



MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING WEDNESDAY, MAY 6, 2020

Minutes of the Meeting of the Special Education Advisory Committee held on **Wednesday, May 6, 2020**, at 6:30 pm Electronic Meeting in Compliance with Education Act Section 207 and Ontario Regulation 463/97 Section 5.1 (2) Public Access 1-866-862-7608, Access Code 2139996#

Vice-Chair Murphy called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

A. ROUTINE MATTERS

1. Opening Prayer

Opening prayers were led by Vice-Chair Murphy.

2. Roll Call

Members	Affiliations	Yes	Excused
Dick Kelsey	Indigenous Community Member	✓	
Harvey, Dorothy	Niagara Children's Centre		✓
Helmeczi, Bill	Pathstone Mental Health	✓	
Howcroft, Andrew	Community Living Welland Pelham	✓	
Murphy, Karen	Autism Ontario Niagara Region Chapter	✓	
Nangle, Ted	Learning Disabilities Association of Niagara Region		✓
Palombo, Pina	Down Syndrome Niagara	✓	
Racine, Anna	Community Member		✓
Smith, Lorraine	Mainstream		✓
Smith, Rita	Community Living Port Colborne/Wainfleet	✓	
Burtmik, Kathy	• Board Trustee of St. Catharines	✓	
Fera, Frank	• Chair of the Board		✓
Filice, Adele	• Vice-Principal, Secondary	✓	
Kerho, Chris	• Principal, Elementary	✓	
Willett, Adeline	• Student Senate Representative	✓	

The following staff members were in attendance:

Pat Rocca, Superintendent of Education, **David O'Rourke**, Coordinator – Special Education, **Vincent Mancuso** – Behaviour Resource Teacher and **Jennifer Lanese**, Recording Secretary/Administrative Assistant to Pat Rocca.

3. Approval of the Agenda – May 6, 2020

- Moved by Bill Helmeczi
- Seconded by Andrew Howcroft

THAT THE Special Education Advisory Committee approves the Agenda of the Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting of **May 6, 2020**.

CARRIED

4. Disclosure of Interest

- No Disclosures of Interest were declared with any items on the Agenda.

5. Approval of Minutes of the Special Education Advisory Committee of March 4, 2020

- Moved by Andrew Howcroft
- Seconded by Karen Murphy

THAT THE Special Education Advisory Committee approves the Minutes of the Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting of **March 4, 2020**, as presented.

CARRIED

B. PRESENTATIONS

- There were no presentations that evening.

C. AGENDA ITEMS

1. Parent Outreach

- Superintendent Rocca reminded the group that due to the COVID pandemic, the meeting with Keynote Speakers Dr. Sheila Bennett and Terri Pauco would not be taking place this School Year.
- He re-assured the Committee Members that the meeting would be re-scheduled during School Year 2020-2021.
- He emphasized that both Dr. Sheila Bennett and Terri Pauco were still eager to participate in the Parent Outreach presentation.
- Superintendent Rocca told the group that more information will follow once all the details have been confirmed.

2. Other Related Items

2.1 Design of System Priorities 2020-20210

- The deadline for feedback submission was **Friday, April 24, 2020**. Since there was only one submission brought forth from the SEAC Committee Members, the Director's office has extended the deadline until **Friday, May 8, 2020**. Superintendent Rocca has asked all SEAC

Committee Members to email their feedback directly to him and he will submit it to Senior Administrative Council on their behalf.

- This was the feedback submitted by Kelsey Dick, Indigenous Community Member:

Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC)

Specific references made to Indigenous Education:

“develop staff capacity to implement practices that honour and engage indigenous perspectives”

“provide Indigenous learners with culturally responsive supports”

Our Indigenous community would be happy to provide specific feedback around priorities regarding Indigenous student success within NCDSB and best practices. These priorities could be informed by the Ministry of Education’s First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework as well as the Calls to Action for Education within the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Report (links attached)

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/policy.html>

http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

2.2 Annual Review of the Special Education Plan

- David O’Rourke, Coordinator of Special Education reminded the Committee Members of the annual review of the Special Education Plan that is taking place.
- He explained to the Committee Members how to access the current Special Education Plan from the Board’s website.
- The direct link to the Special Education Plan can be accessed by clicking: [Special Education Plan](#) or by entering in your browser: (<https://cdn.niagaracatholic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Spec-Ed-Plan-Binder-2019.pdf>).
- All sections of the Special Education Plan will be updated to reflect this School Year.
- The Committee Members were asked to ensure that their personal information (found on Page 72, Part 3 of the Special Education Plan) was correct and up to date.
- Jennifer Lanese will be emailing the group an updated contact information list for their review.
- SEAC Committee Members were encouraged to review the Special Education Plan and forward any feedback to Jennifer Lanese.
- Jennifer Lanese will then forward any feedback to the Special Education Coordinators to submit to the Ministry on SEAC’s behalf.
- SEAC Committee Members will be putting forth a motion at the next SEAC Meeting:

