**Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)**

## MINUTES for Monday, November 7, 2016

### SEAC – Representatives and (Alternates) Present:

Association for Bright Children Diana Avon

Autism Society of Ontario – Toronto Lisa Kness

Brain Injury Society of Toronto Cynthia Springings

Community Living Toronto Clovis Grant

Down Syndrome Association of Toronto Richard Carter

Easter Seals Ontario Deborah Fletcher

Epilepsy Toronto Steven Lynette

Learning Disabilities Association Toronto Mark Kovats

VIEWS for the Visually Impaired David Lepofsky

VOICE for Hearing Impaired Children Paul Cross

TDSB North East Community Aline Chan Jean-Paul Ngana

TDSB North West Community Jordan Glass

TDSB South East Community Diane Montgomery Olga Ingrahm

TDSB South West Community Nora Green Paula Boutis

TDSB Trustees Alexander Brown Pamela Gough

Regrets: Phillip Sargent (NW Community Representative), Dick Winters (SE Community Alternate)

Staff Present: Uton Robinson, Executive Superintendent, Special Education and Section Programs

Margo Ratsep, SEAC Liaison

Guest: Janis Jaffe-White, Co-ordinator, Toronto Family Network

Recorder: Margo Ratsep

MINUTES

## Call to Order

## SEAC Chair David Lepofsky called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. and invited SEAC members and staff in attendance to introduce themselves to the guests in the gallery.

## Declaration of Possible Conflicts of Interest

## No conflicts of interest were declared.

## Approval of the Minutes for Monday, October 24, 2016

On motion of Paul Cross, seconded by Clovis Grant, the Minutes for Monday, October 24th, 2016 were approved

**4. SEAC Membership Applications**

SEAC passed 2 motions in response to SEAC membership applications:

**\*\*\*MOTION 1:** Regarding the application from Valerie Gonzales-Chavez for a position as an Alternate Community Representative for the North West quadrant and moved by David Lepofsky:

***Whereas there are 2 North West Community Alternate representative vacancies on TDSB Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) and***

***Whereas Valerie Gonzalez-Chavez has applied for one of the vacancies and meets the Ministry of Education and board criteria for eligibility, therefore,***

***SEAC recommends that the Toronto District School Board appoint Valerie Gonzales-Chavez as an Alternate Community Representative for the North West Region on the TDSB Special Education Advisory Committee for the 2015 to 2018 term.***

The motion carried.

**\*\*\*MOTION** 2: Regarding a nomination from Bill Quesnel, Chair of the board for VOICE for Hearing Impaired Children of Rosary Kwak as Alternate Association Representative for VOICE and moved by VOICE Representative Paul Cross:

***Whereas TDSB Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) association member VOICE for Hearing Impaired Children has no Alternate Representative, and***

***Whereas SEAC has received a nomination from Bill Quesnel, Chair of the Board for VOICE for Hearing Impaired Children, recommending Rosary Kwak as the TDSB Alternate Representative for VOICE, therefore***

***SEAC recommends that the Toronto District School Board appoint Rosary Kwak as the VOICE Alternate Representative on the TDSB Special Education Advisory Committee for the 2015 to 2018 term.***

The motion carried.

**5. Streaming February 2017 SEAC meeting**

The current Chair and Vice Chair are exploring a trial streaming of the February SEAC meeting, pursuant to permission from the new Chair

**6. Inclusion – Toronto Family Network**

The SEAC Chair welcomed guest Janis Jaffe White, Coordinator of Toronto Family Network. She introduced herself, referenced handouts posted on the SEAC pages of the TDSB website and in hard copy at the meeting. She then spoke to the kinds of recommendations to the TDSB made on behalf of the Toronto Family Network in support of Inclusion.

