

## AVON MAITLAND DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

*We Will: Create Positive, Inclusive Learning Environments, and Maximize Outcomes for Students*

### COMMITTEE'S ACTION REPORT

**TO: Regular Board Meeting – Tuesday, April 25, 2017**

**AGENDA ITEM: 4.1 a)**

**SUBJECT: Report of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)**

#### 1.0 Background

- 1.1 At the February 14, 2017 meeting of the Avon Maitland District School Board (AMDSB), the following motion was approved:

*Resolved that, the Avon Maitland District School Board ask SEAC to provide the board with the processes and strategies for carrying out a review that consists of the following:*

- 1. Describe the vision in AMDSB for inclusive education, and in particular for those students with developmental disabilities;*
- 2. Outline the current practices throughout the District with feedback on their effectiveness through input from all stakeholders including but not limited to: students, parents, teachers, EAs, and Administration;*
- 3. Identify best practices and opportunities for growth, and as appropriate provide recommendations to ensure that the vision for inclusive education is realized throughout our District;*  
*And that a progress report on strategies/processes be brought forward following the April SEAC meeting.*

- 1.2 SEAC members discussed the motion at their March 1, 2017 meeting. At that meeting a motion to strike a Subcommittee of SEAC was approved. The Subcommittee members were Nancy Rothwell, Katie Fox, Terri Sparling, Doris Barkley, and Peggy Blair.

- 1.3 The Subcommittee met on March 8 and April 10, 2017. At the April 12, 2017 SEAC Meeting the Sub-committee discussed each piece of the board motion.

#### 1.4 **Section 1: Vision for Inclusive Education**

In terms of the vision for inclusive education in AMDSB, it flows from the prior and current strategic plan priorities: *We will create . . . 'Positive, Inclusive Learning Environments' coupled with 'Maximizing Outcomes for Students'*. The two priorities are not separate but are the two parts of a whole: one can not be emphasized over the other. Since 2011, SEAC has supported the move to general education classes for students with developmental disabilities. To this end, members of the SEAC have been working on a definition of inclusive education for an extended period of time.

At the April 12<sup>th</sup> meeting members of SEAC accepted the following draft definition was accepted:

*Inclusive education in the Avon Maitland District School Board values the individual, social and academic contributions of every learner. Inclusive education acknowledges that every student has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs that are enriched in a common learning environment through student-centered pedagogy. Inclusive education embraces diversity, to create rich learning communities where all students are supported to learn and grow together in general education settings regardless of difference.*

This draft definition does not speak to the 'how' of inclusive education but rather supports the vision of inclusive education for all diverse populations including students with disabilities, created with direct input from SEAC and other stakeholders.

### 1.5 **Section 2: Outline Current Evidence-Based Practices and Solicit Feedback From Stakeholder Groups**

There was discussion on the most prominent evidenced-based strategies that are in effect across the school board for all learners with developmental disabilities, including those cited in Ministry of Education documents and other credible literature. The following is a list of the strategies:

- Individual Education Plans
- Universal Design for Learning
- Differentiated Instruction
- Assessment for Learning
- Response to Intervention

Potential stakeholders brought forward to SEAC from the Subcommittee for involvement in the research included students with developmental disabilities who are fully included in regular classes, parents of students with developmental disabilities who are fully included in regular classroom placements, teachers of such students, educational assistants, principals and adult service providers. There was discussion about whether additional research was necessary. If it is needed, then a review of research conducted in the board will be required to determine which stakeholder groups need to be involved.

Before making a recommendation to the board of trustees, the scope of the research (large or representative sample), costs (visible and hidden), a literature review and ethics clearance were all considered by SEAC. The Subcommittee proposed that the scope of the research be representative (\$21,500.) and of a proportional sample size, to be mindful of the costs and to avoid unnecessary duplication of previous researched stakeholder groups.

The sub-committee recommended to SEAC that the AMDSB partner with Brock University to conduct the research for a number of reasons including:

- the ethics clearance is currently open;
- the past history of satisfaction with the quality of research conducted to date;
- the previous literature review has been completed; would just require an updated review;
- the timeliness of research is expedited because ethics clearance is open.

1.6 **Section 3: Identify Best Practices and Opportunities for Growth to Ensure the Vision of Inclusive Education is Realized**

The current, as well as new research, will identify strengths and areas to consider growing in the future. Research may label evidenced-based practices currently underway in school locations within the board that need sustained resourcing to maximize the learning of the students with developmental disabilities and the staff that work with these young people. Evidenced-based strategies may be classified under key headings such as instructional, environmental and foundational.

**2.0 Recommendation**

It is recommended by SEAC that the AMDSB consider the following when moving forward with new research:

- a) Scope: representative and proportional sample size
- b) Be mindful of the cost
- c) Avoid unnecessary duplication of previous researched stakeholder groups if not necessary
- d) Stakeholders who have been interviewed for previous research might not be considered for new research

In addition, the school board should partner with Brock University because:

1. The ethics clearance is currently open
2. The past history of satisfaction with the quality of research conducted to date
3. The previous literature review has been completed; would just require an updated review
4. The timeliness of research is expedited because the ethics clearance is open

Respectfully Submitted by:

Special Education Advisory Committee Members