**Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)**

## DRAFT MINUTES for Monday, March 20, 2017

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

Association for Bright Children Diana Avon

Autism Society of Ontario – Toronto Lisa Kness

Brain Injury Society of Toronto regrets

Community Living Toronto Clovis Grant

Down Syndrome Association of Toronto Richard Carter

Easter Seals Ontario Deborah Fletcher

Epilepsy Toronto regrets

Integrated Action for Inclusion regrets

Learning Disabilities Association Toronto regrets

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 regrets regrets (Valerie Gonzales-Chavez)

TDSB South East Community Diane Montgomery regrets (Dick Winters)

TDSB South West Community Nora Green regrets

TDSB Trustees Alexandra Lulka Pamela Gough Alexander Brown

Regrets: Cynthia Sprigings and Alternate Melissa Vigar (Brain Injury Association Toronto), Jordan Glass and Phillip Sargent (NW Community), Olga Ingrahm (SE Community), Kim Southern-Paulsen (Integrated Action for Inclusion) Steven Lynette (Epilepsy Toronto), Paula Boutis (SW Community)

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

Margo Ratsep, SEAC Liaison

Recorder: Margo Ratsep

MINUTES (Draft)

## 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. SEAC welcomed a new Alternate representative for the North West Community. He announced that the meeting would be audio-recorded, with the intention that it be made available to the public through a link. He reminded members that if there was anything of a personal nature they wishes excluded from the audio file to let him know immediately after the meeting for editing purposes.

## 2. Declaration of Possible Conflicts of Interest

## No conflicts of interest were declared.

## 3. Approval of the Minutes

On motion of Dick Winters, the Minutes of February 6, 2017 were approved, as amended.

**4. Further SEAC discussion of Draft 3 of Motion #5 on Inclusion at TDSB**

The Chair provided perspective for the discussion. He pointed out that input into the Special Education Plan is not just document editing. The ideas from the four June 2016 motions and current Motions 5 and 6 form input that staff can include in the special education plan where agreed upon and where possible. The Chair also reviewed the steps taken to date on Motion 5, which focuses on actions towards more effective inclusion for students with special education needs in the TDSB. The Chair developed a first draft and received feedback from SEAC members. He presented a second draft in January for more input and created a third draft from input emailed to him following the February meeting. His aim is to produce a last draft for voting on at the April 3rd meeting, reflecting a viewpoint that is shared by all members. There has been an exchange on how long it is and to shorten it he removed the backgrounder. He anticipates that future motions will be much shorter. Passing the motion doesn’t have to be unanimous, but he has done his best to include every view. Additional points can be added. Finally, the Chair outlined the process following passage of a SEAC motion. It goes three places: first to Executive Superintendent Uton Robinson, Director of Education John Malloy and to department staff – to read and act on ideas that they can accept and act on. The second place is to the Enhanced Equity Task Force, which will meet through the summer and make recommendations to the board in the fall. It will be important that SEAC’s recommendations get to them. The third place is to the trustees, but if SEAC is successful, it can have an impact on staff and the task force before it gets to trustees.

The Chair opened discussion about Motion 5. SEAC Member input included the following points:

Input 1 (JPN): Questioned the reasoning for taking the backgrounder out and giving it separately. The recommendations are built on the backgrounder, so SEAC needs to take time to make sure the principles the recommendations are built on are also agreed on.

Chair’s response: The backgrounder can be re-included if wanted. The most feedback he had received was about the backgrounder. The more changes he made in response to the input, the more changes it seemed would be needed. People also said it was too long. He proposed submission of the backgrounder under his name to see if there was agreement in principle by SEAC. Timing is important. He wants to get it done and to the board when it can have an impact. If this committee were to agree with the recommendations but not the backgrounder, he would cut it out completely but he wants to get to the recommendations, because that is what makes a difference. If the majority believes the backgrounder is agreed on, he will add it back.

Input 2 (JPN): Questioned the difference between a motion and input. As an advisory group, why not call it input?

Chair’s response: SEAC’s power is to make recommendations through motions to the trustees. The other benefits are that we can share it with staff and the Equity Task Force.

Input 3 (DA): Suggested a change to the name of the motion because it does not include Giftedness as worded. At this point it speaks to: Substantially Improving the Effective Inclusion of Students with *Disabilities* (not with “*Special Education Needs*”) at the TDSB. (Rewording would substitute “Disabilities” for “Special Education Needs”.)

Input 4 (DA): Suggested inclusion of acceleration as one method of effective inclusion of gifted students in the primary grades where there is no option for special education programming until Grade 4. These children have special education needs that are not being met.