In short, the following seven recommendations were made:

1. The Board shall provide a comprehensive definition of inclusive education that everyone understands and uses.

1. The Board shall ensure that people first language is utilized constantly and continually in policies, procedures and practices.
2. The Board shall combine the TDSB Special Education Department with the Teaching and Learning Department.
3. The Board shall review and recognize that the Integrated Equity Framework Action Plan may be antithetical to the creation of an inclusive system.
4. The Board shall ensure all students receive their education within their community schools.
5. The Board shall remove the Intensive Support Program designation and the Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 service delivery model currently used in the TDSB.
6. To achieve inclusion, the Board shall close all segregated schools and the students currently enrolled in these separated and different environments will be returned to their community schools with the necessary supports.

The Chair invited Janis to share a copy of her presentation with SEAC and for posting on the website. She then received questions and input from SEAC members.

**SEAC Input 1:** Understand and appreciate points made, but must all children be included? There should be parental choice. Some kinds of exceptionalities benefit from being within an exceptionality grouping, and want to be with others who have the same challenges. Want to see that choice is kept. There will also be a great number of resources required to meet the multiple needs in a regular classroom.

Response: Understand it raises questions among different associations because what we are proposing may seem radical, unfair or against the code. The families we support have wanted inclusion with the required educational supports. There are times a self-contained class might be beneficial for a child. This discussion was held in New Brunswick, when they wanted to close segregated schools and there was backlash. However, it has been done and New Brunswick is considered one of the best systems in the country. Regarding children wanting to be with others with the same challenges, it is important we don’t make generalizations.

**SEAC Input 2:** Feel a number of things need to be done as groundwork before changes can happen. A paradigm shift is needed, to educate the community first before can make Inclusion happen. In a congregated setting own son is happy because is doing something that is true integration within an accepting community. It takes a lot of education, i.e. with employers too. It needs planning, education and anecdotes/personal stories.

Response: The Cathy Snow article explains the difference between terms like integration, inclusion. It is important to define what Inclusive Education is and how we are going to implement it. Agree that it is important to educate the community. The research is already available that proves Inclusive Education works without impacts on other students.

**SEAC Input 3:** Change is so incremental and transition into real Inclusion may mean that some people will be thrown under the bus. To pretend we already have in place a system to carry out the change without conflict is idealistic. The fact that we have two different departments (i.e. special education and Teaching and Learning) is a barrier – Assessment FOR learning rather than assessment OF learning is where we are going. It is interesting that the first frame in Kindergarten is “Belonging and Community” and we say kids with learning differences can’t be there. Agree with what was presented but the change is chaotic.

**SEAC Input 4:** Appreciate what was said about the community needing to be ready to receive the students. Have to keep in mind the end goal…look at their capabilities and look at what we need to do to maximize their capabilities. What would the school model look like moving every special education student back into the regular class and how would we meet their needs? As a committee, we have to look at the transition and develop an exit plan – if SEAC provides a vision for what SEAC looks like with real Inclusion. What are we doing today as associations at this table – We should lead by example. What is the UN definition of Inclusive Education?

Response: We need to support the teachers. Have heard SEAC discuss this – we have to do better –prepare them better to teach all students in their class, have them better prepared out of teaching faculties. We have to look at how kids are supported, that they have a right to the proper support and keep in mind the teachers that need support too, including teachers in special education classes.

**SEAC Input 5:** As volunteers appreciate dedication TFN has. Regarding the 7 points raised, it sounds like the message is there should never be a segregated class for anyone ever, but the response to the first input sounded like a reduction in segregated classes, but not abolished entirely. If a parent wants the child in a segregated setting, what is the view?

Response: emphasizing that the stand alone segregated schools should be closed down. Regarding classes, choice is still important (as per Regulation 181). There are times/circumstances where it is beneficial. At an IPRC there must be reasons provided. But there are many situations where the parent wants regular class placement with special education supports/services in place and is scared off. Even in New Brunswick, there are some self-contained classes, but far fewer and parents are willing to accept Inclusion because they see it working in schools.

