD individuals have unique strengths—such as creativity, problem-solving, and adaptability—that can thrive in the right learning environments. By 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.

Results of the Vote taken on the AMENDMENT, as follows:

In Favour

Members De Belchior
Di Francesco
Pabon
Rizzo
Wedge

Opposed

D'Amico
Feldman
Munro
Kennedy

The AMENDMENT was declared

CARRIED

Results of the Vote taken on the Motion, as amended, as follows:

In Favour

Members De Belchior
Di Francesco
Pabon
Rizzo
Wedge

Opposed

D'Amico
Feldman
Munro
Kennedy

The Motion, as amended, was declared

CARRIED

MOVED by Jennifer Di Francesco, seconded by Ashley Pabon, that Item 15c) be adopted as follows:

15c) 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:

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.

Results of the Vote taken, as follows:

In Favour

Members D'Amico
De Belchior
Di Francesco
Munro
Rizzo

Opposed

Feldman
Kennedy
Pabon
Wedge

The Motion was declared

CARRIED

Jennifer Di Francesco left the virtual room at 8:47 pm.

12. Consent and Review

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

13b) Special Education Plan May 2025

Sections for Discussion

19A. Multi-Year Accessibility Plan – Geoffrey Feldman; and

19B. Accessibility Annual Report – Geoffrey Feldman;

14a) Special Services Superintendent Update – May 2025 – Trustee Kennedy; and

14b) Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) Student Achievement Plan 2024-2025 Report Back and Draft Student Achievement Plan (SAP) 2025-2026 for Consultation – 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) Draft Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Annual Calendar 2024 – 2025; and

13b) Special Education Plan May 2025

Sections for Discussion

20. Parent Guide to Special Education;

21. Protocol for Partnerships with External Agencies; and

22. Board Improvement and Equity Plan.

The Chair declared a 10-minute recess.

The meeting resumed with George Wedge in the Chair with no change to the Roll Call.

13. Annual Calendar Items

MOVED by Geoffrey Feldman, seconded by Trustee Kennedy, that Section 19A) of Item 13b) be adopted as follows:

13b) Special Education Plan April 2025:

Section for Discussion:

19A. Multi-Year Accessibility Plan received.

On the Vote being taken, the Motion was declared

CARRIED

MOVED by Geoffrey Feldman, seconded by Trustee Kennedy, that Section 19B) of Item 13b) be adopted as follows:

13b) Special Education Plan April 2025:

Section for Discussion:

19B. Accessibility Annual Report 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 14a) be adopted as follows:

14a) Special Services Superintendent Update – May 2025 received.

On the Vote being taken, the Motion was declared

CARRIED

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

14b) Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) Student Achievement Plan 2024-2025 Report Back and Draft Student Achievement Plan (SAP) 2025-2026 for Consultation received.

On the Vote being taken, the Motion was declared

CARRIED

22. Adjournment

MOVED by Geoffrey Feldman, seconded by Tyler Munro, that the meeting be adjourned.

On the Vote being taken, the Motion was declared

CARRIED

SECRETARY

CHAIR