Northeastern Catholic District School Board

A place where we all belong.

Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting - Minutes Wednesday, September 23, 2026

PRESENT: Paula Crotteau, Inspire Centre
Ken Ryan, The Lord's Kitchen Society
Jeremy Hall, Timmins Learning Centre
Sabrina Belanger, Cochrane Temiskaming Resource Centre
Ellen Renaud, North Eastern Ontario Family and Children's Services
Shannon Costello, Cochrane District Services Board
Ryley Reis, Canadian Mental Health Association
Kristine Arthur, Kunuwanimano Child & Family Services
Colleen Landers, NCDSB Trustee
Stan Skalecki, NCDSB Trustee
Erica Raymond, Superintendent of Education
Derek Mundle, School Principal Sacred Heart Catholic School
Amber Smith-Come, School Principal St. Anne English Catholic School
Catherine Hoven, Special Assignment Teacher
Katie Mundle, Special Assignment Teacher
Lisa Lamarche, Autism & Behavior & Worker
Jean Ethier, Education Services Officer / Recorder
Brittany Counter, Behaviour Analyst

EXCUSED: Lisa Malette-Lilko, Hands Autism Services
Kim McEntee, Mental Health Supervisor

Summary:

Erica welcomed everyone and led the group in prayer and in the land acknowledgement.

Approval of the agenda: Moved by Ellen Renaud and SECONDED by Stan Skalecki
That the agenda be approved as presented. CARRIED

Approval of the minutes of June 17, 2026, meeting
Moved by Colleen Landers and SECONDED by Stan Skalecki
That the minutes be approved and presented. CARRIED

Elections – Chair and Vice Chair

Elections – Chair

Erica Raymond opened the nomination process. Stan nominated Colleen Landers as Chair of SEAC. Colleen accepted the nomination. Nominations were closed and Erica declared Colleen Landers, Chair of SEAC from September 2026 to June 2027.

Motion

MOVED BY: Kristine Arthur
SECONDED BY: Ken Ryan
CARRIED

Elections – Vice Chair

Colleen Landers as Chair of the committee opened the nomination process for the position of Vice Chair of SEAC.

Ryley Reis put himself forward for the position and nominations were closed and Colleen declared Ryley Reis the Vice-Chair of SEAC from September 2026 to June 2027.

Motion

MOVED BY: Kristine Arthur
SECONDED BY: Ellen Renaud
CARRIED

Schedule of Meetings September to December 2026

The meeting schedule for the remainder of 2026 has been confirmed with the committee members. Dates for meetings from January to June 2027 will be finalized and communicated by mid-November 2026.

In Service Sessions for upcoming meetings

Erica provided a list by month of potential topics to be discussed at future meetings and requested the committee feedback.

Suggested Monthly Topics for SEAC and Annual work plan topics for a Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC).

Month	Suggested Topic
September	Welcome and SEAC Roles and Responsibilities, Review of suggested topics and Meeting Norms
October	Special Education Priorities, Student Achievement and Well-Being, EQAO Data
November	Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS): Tier 1 Universal Supports and Inclusive Practices, Attendance and engagement of students with exceptionalities
December	Mental Health and Well-Being Supports for Students with Special Education Needs Discuss collaboration with agencies on kindergarten registrations and how it can be supported
January	Special Education Budget Review and Funding Updates
February	Accessibility Planning, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and Technology Supports
March	Transition Planning: Early Years to School, Elementary to Secondary, and School to Community
April	Special Education Plan Review
May	Indigenous Learners with Special Education Needs and Culturally Responsive Supports
June	Student Voice Panel, Parent Perspectives, and Year-End Reflection on Special Education Priorities

Additional Rotating Topics

- Autism supports and evidence-based practices
- Behaviour management and regulation support
- Speech, language, and communication services
- School-based rehabilitation services
- Developmental disabilities and inclusive education
- Equity and special education

- Assistive technology demonstrations
- Safe schools and progressive discipline for students with special education needs
- Reading, mathematics, and intervention programming
- Community agency partner presentations
- Postsecondary pathways and employment support
- Special Incidence Portion (SIP) claims and intensive supports
- Student transportation considerations
- Emergency preparedness and medically fragile students
- Individual Education Plans (IEPs), Alternative Expectations, and Parent Engagement

Meeting Norms & Expectations

As a Special Education Advisory Committee, we work together respectfully and collaboratively, keeping students at the centre of every discussion. Our shared expectations are to:

- Put students first – Focus on student achievement, well-being, inclusion, and support.
- Respect all voices – Listen actively and value different perspectives and experiences.
- Engage respectfully – Share ideas, ask questions, and respectfully disagree.
- Assume positive intent – Approach conversations with trust, empathy, and professionalism.
- Maintain confidentiality – Protect privacy and focus on system-level matters.
- Be solution-focused – Work together to improve special education supports and services.
- Respect time and process – Follow the agenda, meeting protocols, and timelines.
- Promote equity and inclusion – Ensure everyone feels welcomed and heard.
- Learn together – Share knowledge, remain open to learning, and support continuous improvement.
- Maintain Confidentiality – Protect privacy, focus on system-level matters, and clearly mark materials that are confidential and not to be shared or distributed.