**SEAC Input 6:** Can you give a flavour of recurring problems Toronto Family Network is aware of?

Response: Each situation is handled one-to-one, such as the following:

* IEPs do not meet Ministry standards and we work with schools to ensure it happens.
* Help parents understand how an IPRC is supposed to unfold and help them prepare for it.
* In 2014 – over 80 families discussed teacher education issues with former Chair of the board, where parents are having to educate teachers about accommodations and how to implement them.
* Families whose children are sent home from school because the school can’t cope or is unsure how to accommodate the child
* Safety, discipline issues

**SEAC Input 7:** TDSB has huge numbers in special education programs compared to the provincial average. What do you feel are the reasons for this? You really want to see a substantial change, but we are looking at 23000 students. What ways do you suggest to start to get moving?

Response – The numbers may have to do with the definitions used to define the types of classes that children are in. If committed to inclusion, we can immediately start with a common definition. It already exists in other jurisdictions. Start combining departments (Teaching and Learning and Special Education). Good teaching is good teaching.

**SEAC Input 8:** There is no danger of closing segregated classrooms in the TDSB. People reach out for help on a frequent basis because they are being told that there is no money for supporting the child and so the child must be put in a segregated class. The first choice if a parent wants it, is supposed to be regular class with support, but it’s not. Understand the difficulty of turning TDSB on its ear. A lot of people don’t accept or believe in Inclusion. The message is not getting out. Special Education Program Recommendation Committee is another issue – don’t understand why it is still allowed. Every child should be able to go to their neighbourhood school. We need to end SEPRC and close Diagnostic Kindergarten and transition segregated schools out.

**SEAC Input 9:** We may be on board with your presentation, but don’t have the impression that the whole board or teachers are on board yet. Appreciate that a definition and people-first language can be done immediately, but the rest not likely to be done quickly. Does Toronto Family Network have a timeframe or road map?

Response: The recommendations are difficult. The first two recommendations are doable and we can learn from other jurisdictions regarding the timeframe, steps, how to get the buy-in from everyone, etc. It comes back to “what is Inclusion?” What does Inclusion mean? We need to decide and move ahead. It feels like we are moving backwards rather than forward. The major hurdle is to ensure that children have an appropriate education, are moving ahead and progressing. Transition planning doesn’t happen early enough. Working together is the key. Parents sometimes are in crisis, afraid, feel intimidated. We have to trust each other and work together to change.

**SEAC Input 10:** You are describing the ideal world. If parents were better prepared, it would work, but how should we move to ensure integration happens every step of the way. We need a paradigm shift, such as was mentioned at the last meeting, to have a focus on “integration assistant” versus educational assistant.

Response: There are organizations that help students prepare for the world of work. We have to do a better job to prepare kids in transitioning to life outside school. Not enough good planning is being done and transition plans have to be more specific. It is critical to ensure kids have access to work experiences. Cooperative education is key to every kid if properly supported. A lot goes back to the IEP. Based on what have heard the board has done a better job getting them in on time, but content needs to be improved.

**SEAC Input 11:** Can see both sides. Ideally Inclusion in the long term is exciting – in the short term I see fear – not ready yet. Talking to parents and kids in regular system that need support but who are afraid of the label so avoid going there. Own son is now in college and very happy. There was a combined effort with the college putting together the resources needed to support him. I am interested in learning the steps taken by other jurisdictions and learn from them.

Response: It is important we don’t pigeon-hole our own children. There is always a way to work around a challenge. We need high but realistic goals.

**SEAC Input 12:** Accommodations are critical but we need to remove the barriers that exist (attitudes, setting). Think the unions are part of the voice we need. We need to ask if it is possible to achieve Inclusion with the given staffing model, collective agreement, etc.

Response: Ontario Human Rights Code super cedes Unions. They play a strong role in the way things are, but can be part of the solution.

