June 14, 2018

Report to SEAC re Parents and Partners Conference 2018

This year I sat as a representative from SEAC on the organizing committee. I really had no idea to expect, and think I went in with some assumptions about process that turned out to be incorrect. I have also learned what it is exactly that is involved in planning the conference and where volunteers and assistance is needed. I have some recommendations and a motion to present in an effort to make the process a better one and to better engage SEAC in next year’s conference.

I will add I think this conference was a success, though it needs more of the “by parents” in the “for parents by parents” slogan to be true to that description, at least in so far as it relates to SEAC’s involvement.

1. The organizing committee and development of workshops

The organizing committee functions largely as an event planning committee. This means all the logistics are covered at each meeting of the committee, including transportation, food and child minding.

Workshops themselves were barely addressed at the full committee level. At least this year, which was my first year on the committee, the topics were not presented to the committee until quite late, and I asked for these to be delivered to the committee on a couple of occasions when I realised they did not seem to be coming to the committee for review.

I missed the second meeting so it is possible I missed the process discussed around the submission of topics. What happened is that staff were asked to submit a workshop proposal to a google platform of some sort (something people like me cannot access). Of the total of 20 slots available for SEAC workshops, there turned out to be only 10 offerings through this process, and three of them were about self-regulation (a fourth workshop on self-regulation was offered through the Mental Health and Well-Being Parent Partnership Committee.) I was very confused by this process. I had made an assumption, I think incorrectly, that SEAC itself or parents would be invited to propose workshops as well.

In the end, I managed to insert myself into the workshops and offered a workshop on Ableism. I was the only parent actually offering a workshop and the only true connection to SEAC for not only the workshops, but really the whole thing, which I touch on more below.

Regarding this issue of the organizing committee, I would like to propose that reps like me do not participate in the overall planning of the workshop as this is a poor use of our time (though I enjoyed meeting the staff and other reps from other committees so some participation at the meetings is of benefit to meet people). I do not know how other parent reps to the committee feel about that idea.

Parents like me really have no role in any of the other logistics in the event planning. With my limited time, I mostly had nothing to contribute at the table around these other topics, except my own anecdotal feedback as a participant about things I personally experienced. I felt like it was a poor use of my time, but for the opportunity to meet people. I note I found the teleconference facility very hard to use and abandoned it the one time I tried.

I would like to propose that this committee have a smaller committee that meet to accept proposals on workshop topics, review and approve them, and that proposals be sought from both staff and parents.

1. SEAC needs to be better engaged overall

More than one person from SEAC needs to be on this committee. We used to have three people and they valiantly contributed to the work for a number of years. Then all three moved on and I stepped up. In addition, we lost our institutional memory with Margo, so both Lianne and I were totally new to the process.

I propose to stay involved next year, but would like to see at least one other person participate in organizing, but there are others ways in which we need assistance.

1. Table Display

SEAC has a display but I have never read it and do not know how good it is or is not, or how long ago it was developed (I suspect some years ago). No one from SEAC sat at the table where our display was up at the conference. I think 2 to 4 people (to take shifts) should sit at the table during the conference to reach out to families and offer insight into our work and the workings of TDSB special education.

We need

* a couple people willing to review our display and consider updating it or improving it, if necessary.
* 2 to 4 people willing to table at the event itself.

1. Morning Logistics and Opening Remarks

As the only person on the committee this year, I also assisted with logistics on the morning of the conference (directing vendors) and spoke as part of the opening remarks.

I hope we can have better engagement from SEAC next year. Ideally one or two people could attend the morning of to help with logistics in the morning. One of the committee organizers should do the speaking, or the chair should be invited to speak.

**MOTION**

To ensure that parents are genuinely involved in the development of the conference workshops from SEAC’s PRO Grant, the organizing committee will ensure that both SEAC representatives and staff are welcome to propose topics and participate in the workshops for the Parents as Partners Conference.

SEAC representatives to the committee shall be active participants in the determination of workshops and ensure that SEAC is informed of proposed topics by staff early in the planning stages and be given an opportunity to comment on those as well as to suggest their own workshops. Representatives of SEAC will be welcome to offer workshops, along with other parents who may be identified to provide relevant workshops to parents.

SEAC also proposes that the TDSB organizing committee create a separate smaller working group for the development of workshops to most effectively use the time of volunteers who assist in the conference.