

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2026

## MINUTES

### ATTENDANCE

#### Committee Members Present

Flavia Orvitz (Acting Chair) - Autism Ontario – Niagara Chapter, Patty Ferrie – Inclusion West Niagara, Tessa Alexander – VOICE for Children Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Katie McKay – Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Coalition, Tom Janzen – Down Syndrome Niagara

#### Administration/Resource

Kelly Pisek – Chief Executive Officer, Simon Hancox - Superintendent of Student Achievement and Well-being, Catherine Hodson- Student Achievement Leader Special Education Elementary, Matt Ezrin – Student Achievement Leader Special Education Secondary, Tracey Krysa – Senior Manager Special Education, Shannon Mitchell - Trustee, District School Board of Niagara,

#### Regrets

Cynthia Nyaundi- NSS-NTEC  
Brienne Friewat – Bethesda  
Barb Wilson – Inclusion Action Ontario  
Kathy Bell – Niagara Children's Centre  
Michelle Toy – Pathstone Mental Health  
Elizabeth Klassen- Trustee, District School Board of Niagara

#### Recording Secretary

Jennifer McGugan, Safe Schools and Student Well-Being Coordinator

#### 1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TERRITORY

Quorum was established and the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) meeting was called to order at 5:35 p.m. Acting Chair, Flavia Orvitz, opened the meeting with the Acknowledgement of Traditional Territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples.

#### 2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Moved by Tessa Alexander  
Seconded by Katie McKay

*"That the Agenda dated September 23, 2026, be approved as presented."*

**CARRIED**

#### 3. WELCOME

Acting Chair, Flavia Orvitz, welcomed new representative Tom Janzen from Down Syndrome Niagara and invited committee members to introduce themselves.

#### 4. STUDENT VOICE

Catharine Hodson, Student Achievement Leader for Special Education – Elementary, presented a video highlighting the success of summer partnership programs for families of children with special learning needs. Participating staff, students, and families shared their enthusiasm and appreciation for programs hosted by Niagara Children’s Centre, Bethesda Services, and the Learning Disabilities Association of Niagara Region.

### 5. **DSBN PRESENTATIONS/UPDATES**

Kelly Pisek, Chief Executive Officer, reviewed recent Ministry of Education updates and outlined DSBN’s initiative to build a 100% Culture centred on Proving What’s Possible for every student. Staff received a consistent message emphasizing two priorities across all areas of work: belonging and inclusion, and responsive instruction at both the system and school levels.

Simon Hancox, Superintendent of Student Achievement and Well-Being, reported that Special Education Support Services provided training and resources on IEP development, including clear guidance on their framework and required components. IEPs promote belonging and inclusion by ensuring students receive the supports they need and by incorporating input from parents and guardians. Simon Hancox also identified specialized programs as a priority, emphasizing the importance of providing consistent regional programming, setting clear baseline expectations, providing adequate resources, and promoting stronger professional collaboration among staff.

### 6. **SEAC COLLABORATION AND FEEDBACK**

Simon Hancox reported that some healthcare providers are recommending educational resources beyond their scope of practice. Committee members discussed and recommended clear communication with families and collaboration with SEAC to support effective family advocacy around special education supports.

Also, the Special Education Plan was updated in June and submitted to the Ministry of Education in July, as required pending board approval. The Board approved the plan in the August board meeting. The accompanying Special Education Parent/Guardian Guide incorporated valuable SEAC feedback, resulting in a more family-friendly resource that clearly explains available supports. This year, DSBN will continue collaborating with SEAC to update the plan and ensure it aligns with evolving Ministry expectations.

Simon Hancox shared that each organization represented on SEAC received a membership confirmation letter, and all current members confirmed their participation for the next four-year term. Organizations will receive further communication confirming their representatives and alternates.

Finally, the SEAC Handbook was shared with members for their review. The group will work collaboratively to revise this document to better support SEAC members in their role.

### 7. **ASSOCIATION INFORMATION**

Committee members shared information and updates from their respective associations and roles.

### 8. **TRUSTEE UPDATE**

Trustee Mitchell provided an update on the August Board meeting.

### 9. **CORRESPONDENCE**

There was no correspondence received.

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### 10. **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

There were no questions.

### 11. **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 6:51 p.m.

Next Meeting: Wednesday October 28, 2026