**SEAC Input 13:** Staffing a huge part of this. With 26 to 30 kids in a kindergarten we need other assistants in the room – need a change in the funding model

Response: We have to stop saying but and move forward looking for solutions rather than focusing on the problems. We need to be creative. There are a lot of teachers who are doing it but it’s a big board.

**SEAC Input 14:** Community Living has long been an advocate of inclusion. The default seems to be the status quo. We have to change the default setting. For kids with MID, the default has been special education class placement and it’s hard to see the solutions. We need to change the default to make Inclusion the way to go and we become more creative.

**SEAC Input 15:** It is hard to see what is between the 2 extremes. We are hearing a lot of things that are not working. In the principal hiring process there is nothing asked about special education. Inclusion is one component the province and TDSB are taking into consideration and we don’t know how. We need to hear from them about how they are proceeding between the 2 extremes.

**SEAC Input 16:** Agree about inclusion, but it’s a tremendous responsibility for the teachers to carry it out when there is a slew of challenges. Having worked in the support field and alluding to New Brunswick – for a teacher to manage this, there must have been an increase in support staff. So we need more support staff with additional training, like CYW. Is this what is happening in New Brunswick?

Response: It would be beneficial to invite Dr. Gordon Porter to respond to this. What we are proposing is not expected to happen next week. It makes sense that there would be an increase in support staff in the regular classroom. There are too many parents fighting to ensure those supports are there. If we closed down segregated schools, we would have many staff available to support regular classrooms.

**SEAC Input 17:** Have there been any studies about problems related to mental health (self- esteem, self-concept etc.) and placement in segregated programs. Kids in the Learning Disabilities class are stigmatized and can’t help but believe it has an effect in this area. There should be a study.

Response: Not immediately aware of any.

*Post Script 1: in follow-up to the meeting: Janis directed SEAC to a document entitled "Children's Perceptions and Attitudes about Special Education". This thesis was submitted by Laura Demchuk for her Ph.D. at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the U of T. It addresses perceptions regarding exclusion, victimization, vulnerability, depression, anxiety, self-blame, negative self-views, feeling ridiculed, stigmatized as being inferior, the bullying and teasing, feelings of separation and shame, lack of a sense of acceptance and belonging and more. The paper can be found at:* [*http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk1/tape3/PQDD\_0015/NQ53746.pdf*](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk1/tape3/PQDD_0015/NQ53746.pdf)

*Post Script 2: Upon reviewing the paper, SEAC representative for the Association for Bright Children, Diana Avon, noted that the research paper only included 2 exceptionalities (Behavioral and Learning Disabilities). It did not include Gifted students, or students with Autism, Developmental Disabilities, Mild Intellectual Disabilities or Physical Disabilities.*

**SEAC Input 18:** If we had the money from the province we could fix everything. But we don’t. What it costs to provide education in the TDSB is not coming from the province. Not even thinking about applying UDL to all learning. I can’t think of any elected champion at the TDSB for these issues. It has become better, but we have had chairs of the board not talking to us. There is a bigger picture and we need a champion to go to Queen’s Park.

**SEAC Input 19:** Just learned there are boards in this province that have not IPRC’d anyone. How are they supporting students? The people-first language should already be modelled. From personal research on inclusion, it wasn’t about teacher training, it was about the teachers’ attitude that the student belonged in the class.

Response: If you see something working in action and working well, you can see yourself doing it.

**SEAC Input 20:** Curious to know if the recommendation about combining departments is shuffling the bureaucratic deck.

Response: It would change attitudes because the board sees the students as students first, not as special education versus regular students – finally saying that these kids belong with typical kids. It would show that the board is committed to Inclusion – an incredible first for the province.

The Chair drew the discussion to a close and thanked Janis on behalf of SEAC. He invited her continued input as SEAC moves to put together proposals derived from this meeting. He reminded SEAC members to do what they can to publicize the SEAC Parent Survey. He commented briefly on his recent efforts as Chair of the AODA Alliance and the support for a provincial Education Accessibility Standard being received from the three major unions (Elementary and secondary teachers and CUPE).

