

Regional School Psychologists Meeting

Hosted by: Melissa Kushnir
Evergreen School Division

Meeting Minutes

June 5, 2025

1. Transferring clinical files:

- a. There was discussion about how various school divisions transfer clinical files from one school psychologist to another.
- b. Melissa mentioned that secretaries in her previous school division typed closing letters, but now Evergreen has no process for this.
- c. In DSFM, all their documentation, such as referrals, charting notes, and summaries go into the Power School database as PDF files. Only administrators have access to this. Test protocols are in the psychologist's files, whereas all contact logs are in Power School. School psychologists don't keep MS Word documents. The student's new school division must request the psychologist's protocols.
- d. One person said that they shred all notes 2 years after the psychology file is closed.
- e. Another psychologist said that they place closed psych files in a box, which go into a locked storage room. Then, 10 years after the student has graduated, the boxed files are shredded.
- f. Files that are open to the psychologist are kept in a locked file cabinet.
- g. In HSD, only final reports are put into Power School. Case notes and protocols are kept in psych files.
- h. Prairie Spirit SD found that Google Drive is more secure than Power School, which has allowed some data breaches. The psychologist puts case notes and reports in Google Drive.
- i. One advantage of transferring test protocols to another school psychologist is that the receiving psychologist can check over calculations from previous testing to see if there is a discrepancy between past scores and current scores. This has happened, especially with adaptive functioning scales or behavior rating scales completed by parents and teachers.

2. **Jordan's Principle** – A doctor or school psychologist can write a letter to get funding for an eligible student.

3. Well-being initiatives:

- a. Prairie Spirit SD – Guidance counselors are using *Kids in the Know* and *Sources of Strength*. The counselors are doing pull-out service and are doing more than resource interventions for literacy and numeracy. It was mentioned that early literacy and numeracy support is needed to prevent a dislike of school.

- b. Evergreen SD – The Heggerty early intervention was tried but abandoned in favor of other programs. The Interoception workbook (activities to build awareness of internal states for those with autism and trauma) and the Low Arousal approach to de-escalate students are being used by OTs. The *Depression Anxiety Stress Scales* (DASS) is used to measure well-being.
- c. DSFM – It's difficult to work with students to build skills when they are often in melt-down. Yet, guidance counselors work on social skills and emotional regulation. During May's Mental Health week, the school psychologists did presentations. They found assemblies are good times to do well-being projects. It was mentioned that it is important to assess classroom needs as a guide for which interventions to use.

4. Recent PD Shares:

- a. Melissa said that she went to the *Social-Emotional Learning* (SEL) conference in November 2024, but some curriculums are not available in Canada. She mentioned that the 5 core competencies are worth remembering: (1) self-awareness, (2) self-management, (3) social awareness, (4) relationship skills, and (5) responsible decision-making. She heard about guidance counsellors who schedule time in play-based connection rooms with students. Some research suggested that the earlier you transition students to high school (e.g., clustering grades 7-12), the greater the chance that students will stay in school.
- b. Melissa said that she was doing online training in TEAM CBT through David Burn's Feeling Good Institute. TEAM stands for T = Testing, E = Empathy, A = Agenda setting, and M = Methods. The training costs \$600.00 and you have to watch a number of videos and practice with others online.
- c. Apparently, the Winnipeg SD does summer well-being programs for kids.

5. Autism Assessment:

- a. Regarding the ADOS: Doctors have been referring to the autism assessment teams instead of assessing children themselves for autism. However, school divisions are telling doctors not to tell parents the school division will assess their children for autism. Also, doctors like to tell school psychologists to do cognitive assessments, but this competes with the needs of the school divisions.
- b. Mike Hogan warned that Calgary eliminated school psychologists and kept OTs, so school psychologists should keep doing the unique service of autism assessments.
- c. Some mentioned that the ADOS was not that great. Adults with autism can compensate and don't score in the clinical range on the instrument.
- d. Although SLPs can't diagnose autism, school psychologists in HSD will ask SLPs for their opinion if the student has a speech-language issue. Although the SLPs took the ADOS training, they're not involved in the diagnostic process.

