# Report to Toronto District School Board Special Education Advisory Committee

# from SEAC Chair David Lepofsky for the December 5, 2016 TDSB SEAC Meeting

Date: November 30, 2016

By: David Lepofsky, CM., O.Ont,

Chair

Toronto District School Board Special Education Advisory Committee

# 1. Introduction

This is my final Chair's report to SEAC for 2016. As we head into this year's final meeting, I believe we can be proud of what we have accomplished this year. We took charge of setting our own agenda. We launched a top-to-bottom review of the education services that TDSB provides 46,000 students with special education needs. We have come forward with a series of positive and constructive recommendations.

Yet we have lots more to accomplish. We will take on next year's challenges with the advantage of great members of SEAC around the table, and a wealth of good ideas and experience on which to draw.

## 2. Please Plan to Give Your Ideas at Our December Meeting on the First Draft of Our Motion #5

With this report, I am circulating a preliminary first draft of a motion for us to consider, to address recommendations on what TDSB can do to strengthen its inclusion strategy. I do not propose that we take any votes on this at our December meeting. Rather, as we did with our first four motions last spring, I would like to first offer this very preliminary draft as a springboard to help you offer your own ideas at our December 5, 2016 meeting.

I propose that this agenda item be approached at our meeting as an open-ended brainstorming session. In compiling this draft, I drew on ideas from our recent meetings. However there is a real chance that I left out ideas that have come up around the table. Please don't treat this as me expressing any personal judgement in any way on those ideas. Rather, I urge you to feel free to raise any feedback on this draft that you wish. What do you like that is set out in it? What do you not like? What would you like added?

As well, I want to encourage TDSB staff to give us their feedback on this draft. That may happen at this meeting, or via email over the next weeks, or at an upcoming meeting in the new year, depending on how much time TDSB staff need to reflect on it.

Ultimately any motion we pass is an expression of SEAC's views, not staff's views. However, it is helpful as we think these ideas through to continue to get staff feedback. If there are areas covered in this draft on which we want to invite further staff feedback in the new year, beyond what is listed later in this report, we can do so.

## 3. Leftover Business from Our November Meeting Re Motion #5

There are several items of business that we did not reach at our November meeting, due to the extended time we allotted to the excellent presentation by the Toronto Family Network. The first of these leftover items will assist us in reflecting on the draft Motion #5. As of the time of writing, I have not yet heard whom will be speaking to these from TDSB staff. I have asked that Executive Superintendent of Teaching and Learning Manon Gardner join us to help with this discussion.

In my chair's report for our October 2016 meeting, I had asked TDSB staff to address these questions:

"1. What is TDSB doing to include principles of Universal Design in Learning (UDL) in curriculum in mainstream classes, to enable students with special education needs to be able to be mainstreamed as much as possible?

2. How is TDSB ensuring this at the Board-wide curriculum level?

3. What is TDSB doing to ensure this in the way teachers design their lesson plans?

4. How is TDSB monitoring for this?

5. What supplemental training are teachers receiving on how to design lesson plans to accommodate students with special education needs?

6. It would also be helpful to have that official explain to us how and where lesson plans in a TDSB classroom come from. In other words:

a) What does the Ontario Government set in terms of curriculum? Does it set the subjects to be taught each year, or does it also set the texts to be used, the software to be used etc.?

b) To the extent that the Ontario Government lets a school board decide how to implement a provincial curriculum, to what extent does TDSB decide how it will be taught in each school, and to what extent does it leave it to each teacher to decide how what will be taught and how it will be taught?

7. For students with special education needs to be able to fully participate in our schools, especially in the mainstream classroom or recess, students without disabilities need to be given curriculum on disability and inclusion. What is TDSB doing to educate students without disabilities about people with disabilities, students with special education needs and inclusion?"

In my chair's report for our November 2016 meeting, I added the following:

" In addition to the 7 questions set out in my SEAC Chair's October 2016 report, I have asked for specifics on what TDSB is doing to overcome the barriers that some students with special education needs can experience in the important area of STEM learning (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). The Ontario Government has made improved math performance a priority. What is TDSB doing to address the added accessibility barriers that students with special education needs can experience in this area? Are new math teaching coaches hired on the basis that this is part of their expertise? What is happening on the front lines and at head office?"

## 4. Gathering Input into the Parents as Partners Conference for Next Spring

Last month's Chair's Report invited your feedback for next year's TDSB Parents as Partners Conference. If you have any feedback, please share it via email before Monday's meeting. If time permits we will try to gather input there, but to manage our time most efficiently, I would be much obliged if you try to share your ideas before then in email form.

## 5. Gathering Input on the TDSB Census

TDSB proposes to do another census regarding the population it serves. Our input was sought. I have written the relevant senior official at TDSB. Below I again set out that email.

If you have anything you would like passed on, and are not able to attend the 6 pm December 6, 2016 consultation session, please pass your thoughts on via email to us, and we will forward them on. Again, if time permits, I will also invite feedback on this at our upcoming meeting.

## Text of the November 27, 2016 Email from David Lepofsky, SEAC Chair, to 6. TDSB on Its Proposed Census

To: Roula.anastasakos@tdsb.on.ca

I am the chair of the Special Education Advisory Committee for the TDSB. We were contacted for our input into a census you were proposing to lead regarding those whom TDSB serves, to better assess how well TDSB is meeting the needs of our students.

I regret I won't be able to make your consultation meeting that has been scheduled. I gather that one SEAC member will be in attendance.

Because of the importance of this topic, I wanted to share my input in writing.

It is vital that this census be fully accessible to people with disabilities, including anyone who may wish to respond to it. It must be available in a wide range of accessible formats. It should use large print.

Any online page must have maximum accessibility features. TDSB has not got a good track record on this, especially re the web.

Any publicity of the census must be fully accessible. pdf should not ever be used unless accompanied by an alternative format that is accessible e.g. MS Word.

The survey must be in plain language. It must be available in multiple languages.

Alternative methods for answering should be available for those who cannot fill out a paper survey or online survey. These options should be widely publicized.

I want to emphasize that you should not assume that TDSB now knows how to meet these information and communication needs for people with disabilities. From my experience, it is quite behind in that regard, especially when it comes to dealing with families.

You should not assume that compliance with accessibility standards under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act means you have done all you should do. Those accessibility standards are helpful but incomplete. They do not ensure that TDSB fulfils all its duties under the Ontario Human Rights Code.

The questions you ask in your survey should include effective questions re the needs of students with disabilities. It should be free of jargon like "special education" and "exceptionalities". It should aim to gather helpful information from families that may not even know that their child has disability-related learning needs.

I would be pleased to provide further input as you may require.

I would appreciate it if you can confirm that you received this email. Let me know if it is helpful.

David Lepofsky CM., O.Ont,

Chair Toronto District School Board Special Education Advisory Committee