In the interest of ending the meeting on time, the Chair skipped items 7 and 8 and moved to Item 9 on the agenda.

**7. Gathering SEAC Input: TDSB Integrated Equity Framework Action Plan and TDSB 2016 Special Education Plan**

This item was not covered.

**8. Gathering input for spring 2017 Parent Conference (Time permitting)**

This item was not covered.

**9. Association Announcements**

Richard Carter: Informed SEAC that at the October 28th, Down Syndrome Association Annual Meeting all questions were about special education. He also referenced his handout, sent to members in advance, about Canadian Down Syndrome Awareness Week, running from November 1 to 7. He will send out a new link to replace the faulty one included in his handout.

**10. Other Business**

This item was not covered.

**11. Adjournment Meeting**

On motion of Clovis Grant, the meeting adjourned at 8:59 p.m.

**Next Meeting: Monday, December 5, 2016**

# Appendix A

TDSB Special Education Advisory Committee received the following presentation by Janis Jaffe-White. The recommendations in the presentation are those of the Toronto Family Network.

**Inclusion in TDSB**

**Toronto Family Network Presentation to SEAC**

**November 7th, 2016**

Inclusion should not be a vision. Inclusion should automatically be a fact based on just being. Inclusion is not a matter of degree. One is either included or not. One either has an inclusive education system or one does not.

The question is how can this be achieved within the Toronto District School Board? We believe that there are seven basic steps required.

The Toronto Family Network would recommend that the TDSB implement the following:

1. **The Board shall provide a comprehensive definition of inclusive education that everyone understands and uses.**

The current definition in the TDSB Special Education Plan states that inclusion is “an attitude toward the need and right to belong to one’s community”.

Yes, inclusion can be considered an attitude based on the belief system that each and every individual has value and dignity no matter the individual’s colour, race, religion, sexual orientation or ability. But inclusion is not merely an attitude.

For this reason, the Toronto Family Network proposes that the TDSB revise its definition by adopting one of the following two definitions or combining them.

The first is from the Canadian Association of Community Living. Inclusive education is:

*When ALL students attend and are welcomed into their neighbourhood schools in age appropriate regular classes and are supported to learn, contribute to and participate in all aspects of the life of the school. As well, all students are challenged to meet their unique intellectual, social, physical and career development goals.*

The second definition comes from Disability is Natural:

*Inclusion is children with disabilities being educated in the school they would attend if they didn’t have disabilities, in age-appropriate regular education classrooms, where services and supports are provided in those classrooms for both the students and their teachers, and where students with disabilities are fully participating members of their school communities in academic and extracurricular activities.*

These definitions clearly show that inclusion is not the same as “mainstreaming” or “integration.” Inclusion is belonging -- not visiting.

If one is truly included, one does not need to be integrated. To have to be integrated, one has to have already been excluded. Inclusion does not allow for separating, ignoring, neglecting, marginalizing and/or alienating. Inclusion does not allow for stigmas, stereotypes, myths, and/or perceptions based on ableism and/or paternalistic attitudes of pity or charity.

1. **The Board shall ensure that people first language is utilized constantly and continually in policies, procedures and practices.**

The language that we use is powerful. We must remember, as Kathie Snow of Disability is Natural states, that words can “perpetuate negative stereotypes and reinforce...attitudinal barriers.” Everyone needs to understand and accept that terms such as “autistic kids”, “the learning disabled”, “D.D. classes” and “Physical disability classes” undermine the value of the person and puts the disability first rather than the child.

1. **The Board shall combine the TDSB Special Education Department with the Teaching and Learning Department.**

This would be in keeping with the principles of universal design and with the promotion of the belief that best practices in teaching and learning are best practices for all students. This would be consistent with a unified educational system which was proposed by the Council of Administrators of Special Education in 1993 and is currently implemented in other educational jurisdictions in Canada, such as New Brunswick.