Chair’s response: I will be meeting with the Association for Bright Children (ABC) to try to come up with wording

Input 5 (RC): Suggested a wording change in the title by removing “Substantially Improving” and starting with “The Effective Inclusion of Students... “ This makes it friendlier. The board has been doing the best it can with the resources it has. SEAC should encourage them.

Input 6 (JPN): The Human Rights Code (HRC) is driving this motion and the requirements of the HRC are different from those of the Education Act. We are saying the HRC requires this. If it were the requirements of the Education Act there would be a different approach.

SEAC discussion turned to the individual recommendations.

**Recommendation 1: Adopt an Effective Definition of "Inclusion"**

The Chair explained he had taken the initial recommendation from TFN and included the provisions.

Input 1.1 (DF): Raised the perspective that “inclusion” is a feeling more than anything else and the need for that to be included in the definition.

Uton’s Response: Drew attention to his March Department Update that presents information from TDSB Research about inclusion which includes that component.

Input 1.2 (DA): Referred to the definition of inclusion from the Education for All policy distributed at the meeting and cautioned that inclusion takes different forms for different groups. Some children cannot handle the environment in a regular classroom. There are some good special education programs that should be kept.

Input 1.3 (RC): Recommended SEAC use the Ministry definition of inclusion, citing that the Ministry speaks about developing potential while the United Nations definition talks about developing capacity.

Chair’s response: There is no definition of inclusion in the Education Act. The reference made to developing potential is regarding the purpose of education. It is unlikely SEAC will end up with a definition all can agree on but we can offer these as options the board can draw on to do its work.

Input 1.4 (JPN): In the Ed Act it is the purpose or goal and in the UN definition it is an objective. Both could be applied - One could be the purpose and the other the objective.

**Recommendation 2: Comprehensive Inclusion Strategy Should Cover Students with Any Kind of Disability**

No additional input was offered.

**Recommendation 3: Comprehensive Inclusion Strategy Should Make Segregation a Last Resort, Consistent with Voluntary Parental Choice, And Should Include Effective Transition Safeguards**

The Chair commented that recommendation 3 was the focus of most SEAC discussion and concern. He presented three challenges: 1. Parents should have a choice and that choice should include a segregated setting; 2. A formulation consistent with parental choice and least constrictive environment might not lead to change; 3. TDSB has staff who want to do a good job but TDSB has more students in segregated settings than any other board. TDSB needs a new strategy.

Input 3.1 (AC): Expressed discomfort with use of the word “segregated”. Consultation with other parents whose children attend a special education school found that they do not feel the students are being segregated. In follow-up to previous input (1.1), inclusion is a feeling. There are programs in contained schools that are running very well and are as inclusive as can be. The students can be very comfortable in these settings, able to participate comfortably in this setting before joining more diverse or larger groups. In “regular” settings, they can be very excluded. This point impacts on recommendations 3 and 7.

Chair’s response: At the last meeting the point was raised that it is segregation if parents are being told the child cannot be effectively supported in the regular class. There was more feedback in favour of the word segregation. I will go with the consensus – we could opt for segregated school/class or special education school/class.

Input 3.2 (JPN): Expressed support for the previous input (3.1) *(discomfort with the word “segregation”)* and is also struggling with what is meant by “disability”. The challenge is with using the Ontario Human Rights Code definition of disability in a motion in the Educational system, which also takes into consideration measures of intelligence (IQ) and negative impacts on learning. Not so with the HRC.

Input 3.3 (NG): Commented that parents of kids in kindergarten expect their child will attend the local school. With the final statement in 3(a), are we saying we don’t trust that they will get there and we need a safety valve? If so, we do have a segregated system.

Input 3.4 (CG): Mirrored input 3.3 about recommendation 3(a). The last statement opens the possibility that TDSB can continue to use segregation as a default, so more comfortable with removing that last statement. There are always situations where the board says it cannot effectively accommodate, so it becomes the default, rather than attendance in the home school.

Chair’s response: We could use another wording. We can’t say never, but we can say the board has the burden to prove it.

Input 3.5 (RC): We have heard that the board cannot effectively accommodate. We have heard from parents “My child cannot get the support they need in the regular class.” We need greater clarity about what the choices are. We need to clearly identify the actual accommodations and use those to prove ability to accommodate.

Chair’s response: Suggested a wording change from “...cannot effectively accommodate...” to “...it is impossible to effectively accommodate...”

Uton’s response: A more delineated process can be outlined in the Special Education Plan so a parent has those particular options. Under the Human Rights Code, some students may need supplementary aids and services offered in special environments. This is in line with the Director’s comments in the Equity Framework to ensure, after everything is done, it is the last resort. But there can be something within our Plan that specifies a response that “We don’t have it here” cannot happen.

Input 3.6 (DM): Commented that it happens all the time and ways are found to prove it. It shouldn’t be an option.

