

## 2020—2021 Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Highlights

The Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board (HPEDSB) Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) is an active committee with a mission to advise, advocate and support processes that meet the educational needs of children with special needs. SEAC also works collaboratively to advocate for effective policies, practices and procedures across Ontario.

### Supporting students with special needs through the COVID-19 Pandemic

Many supports and services were provided to assist students with special needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, and throughout learning at home programming which continued into the 2020- 2021 school year. The mental health needs of students, families and staff has never been as significant as has been evident over the past year. The extraordinary work of the mental health team and the caring response from all staff members, helped to move us forward when the obstacles seemed insurmountable.

### SEAC sub-committee initiatives

As part of SEAC's annual goal-setting process, three sub-committees were established, as follows:

#### 1. Advocacy, Equity, and Social Justice

Members of SEAC issued a letter to Dr. Piotr Oglaza, Medical Officer of Health for Hastings Prince Edward Public Health, to strengthen their commitment to ensuring the health and safety of students and staff who work directly with students who have high special needs, in regional and self-contained placements, to access vaccinations. The letter emphasized the importance of vulnerable populations receiving their vaccines in a priority sequence.

A thank you email was sent to elementary resource and secondary regional program staff for their great work supporting students with special education needs, from SEAC.

#### 2. Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

Work continued on creating an IEP Parent Guide, which will help parents/guardians understand the process and how they can become involved.

#### 3. Mental Health

Mental Health is an important part of a person's well-being and contributes to student achievement. Mental health resources remain available to students and families, including the Kids Help Phone (1-800-668-6867 or text CONNECT to 686868) which offers 24/7 counselling and referral services across the province, Children's Mental Health crisis line (613-966-3100 for students 15 years and under), and Quinte Health Care crisis line (613-969-7400 for students 16 years of age and older). As well, School Mental Health Ontario has a number of resources for students, parents/guardians and families posted on their website as follows: [www.smho-smsso.ca](http://www.smho-smsso.ca).

The Tri-board SEAC meeting in May included a presentation by School Mental Health Ontario entitled "Rising to the Challenge! Supporting Student Mental Health through the COVID-19 Pandemic". Targeted resources, training, and strategies were shared, which supported school boards, staff, and students through this year of challenge and opportunity.