1. **The Board shall review and recognize that the Integrated Equity Framework Action Plan may be antithetical to the creation of an inclusive system.**

Equity is inherent in the concept of inclusion but inclusion may not necessarily be inherent in the concept of equity. What this means is that equity may be used as an excuse to maintain special education schools and promote the status quo regarding special education class settings and the myth of special education.

Based on section 14 of the Ontario Human Rights Code, the only grounds by which a system can institute and maintain “special programs” is if these programs are designed: 1) to relieve hardship or disadvantage 2) to help the disadvantaged group to achieve or try to achieve opportunities and 3) to help eliminate discrimination. Based on the research by the TDSB and external sources, the special education schools and classes that currently exist within TDSB may be determined not to meet these criteria. For the Board to use equity of educational opportunities and education to maintain these special education schools and classes would appear to undermine the whole concept of inclusion.

1. **The Board shall ensure all students receive their education within their community schools.**

Students will begin their schooling in kindergarten or any other grade with their same-age peers. This would mean it would no longer be necessary to hold Special Education Program Recommendation Committee. The SEPRC is not a legal requirement and by removing it, the TDSB could be considered to actually demonstrate a commitment to inclusion for each and every student.

Students would begin their educational career in what is currently referred to as a regular class “with appropriate special education services” and the same age peers would be considered their “community of learners”. This is truly a natural learning environment. Students will have recesses and lunches together in the same place and at the same time. Students will use the same parts of the school and will not be confined to a separated and specific area. Student support is not based on label or type of class but based on individual need.

The Canadian Inclusive Education Knowledge Exchange Initiative (found in the resource list you have been provided), makes it clear that students with additional or differing needs in regular class placement showed greater improvement in language, academic performance, social and emotional development and later in employment status. It was noted that there were no adverse effects to other students and that the transition of these students to postsecondary institutions and adult life in the community was more positive and productive.

It must be remembered that inclusion is a basic human right and a legal right. This is clearly stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, and Regulation 181/98 of the Education Act of Ontario.

We have included Regulation 181 because at IPRCs, placement choice is either “Regular Class with appropriate special education services” or Special Education.

The fact that Reg. 181 includes the wording “with appropriate special education services” after the words “Regular Class” indicates that the law requires that students are entitled to and shall receive the supports that they require within their neighbourhood or community school with their same-age peers.

1. **The Board shall remove the Intensive Support Program designation and the Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 service delivery model currently used in the TDSB.**

This designation and model have resulted in a denial of access to support services to students in need. The students affected were either in the regular class or were not considered to be a “priority” to decision-makers although their needs were known and by law had to be addressed.

According to the Ontario Human Rights Code, if a need has been identified, the support accommodations must be provided and in a timely manner and to the point of undue hardship. The Ministry of Education Memorandum to Directors of Education, dated December 19th, 2011, clearly states that any child with a need is “entitled” to have his or her needs met.

1. **To achieve inclusion, the Board shall close all segregated schools and the students currently enrolled in these separated and different environments will be returned to their community schools with the necessary supports.**

To do so, the TDSB would be debunking the myth of special education as something different, additional and special. To do so would be to destroy the cultural legacy and allow for a cultural shift to achieving inclusive attitudes and environments. By doing so, TDSB will be demonstrating a clear commitment to authentic inclusion.

In closing, we do not think that there is one person in this room that would not agree with the fact that what happened to Aboriginal children in the residential schools was wrong and that what happened to children, youth and adults with disabilities in the residential institutions was wrong. So we would ask: Why would we accept the continued use of segregation in the Toronto public school system?

Each and every one of these exclusionary institutional settings is based on the same premise that individuals who are different are an anomaly to normalcy and do not belong nor are accepted in the mini-society we call school.