Chair’s response: Called for comments from each member about keeping the last statement under 3(a).

There was unanimous agreement to remove the last statement in 3(a)

Input 3.7 (DF): Undue hardship is not measurable. There is push-back from teaching staff who did not train for this, did not sign up for this, do not have the right tools... They need a lot of help.

Input 3.8 (AC): We need to add something regarding the measure of success, improvement, determining where the gaps are. Reference was made to PPM 156 on Transition Plans.

Chair’s response: Extended an invitation for the member to provide additional wording to address this concern.

Input 3.9 (NG): Segregated placement can be considered if working collaboratively with the family and that is their choice. It is not something that staff should come at parents with.

### Recommendation 4: TDSB Should Create a Major Organizational Change Transition Plan

Input 4.1 (DA): Agreed that we need to ensure the child is not in a worse place, but we need to figure out how to measure the effectiveness of special class/program.

Input 4.2 (NG): Commented that the board has no effective way to monitor success, once a child is on or off a modified curriculum; no way to guarantee efficacy of a modified program in a special education classroom, which is not really specialized. No proof, no documentation – Is there a district review process? (Uton Robinson responded that a review process was developed last year.) Further input cited the lack of longitudinal evidence and the need to know if they are working.

Chair’s response: Suggested SEAC could add a part 4(d) that for individual student placements there should be monitoring and accountability to measure outcomes and success.

Input 4.3 (JPN): Suggested that SEAC build on what has been in place since January, described by Uton Robinson as part of the Equity Framework and see how it has progressed – how administrators and staff are progressing in the schools.

Input 4.4 (RC): Going back to teachers saying they “didn’t sign up for this” and that teachers don’t have the right tools *(Input 3.7),* we need to know first what supports are required and put it in writing (i.e. These are the supports needed...) and then see if those supports are there or can be provided.

Chair’s response: This is covered later in the motion

Input 4.5 (AC): Offered an idea for a new recommendation 4d – SEAC member Kim Southern-Paulsen attended the Ministry of Education forum on alternative education. She may have suggestions around validation of student learning an alternative curriculum and employability that should be included in the recommendation.

**Recommendation 5: Identify TDSB Accessibility Barriers and Develop Comprehensive Action Plan and Timelines for Barrier Removal and Prevention**

No additional input was offered.

**Recommendation 6: Rename and Re-define Misnamed Intensive Support Programs**

No additional input was offered.

**Recommendation 7: Phase Out Schools that Are Entirely Segregated**

Input 7.1 (DA): Special schools were purposely built for students with high medical needs. Rather than closing, the board should repurpose the buildings by bringing in regular student population.

Input 7.2 (RC): Expressed thanks to Trustee Gough who at a March 2nd forum had a TDSB Planner speak on long-range planning. The Planning department should be at this table to hear what we are asking for and how they can plan to accommodate it

**Recommendation 8: Implement Strategies to Substantially Reduce the Shuffling of Students with Special Education Needs From School to School Over Their TDSB Years**

The Chair explained he has added this based on discussion at the last meeting.

**Recommendation 9: Ensure Universal Design in Learning Is Used in Regular Classrooms Across TDSB**

The Chair explained that following input he received, he had added Differentiated Instruction.

Input 9.1(DM): We talk about inclusion but not how to put it together. As an example, having visited a school that has implemented a lot of inclusive practice, staff are picturing the HSP teacher will come into the classroom, so team-teaching will probably be part of it. On that note – teachers don’t collaborate much and the principal said communication/collaboration between the teachers is the most important benefit. We need to ensure teachers have time to talk (i.e. bring in occasional teachers to release staff for time to train and collaborate.

Chair’s response: Reflectied on steps being taken in California where all teachers are undergoing training to learn how to teach to all abilities.

Input 9.2 (NG): We need to include that instructional coaches are dedicated to learning about special education too. Part of problem is that they are separated from special education. Co-teaching has to include curriculum instruction staff and special education staff.

Input 9.3 (DF): UDL is an important part of special education, involving designing the learning. When teachers have special education students in the classroom, we have not captured that teachers are not trained to do this. Teacher college was 20 weeks. They don’t have what it takes to deal with behaviours and emotions and reams of challenges we aren’t addressing here. The typical teacher is not qualified or able or even signed up for this.

Input 9.4: (NG) That’s why I want to hear about the Special Needs Strategy *(in the Coordinated Service Planning Partnership Agreement under consideration)*

Input 9.5 (DA): On same topic – maybe there needs to be some kind of additional instruction on addressing those challenges, not just UDL but a condensed version of training teachers could be given.

Chair’s response: We could add wording that teachers need to be properly trained to teach students with special needs.