- e. Some school psychologists find the MIGDAS-2 a more helpful tool than the ADOS. It costs about \$300.00, but you have to buy the related toys on your own. With the MIGDAS-2, you have to observe a child on the playground, which is better than seeing a child in only a clinic setting. The ADOS does help in knowing what behaviors to observe. Two books were circulated around the group, which are highly recommended: Henderson & Wayland, et al. (2023). *Is This Autism?: A Guide for Clinicians and Everyone Else*, as well as the companion book: *Is This Autism: A Companion Guide for Diagnosing*. Both are published by Routledge.
- f. Carla Derksen said that the *Social Language Development Test* (SLDT) is also very good to use in the diagnostic process.
- g. The *Autism Diagnostic Interview* with parents is good for assessing students in kindergarten.

6. PAM Update:

- a. PAM is ready to take school psychologists over.
- b. School psychologists can't use their title outside of the school system at present according to the Psychologists Registration Act.
- c. PAM recently wrote the psych legislation and excluded "school psychologists."
- d. School psychologists and guidance counsellors will become known as "Psych Associates," although their training requirements differ.

7. Reading Journey at Evergreen:

- a. Melissa did a wonderful presentation of the newly developed RTI reading program for Evergreen SD, which she created in partnership with Brittany Morrish (SLP).
- b. She talked about the RTI hierarchy of support levels (i.e., 5-10% need spelling & writing support; 35-40% need some explicit instruction; 40-50% need explicit instruction; and 10-15% need frequent repetition).
- c. She presented Scarborough's Reading Rope model ($LC \times D = RC$) and mentioned the BIG FIVE skills from the 2000 National Reading Panel report (phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension), and an active view of reading (e.g., self-regulation – word recognition - [bridging processes] - comprehension – fluency).
- d. She mentioned "The Matthew Effect" – those who start out with a disadvantage tend to fall further behind other students, so early intervention is crucial.
- e. She reviewed the Early Reading Intervention study by Lovett et al (2017), which found that intensive early intervention for children at risk of reading disabilities in grades 1, 2 and 3, significantly outperformed control students on all measures. Also, the earlier the intervention, the better the gains.
- f. In their RTI reading program, a student must receive at least 6 months of reading intervention before they can be assessed for dyslexia.

- g. For students diagnosed with dyslexia, they can get accommodations, such as assistive technology, reading pens, etc.
- h. High school students with dyslexia can get credits for continuing to work on literacy skills. Volunteer credits can be obtained by reading to younger children on a regular basis.
- i. Melissa said they use the DIBELS 3 times/year to assess students. They also use the *Quick Spelling Survey* (QSS) and the *Quick Phonics Screener* (QPS).
- j. Brittany said that the Heggerty program does too much training on phonological awareness skills. They only use segmenting and blending in their reading program.
- k. They use 3 tiers in their RTI reading program.
- l. Melissa and Brittany also reported how they gradually implemented the program over a few years.
- m. Tier 1 lessons are scripted and structured for teachers. There are 8 skills per lesson across 122 lessons, and they follow a scope and sequence, using decodable books. They use interleaved practice.
- n. Tier II lessons are 25 minutes long, with 5-6 students in a group, done 2-3x/week.
- o. Tier III lessons are 25 minutes long, with 1-3 students in a group, done 4-5x/week.
- p. Initial assessments are done during Strong Beginnings in September across 4 days. They use the TOWRE-2, CTOPP-2, KTEA-3, and TILLS. Clinicians interpret the results.
- q. There was a question about whether SLPs could diagnose dyslexia. In the DSM-5-TR, dyslexia is listed as a neurodevelopmental disorder, not a language disorder. Some SLPs consider dyslexia as a language-based disorder and therefore within their range of expertise.
- r. Melissa provided a copy of her presentation to all the school psychologists in the regional group via email.

8. Next Years Regional School Psych Meetings:

- a. The DSFM school psychologists will be hosting the next regional school psychologists meeting on Thursday November 6, 2025.
- b. The meeting after that is targeted for March or April of 2026.

9. Retirement Notice:

- a. Suzanne Robert, from DSFM, is retiring at the end of June 2025. We wish you all the best in your retirement, with many happy years of freedom to do whatever your heart desires. Au Revoir Suzanne!

NOTE: It was not decided who will be updating the regional school psychologists' member list for next year. Laura Sander was doing it, but she's no longer working for Sunrise SD. She got another position in Winnipeg. A volunteer is needed.