Update on the Summer Transition Program

Autism & Behaviour Support Services – Presentation by Brittany Counter

1. Transition 4-Day Camp
    - Approximately 130 students from FDK to Grade 8 with a variety of needs were invited across 10 school sites.
    - Attendance was approximately 60–75%.
    - The camp focused on building key skills for a successful transition to school, including:
        - Asking for help
        - Following routines
        - Sharing
        - Developing independence
2. Foundations for Success at School – Updated Kits
    - The Foundations for Success at School kits have been updated.
    - Resources continue to focus on the same core skills and routines.
    - Materials are aligned with the Ontario Kindergarten and Grade 1 curricula, as well as Everyday Speech and the School Mental Health Ontario Frameworks.
    - The updated kits include 8 read-aloud books.
    - Classroom visits and feedback forms will begin soon to support implementation and gather feedback on the resources.

Update on Early Reading Screening

Presented by Catherine Hoven

Since fall 2022, Special Assignment Teachers have been working with Resource Teachers and Leads in elementary schools to complete early reading screenings for SK–Grade 2 and oral reading assessments for Grades 3–8.

The Ministry of Education requires students in K–2 to be screened twice annually, with parents/guardians informed of their child's progress. The board uses Aimsweb+ by Pearson, a nationally normed, skills-based assessment and progress-monitoring tool.

- Aimsweb+ helps staff:
    - Identify learning gaps and students who may be at risk.
    - Inform daily classroom instruction.
    - Monitor individual and group growth.
    - Provide reading achievement information to teachers and families.
    - Track the effectiveness of instructional interventions.
- Assessment areas include letter naming and sounds, print concepts, initial sounds, vocabulary, word reading, nonsense word reading, phoneme segmentation, and oral reading fluency.
- Students are typically assessed three times per year—fall, winter, and spring—to identify concerns early.
- Based on results, Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions are provided as needed.
- Students identified as at risk can be progress monitored more frequently to determine whether changes to instruction are supporting their reading growth.

Professional Development Day Planning for October 26: Special Education Focus

Presented by Erica Raymond

Special Education Professional Activity Day

The Ministry has designated a Professional Activity Day specifically focused on Special Education, which is a new development and has not occurred in recent memory. This provides an opportunity for a board-wide focus on Special Education professional learning.

- Potential areas of focus include:
    - Reviewing IEPs and their contents.
    - Identifying efficiencies in the IEP process across the system.
    - Developing a clearer understanding of universal accommodations from K–12.
    - Reviewing whether current accommodations are effectively meeting students' needs.

The day presents an opportunity for focused Special Education work that has not previously been a provincial priority.

AI and Special Education

AI is being explored as an emerging tool to support teachers and Special Education staff.

One potential application is using AI to assist with identifying strategies and next steps based on a student's learning profile.

For example, information about a student with a learning disability (LD) could be used to generate potential:

- Immediate instructional next steps.
- Strategies and accommodations.
- Progress-monitoring approaches.
- Possible goals.

AI could become an additional accommodation and support tool, helping staff provide more individualized support and potentially helping to level the playing field for students who experience learning challenges. This is still an emerging and largely untapped area, with conversations beginning about how AI can be used appropriately within Special Education.

Agency Reports

Timmins Learning Centre

Jeremy Hall, Executive Director of the Timmins Learning Centre, welcomed Erica Raymond back and spoke about the importance of building stronger community connections. He mentioned seeing NCDSB at the United Way Community Breakfast and Welcome to Timmins Night.

The Timmins Learning Centre is also looking at reviving a partnership with NCDSB and DSBONE where schools could sponsor students to receive additional tutoring and support through the Centre. This could include fall, winter/spring, or summer sessions, with the goal of working together to provide additional support and help students be successful.

Canadian Mental Health Association

The government is moving toward a centralized referral model for mental health and other related health services. Instead of parents or patients contacting multiple agencies individually, they would access services through a centralized intake system.

- A worker would assess the individual's needs and determine which services and supports are appropriate.
- Referrals would then be directed to the relevant agencies.
- Agencies such as CMHA are beginning to reshape their internal processes to align with this model.
- Over time, other healthcare-aligned agencies in the community are expected to adopt similar processes as this provincial direction is implemented.
- The transition is expected to occur gradually

Cochrane District Services Board

Shannon provided an update on what is happening with childcare and EarlyON services across the district.