*THAT the Special Education Advisory Committee approve the revisions to the Provisions of Special Education Programs and Services to be included in the Special Education Plan, **Building Bridges to Services 2020 and Beyond**.*

- All SEAC Committee Members were strongly encouraged to attend June's meeting.
- The approved plan will be submitted to the Ministry of Education no later than **Friday, July 31, 2020.**

2.3 Ministry Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE) Community Collaboration Form

- All Committee SEAC Members were emailed a MACSE Community Collaboration form and they were encouraged to complete the form based on their experience and affiliations.
- Superintendent Rocca will collect the data and share the results with the group at a later meeting.
- The due date for the submission of the MACSE Community Collaboration forms was **Friday, May 22, 2020.**

3. Policy Review

- The following Policies and Administrative Guidelines are currently being reviewed as part of the cyclical Policy and Administrative Guidelines Review process.
- To be considered, all submissions must identify the specific policy and include your name, phone number, address, and affiliation with Niagara Catholic.

Anonymous or pseudonymous submissions will not be considered

- [Equity and Inclusive Education Policy \(100.10\)](#)
- [Retirement & Service Recognition Celebration Policy \(201.2\)302.67\)](#)
- [Leadership Pathways Policy \(203.4\)](#)
- [Volunteer Recognition Policy \(800.4\)](#)

- Please submit your feedback to jennifer.pellegrini@ncdsb.com by 4:00 pm on **September 11, 2020.**

4. SEAC Sub Committees

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the SEAC Sub Committees would not be conveying after the electronic meeting.

D. AGENCY REPORTS

1. Learning Disabilities Association of Niagara Region – Ted Nangle

- NIL Report

2. Niagara Children's Centre – Dorothy Harvey

- NIL Report

3. Autism Ontario Niagara Region Chapter – Karen Murphy

- Autism Niagara is continuing to offer support by phone or through email. Autism Ontario has

been able to provide 355 activity kits across Niagara in April and hope to be able to offer more in May and June. Families are encouraged to check Autism Ontario's Facebook page for upcoming available kits.

- Ontario Autism Program Information sessions are being offered through Zoom meetings. The Zoom meetings also help families learn about the different ways during COVID-19 that they can spend their passport dollars. A final decision on what the summer camp 2020 will look like will be discussed on **Friday, May 15, 2020.**

4. Down Syndrome Niagara – Pina Palombo

- NIL Report

5. Community Living Welland Pelham – Andrew Howcroft

- NIL Report

6. Mainstream – Lorraine Smith

- NIL Report

7. Community Living Port Colborne / Wainfleet – Rita Smith

- NIL Report

8. Pathstone Mental Health – Bill Helmeczi

- Since **March 16**, Pathstone Mental Health has been providing support by phone. As of the week of **May 11**, in-person on-site appointments have begun. On **May 18**, the Lived in Service (Residential) program reopened. Since Pathstone did not have Personal Protective Equipment at that time, services had to be suspended. As of the week of **May 25**, all services will be offered at one of their two main sites. If needed, telephone support will still be provided. Beginning the week of **May 5**, they will be offering digital psychotherapy and digital counselling.
- In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, Pathstone Mental Health clinicians continue to use methods other than face-to-face sessions to meet with clients.
- Their Crisis and Support Line remains open **24/7** at **1-800-263-4944** where individuals can speak with a counsellor about any problem, big or small.
- Children, youth, and families can receive mental health counselling and support, through their Crisis Line **24/7** at **1-800-263-4944**.

9. Indigenous Community Member – Kelsey Dick

- Kelsey wanted to share three Programs that are available for the Indigenous Community:
 - i) **Online Programming**
The Niagara Regional Native Centre as well as the Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre are providing free online cultural programming for students. Online tutoring support is also available for students who self-identify as Indigenous (i.e., First Nation, Metis or Inuit).
 - ii) **Child Care Subsidy Program**
The Metis Nation of Ontario offers a province-wide childcare subsidy program to support Metis families to access safe and quality childcare that fosters a child's lifelong learning. Please email elccsupport@metisnation.org for additional information.

iii) ***Disabilities Support Program***

This program provides Metis people with disabilities to secure employment and entry to the workforce by assisting with skills development. Expenses that may be eligible for coverage include training, special equipment, tutoring, transportation, and assessment fees. For additional information, please contact **1-888-546-3847**.

