

Meeting Highlights
Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE)
February 8 & 9, 2017

February 8, 2017

- Marion Macdonald, vice-chair, welcomed members and acknowledged that MACSE is meeting on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit. She reminded members of the *Conflict of Interest* rules and the requirement to declare any potential conflict at each meeting.
- Bruce Rodrigues, the Deputy Minister of Education, delivered brief remarks and invited comments. He began by thanking members of MACSE for their diligence in supporting the ministry to ensure that all students are considered in its work. Within the four major goals that guide the ministry's work (achieving excellence, ensuring equity, promoting well-being, and enhancing public confidence), he noted that current areas of focus include:
 - the government's commitment to add 100,000 new child care spaces,
 - the renewed mathematics strategy,
 - preparing students for a highly skilled work force, and
 - well-being.
- The Deputy added that the lenses for all of this work include equity, Indigenous education, and collaborative professionalism. He also noted that transitions between academic and applied levels of study, and an achievement gap between the two levels, are areas where more work need to be done.
- Council member comments:
 - Curriculum should be more broadly accessible by using all of the senses, not just sight.
 - There is a connection between difficulties in learning math and anxiety. The Toronto Catholic DSB delivered a very successful professional development day activity during which a mental health model was presented to all secondary school staff with the support of Student Mental Health ASSIST.
 - Public confidence suffered when EQAO testing was disrupted by a cyber-attack in October. The introduction of on-line testing by EQAO without full availability of accommodations for students with special education needs was very disappointing.
 - It is not clear how the well-being strategy is being monitored and measured so as to hold school boards accountable.
 - Well-being and mental health should not be viewed as separate strategies. They are linked in both identifying areas of difficulty and deploying interventions.
 - All students deserved to be recognized for achieving at their own level.
- Louise Sirisko, Director of the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch (SEPPB), advised that the *Special Education Update* would be circulated to the members and posted on the web site in a few weeks. She provided an update on the ministry's work reviewing three of the exceptionality definitions (Gifted, Mild Intellectual Disability/Developmental Disability, and Behaviour). Stakeholders are being consulted on draft revised definitions and it is hoped they will be released in 2017.

- Staff from SEPPB provided an update and sought feedback on the Provincial Framework for Alternative Programs and Courses, for students who do not access the provincial curriculum.
 - MACSE noted that the starting point should be the provincial curriculum. Some students will access some, but not all of it.

- Representatives from four other ministries provided updates on their initiatives (details are provided in the *Special Education Update*):
 - Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD)
 - Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS)
 - Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC), and
 - Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS)

- Staff from the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) provided an update on standardized testing.
 - EQAO remains committed to moving from paper to computer-based assessments, but in light of the cyber-attack that disrupted the October 2016 OSSLT assessment, it has been decided to administer the March 2017 OSSLT on paper.
 - EQAO is committed to addressing special education needs.
 - MASCE members suggested that EQAO communications to school boards be copied to SEACs and School Council chairs.

- Staff from SEPPB provided an update on the Renewed Mathematics Strategy (RMS).
 - One key priority of the RMS is to focus on support for students with special education needs, with deliberate attention to the learners with learning disabilities and leading to improve mathematics learning for all.
 - The ministry continues working together with school boards to provide differentiated and responsive support. During the fall 2016 professional learning sessions, some focused areas of learning included:
 - Using comprehensive assessment data to inform a rich and inclusive student profile
 - Understanding and using individual education plans to support learning in math
 - Understanding learning disabilities and how processing affects learning for all learners.

- Staff from SEPPB provided an update on initiatives related to provincial and demonstration schools.
 - Highlights of last year's public consultation on provincial and demonstration schools were reviewed.
 - Information on next steps was provided, including the three-year intensive reading intervention pilots and establishment of a supporting reference group.
 - A reference group has also been established to provide input on strengthening programs and outcomes for students who are Deaf or hard of hearing.
 - A working group is providing advice on a new governance model for Centre Jules-Léger. The proposed transfer of governance to the 12 French-language school boards is subject to legislative approval.

February 9, 2017

- The Honourable Mitzie Hunter, Minister of Education, made brief remarks noting the importance she places on the work of MACSE to inform both the work of the ministry and her own consideration of issues.
- Members of Council offered a number of comments, including:
 - When considering diversity, persons with disabilities should be a lens.
 - Equity does not apply to students alone; it should also be a feature of human resources policies, including accommodations in hiring practices.
 - There can be an eligibility gap for accommodations between high school and post-secondary institutions.
 - Some school boards are not prepared to deliver educational programs to students who are blind or have low vision. W. Ross Macdonald School for the Blind in Brantford should not be a parent's only option.
 - Well-being is essential for all students. Development of resiliency skills aligned with working skills and habits results in higher academic performance and lessens the potential for future mental health issues.
- The Minister recognized three retiring members of MACSE: Marcia Brown (Educational Assistants), Dawn Clelland (Blind and Low Vision), and Braxton Hartman (Students and Youth).
- Staff from the Leadership Development and School Board Governance Branch provided an update on school board leadership and related initiatives.
 - There has been significant turnover in school board leaders (directors, supervisory officers, principals) over the last three years.
 - School leadership is second only to classroom teaching in its impact on student achievement and well-being. It is important to develop strong leadership at all levels to support student success inside and outside the classroom.
 - Key documents guiding the ministry and sector's approach to leadership include:
 - [The Ontario Leadership Framework](#)
 - [The Ontario Leadership Strategy](#)
 - [Policy/Program Memorandum 159 – Collaborative Professionalism](#)
 - An article, [Setting the Table for Collaborative Professionalism](#) (from *Principal Connections*, Vol. 20, Issue 1, Fall 2016, p. 34-37) was shared with Council.
- Staff from SEPPB and the Safe Schools and Student Well-Being Branch (SSWB) provided an update on well-being and mental health initiatives.
 - Stakeholder engagement includes an engagement paper, regional sessions, a web site (www.ontario.ca/studentwellbeing), and social media.
 - Online input, through the web site, is being sought until March 19, 2017.
- Staff from SEPPB and the SSWB provided an update on suspension and expulsion data.
 - Since 2005, the ministry has posted annual suspension and expulsion data on its website: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/statistics.html>
 - The method of reporting has been refined to use student enrolment data from the full year, rather than only as of October.
 - Previously only students with an IPRC or an IEP were included. Going forward, all students receiving special education supports and services will be included.
 - Data for 2014-2015 will be posted on the EDU web site in winter 2017.

- Community collaboration reports were shared with ministry staff and council members.
- Members thanked Mike Gildea, Secretary of MACSE, for his support of the Council's work. He is being succeeded by David Moore.
- Members were reminded that all meeting materials are confidential unless otherwise stated.
- MACSE's next meeting is scheduled for June 7 & 8, 2017.