- CWELCC funding: The province and federal government still haven't reached an agreement on continuing the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care funding. They're waiting to see what that will look like for next year and whether there will be another major funding change.
- Recruitment is improving; Workforce recruitment and retention efforts are starting to make a difference, and they're seeing more people coming into the sector. They're also doing more outreach to students, starting as early as Grades 7 and 8, to introduce them to different careers in the early years field. An additional $40,000 has been put toward the fall program.
- They are also working with local colleges to better prepare students for placements. This includes a mentorship program for second-year students and tours for first-year students so they can learn more about the different types of jobs and facilities available in the early years sector.
- EarlyON is seeing a lot of growth: Services are being used much more by families across the district. Spruce Hill Lodge alone had more than 6,000 visits during July and August, compared with just a couple hundred visits across the entire district when the program was first taken over in 2018.
- Families are making greater use of programs such as literacy, mental health, child development, and Ages and Stages assessments. Staff are also increasingly able to meet one-on-one with families and provide resources to help support their children's development.
- The C.D.S.B. is now directly operating additional centres, including Matheson, with more expansion happening across the district.
- The biggest change is who is accessing the services. In 2018, about 90% of families using free EarlyON services were from households earning over $100,000. That has changed significantly, and participation is now much more evenly spread across low-, middle-, and higher-income families.

Overall, the message was that EarlyON and childcare services are becoming much more widely used across the district, while recruitment efforts are helping to build the workforce needed to support that growth.

Inspire Centre

Paula shared that this would be her final SEAC meeting, as Melissa Landry, Program Manager for Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, and Speech-Language Pathology, will be taking over the SEAC role beginning in October. Paula provided an update on service delivery, noting that approximately 680 classroom visits were completed last school year through the tiered Occupational Therapy intervention model, with additional support provided through Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. The OT tiered intervention rollout continues to go well. The organization also piloted a tiered Speech-Language intervention model last year, which was very successful and is now being expanded. Despite ongoing vacancies among Speech-Language Pathologists, every school board will have at least one school participating this term, with plans to expand the service further in January. Collaboration with school CERTs is an important part of the model, and feedback to date has been very positive.

Paula also noted a significant vacancy in Physiotherapy following the retirement of a senior physiotherapist, and recruitment efforts are underway to address the resulting service needs. Another change is that the Inspire Center is now the access point for new applicants seeking Complex Special Needs Funding through coordinated service planning. Families who already receive complex special needs funding through NEOFACS will continue with their existing services, and Francophone and Indigenous families can continue to use their established pathways. Families and service providers can contact the organization through the Smart Start Hub or intake for assistance navigating the process and accessing appropriate services.

North Eastern Ontario Family and Children's Services

The agency is currently managing waitlists of approximately two months, which is considered manageable, but there is some concern that referrals may increase as schools are fully underway and more students are identified as needing support. Staffing is also returning to normal as staff come back from various locations, allowing services to get back on track. Current supports include Circle of Security, an attachment-based program, as well as ongoing psychological services and other community-based supports.

Kunuwanimano Child & Family Services

The agency has gone through a significant shift, with federal funding and prevention-based services transitioning to First Nation communities. As a result, their Child and Youth Well-being team is now primarily focused on youth in care, while continuing to provide education and liaison supports.

A major focus this year is supporting Indigenous youth in care who are struggling with high school credits and graduation, particularly those with special needs. Limited access to alternative education programs in Timmins is creating a significant gap. Some youths are choosing to step away from school for 12–18 months while waiting to become eligible for other options, but this can result in lost opportunities to develop important skills and maintain educational progress. The situation is particularly challenging for youth who are 16–17 years old and living independently, while also dealing with limited support systems and access to services. The team is trying to get ahead of these challenges with fewer resources and is interested in working with community partners to identify available supports and find ways to better connect youth with appropriate resources.

Cochrane Temiskaming Resource Centre

There has been a significant program audit of the psychological and speech and language services over the summer, with a focus on identifying efficiencies and reducing wait times. There has also been an extensive wait list for prevention services, as well as within psychological services. The goal is to refine and improve the service-delivery process moving forward. Speech and language services were also impacted by staffing vacancies over the past year, which contributed to delays. The agency is now looking at ways to adjust the process and improve access to services.

Date of the Next Meeting – Wednesday October 21, 2026, at 11:45 a.m.

Other Business – Erica read a thank-you card from Daphne Brumwell, expressing her appreciation to the committee for her retirement gift.

Adjournment - Moved By: Stan Skalecki, that the meeting be adjourned at 12:54 p.m. CARRIED