E. STAFF REPORTS

1. Secondary Principals – Adele Filice

- Adele shared with the group that distance learning has been very successful in the Secondary Schools. She emphasized that all students are being supported during these unique and uncertain times.
- Educational Assistants (EAs) have been engaged with supporting students through these difficult times. Consequently, EAs have also been assigned to the students' google classrooms to offer additional support for students.

2. Elementary Principals – Chris Kerho

- The last day of Catholic Education Week was themed, "***A Future Full of Hope.***"
- Today, we are highlighting one of our Grade 8 students, Jessica Gaunt. Jessica has been diagnosed with autism and suffers from anxiety.
- She will be going to Notre Dame College in September for Grade 9.
- The school put a plan in place to help Jessica with this transition.
- Jessica's transition to Notre Dame College was progressing well and then the pandemic hit.
- Jessica and her mom have been keeping very busy while dealing with the school's closure due to COVID-19.
- Jessica embodies our spirit as a Catholic community with "***A Future Full of Hope.***" She has been making care packages for nurses and health care workers to show support and appreciation for their efforts. Packages include hand-sewn masks, homemade soap, and bath bombs.
- In addition to all of this, Jessica has also decided to cut her hair to donate to ***Angel Hair*** for kids. This is the third time Jessica has donated her hair. The entire St. Andrew Catholic Elementary School community thanks Jessica and her mom for all their efforts. With the caring attitude and concern for others, Jessica is truly an example of "***A Future Full of Hope***"!

3. Special Education – David O'Rourke

- The Student Support Department has been having virtual meetings to provide support for staff during distance learning.
- Niagara Catholic continues to provide support to all students throughout distance learning.
- Our Student Support Department has had on-going contact with principals, teachers, and families to provide support for students with special needs to help them adapt as best as possible during distance learning.
- The Special Education Coordinators have been reviewing the Needs Assessment for all schools to ensure that schools have their support in place for School Year 2020-2021.

4. Pat Rocca – Superintendent of Education

- As we do each year, during the first week of May, Catholic schools across Ontario celebrate the gift of Catholic education during Catholic Education Week.
- Although we celebrate Catholic education in many different ways every day, Catholic Education Week truly allows us to highlight what makes Catholic education different, and how it makes a difference in the lives of the students who receive a Catholic education.
- The theme for this year is *Igniting Hope*. Here are the lyrics to the song, *Hope* by Christopher Rait:

In the dark - When all seems lost - Find a way - With just a spark. Be the hope - It's there inside - Find some kindness - And shine the light. There is hope in our world. A hope within us God's story told. Ignites the hope among us. Share a future with young and old. Clear as day - With no disguise - Had to look with different eyes - Call off the search - It's here inside - Share some kindness - And shine the light. There is hope in our world. A hope within us God's story told. Ignites the hope among us. Share a future with young and old. Be the joy - Be the peace - Be the hope - It's in your reach - Over the land - Over the sea - The love that grows - When you set it free. There is hope in our world. A hope within us God's story told. Ignites the hope among us. Share a future with young and old.

- Niagara Catholic students were actively engaged during Catholic Education Week. Mr. Kerho, Principal of St. Andrew Catholic Elementary School shared a story about one of his students to the Committee Members.
- Superintendent Rocca encouraged all the Committee Members to access the many wonderful resources that are available for all families on the Board's website. He touched upon the many wonderful videos, and pictures of our students, who are the very best advocates of Catholic Education, as they ignite hope in all of us each day.
- Superintendent Rocca spoke of the three phases Niagara Catholic has launched during distance learning.

Phase 1 – The Liaison Phase

- Niagara Catholic immediately began corresponding with families on social media following the March 12 announcement, that schools would be closed for two weeks following March Break. Since that time, we have created two dedicated COVID-19 pages on our Board's website.
- One web page for general pandemic information and another web page for learning at home. We upload daily posts on social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram), and sent letters and calls to our families through School Messenger.
- You will find it on the Main Web page: **COVID-19 Learn at Home**, where families can access any of the four tabs, (i.e., Elementary, Secondary Special Education or Continuing Education) from the **Learning from Home Resource Page**: [COVID-19 Learn at Home](https://niagaracatholic.ca/covid-19-learn-at-home-resources/) or by entering in your browser: (<https://niagaracatholic.ca/covid-19-learn-at-home-resources/>).
- We worked very diligently in creating resources to post on the Board's website to support our families. You will also notice that on the Board's website, we have resources for families that our very valued community partners have shared with our Board.
- This website is updated weekly and Superintendent Rocca thanked all of the Committee Members

and their agencies for sharing their information and so many wonderful community-based resources with our Niagara Catholic families.

- Providing access to these resources has also enabled many of our families to become familiar with the excellent support that these agencies provide.
- Superintendent Rocca also thanked Jennifer Lanese for coordinating the transfer of this information to our Communications Officer, Jennifer Pellegrini.
- Jennifer Pellegrini has been doing a fantastic job informing our entire Niagara Catholic Community! We thank her for all her efforts. Through our Communications Officer, Niagara Catholic has continued to stay connected with the community. We have a robust social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. We work diligently to keep our followers, which includes our students, staff, families, and the broader community stay engaged. We also keep in contact with our local media outlets to share our good news.

Phase 2 - The Collaboration Phase

- Niagara Catholic has taken extraordinary steps to continue to provide excellence in Catholic education since Minister of Education Stephen Lecce announced the first school closure and student-supported learning. Throughout each extension, Niagara Catholic has continued to add to the Ministry of Education resources for teacher-led distance learning with supplementary activities families can continue to use to keep students engaged when not participating in the formal learning part of their days. These resources are listed on the Learning Resources section of our special Learn at Home section found on our Board's website, as well as community resources intended to keep minds active while students are away from school.
- We worked with the schools through the support of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).
- Our entire Student Support department gathered the resources necessary to support learning at home for all staff and students.
- These resources are reviewed and selected by school staff in order to support families on a case-by-case basis. As the need for intervention arises, all staff collaborate to provide that support and locate the most appropriate resources to do so.

Phase 3 – The Create and Enhance Program Phase

- We are currently in Phase 3, where we are creating and enhancing programs for staff and students through program support and Professional Development opportunities.
- Niagara Catholic provides ongoing professional development for all staff throughout the school year. How staff development is taking place this spring may be different, but we are ensuring that all staff continue on their professional development journey and reach goals and objectives to continue to provide excellent service to our students and our schools.
- Professional Development opportunities have been provided for all staff by the Student Support and Staff Development departments respectively.
- We have approximately 40 Educational Resource Teachers that have completed additional qualifications in Applied Behavioural Analysis training.
- Educational Assistants have also partaken in a variety of Professional Development opportunities chosen by each individual based on their learning goals.

- We have a Special Education System Learning Group, comprised of school and system-level staff that continue to engage in dialogue creating resources and artifacts to support all school staff.
- In closing, I pray for the best of health and safety for all of you and your families during this most challenging time. I am hopeful, that amidst all of this, you are able to find moments of peace and serenity, and take the opportunity to truly experience the joy and comfort that our family and friends provide us each day. I often find that celebrating the many little things around us make the big things in life that much more manageable. God bless you and your families, and please take good care.

F. TRUSTEE REPORTS

- John Crocco, Director of Education has provided regular updates to all staff through an ongoing series of Director's memorandums since distance learning began in March. These Director's memos have been shared with trustees and Bishop Gerard Bergie, head of the Diocese of St. Catharines. These memos provide action and information for all staff from the Director, Senior Administrative Council, Human Resources, Health and Safety, Facilities Services, Information Technology Services, and Communications.
- In addition to the many letters, Director's memos, and department memos, social media posts and other correspondence with students, staff, and families, Niagara Catholic also provided many pieces of supporting documentation to help everyone transition from the traditional classroom setting to student-directed learning teacher-led learning.
- The Board of Trustees has been meeting regularly during this pandemic and they are keeping Niagara Catholic families in their prayers.
- Trustee Burtnik asked the group to keep in their thoughts and prayers, Patricia (Pat) Vernal, who has taken ill.
- Pat was a former Board Trustee and a retired Niagara Catholic Special Education Teacher. Sadly, Pat recently passed away. We continue to keep Pat and her family in our prayers.
- In closing, Trustee Burtnik gave a big shout-out to all Niagara Catholic staff for keeping the students safe while keeping them engaged and learning. On behalf of the Chair of the Board and all the Board Trustees, she expressed her gratitude for all the hard work, dedication, and commitment Niagara Catholic staff have undertaken during these challenging times.

G. STUDENT REPORT

- Student Senate has had Zoom meetings since the school closures. They recently made a video thanking all of the Front-line workers. They also made a video to promote Catholic Education.

H. NCPIC REPORT

- Vincent Mancuso will be attending NCPIC Meeting on **Thursday, May 7, 2020**. He will be presenting a summary of the current projects that the SEAC Committee Members are perusing.

I. FUTURE MEETINGS AND EVENTS

- Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, there is nothing to report at this time.

J. MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION FOR LIFE

- Vice-Chair Murphy asked all attendees to observe a moment of silence during these uncertain times.

K. NEXT MEETING

- **Wednesday, June 3, 2020 at 6:30 pm** – format to be determined based on current COVID-19 restrictions.

L. ADJOURNMENT

- Moved by Bill Helmeczi
- Seconded by Kelsey Dick

THAT the May 6, 2020 meeting of the Special Education Advisory Committee be adjourned.
CARRIED

- This meeting was adjourned at 7:10 pm.