Input 9.6 (LK): We have paraprofessionals (Behaviour Teams, ASD Teams) available that do work with teachers but the strategies are not always being implemented on the front line.

Input 9.7 (RC): Further to comment about teachers not being qualified – All of us likely have a child with an exceptionality and they didn’t come with an instruction manual. We pull the pieces together. Is there an Intellectual Disability team, a Blind/Low Vision team? By May or June the TDSB knows these students are going into a class. How do we help teachers prepare – with tools needed to work with the student. We all have to collaborate to do this.

Chair’s response: SEAC may want to concentrate on this in the future.

**Recommendation 10: Tearing Down Counterproductive TDSB Senior Management Silos**

Input 10.1 (JPN): SEAC already discussed this during staff presentations. All of these recommendations can be put into a comprehensive strategy.

Input 10.2 (DM): We don’t want to lose the expertise we have – like staff specialized in exceptionality needs.

**Recommendation 11: Tearing Down Attitudinal Barriers Against Students with Disabilities**

Input 11.1 (DA): Students with optional attendance have sibling rights to a school but students placed in special education classes at other than the neighbourhood school don’t.

Input 11.2 (DF): Inclusion is a feeling and we need to be able to measure if inclusion has truly happened for these children. Suggested that we add – 3 times a year at reporting time, ask each student and parent “Do you feel included?”

Input 11.3 (DW): Referring to recommendation 11d, expand on idea of giving information to parents, that information be posted and given out/posted in the school – about rights – supports – opportunities.

Input 11.4 (NG): At Trustee Pilkey’s forum there was a presentation on equity and inclusion, but special education was not addressed in the topic until it was raised as a question. Students have identified body image and perceived intelligence as the issues that impact on their feeling included.

**Recommendation 12: Removing Barriers to Participation in Experiential Learning**

No additional input was offered.

The Chair noted that time for further discussion was limited and suggested that members comment on the recommendations 13 to 20 by personal choice.

**Recommendation 13: Ensuring French Immersion and Other Specialized Programs Are Barrier-Free for Students with Disabilities**

**Recommendation 14: Ensuring Student Testing/Assessment is Free of Disability Barriers**

**Recommendation 15: Ensuring Students with Disabilities Can Bring Service Animals to School**

**Recommendation 16: Ensuring Accessibility of Instructional Materials that Students with Disabilities Use**

**Recommendation 17: Ensuring Accessibility of Gym, Playground and Like Equipment**

**Recommendation 18: Implement Human Resources Policies and Practices to Expand TDSB Staff Knowledge and Skills Regarding Inclusion**

**Recommendation 19: Finding Out What Has Worked on Inclusion Elsewhere**

Input 19.1 (DM): We should look at our own school board for what is being done well in some of our schools. There are a lot of teachers very positive about this direction.

**Recommendation 20: Establishing a TDSB Chief Accessibility Officer**

**Recommendation 21: TDSB Regularly Reporting to the TDSB Board, to SEAC and to the Public on Plans and Progress**

The Chair commented that he added recommendation 21 as a way to strengthen reporting back to SEAC.

Input 21.1 (JPN): We are telling people how to do their job. We know that the first thing to do is to see what is happening regarding the issue we are trying to address. We should be putting ourselves in the shoes of some of the staff – tell them what the issue is and learn what is happening.

Chair’s response: SEAC’s job under law is to make recommendations on how to improve TDSB educating our kids. They are professionals and people who care. That doesn’t mean there is no way to improve it.

Further to input 21.1 (JPN): It is the way that a recommendation is presented that can impact on how it is received and acted on.

9:00 p.m. having been reached, Executive Superintendent Uton Robinson asked for SEAC’s agreement to extend the meeting to permit him time to speak to his report to SEAC on a number of important and time sensitive matters. On motion of Aline Chan, the meeting was extended fifteen minutes.

The Chair directed that any additional input to Motion 5 be emailed to him and directed SEAC’s attention to Uton Robinson.

**5. Special Education Department Update – Uton Robinson**

1. Recognition was given to Jan Fukumoto, Coordinator of Autism Services, who has worked tirelessly for many years on behalf of children with Autism and their families and who retired in February. The department welcomes the new Coordinator, Lydia Tisma. She and the thirty-one staff on the Autism Teams play a tremendous part in successful programming for children with Autism, along with a host of consultants and special education teachers.

2. In place of the offered presentation, SEAC members received a two-page synopsis about the proposed Toronto Region Coordinated Service Planning Partnership Agreement, prepared by Rae Roebuck *(Partner, First Leadership and the Project Coordinator).* This is a huge task with many parties involved in the coordinated services *(as outlined in the Department Update).* The path forward is to decide if TDSB is going to sign on to this. A timed response is required so staff has the feedback prior to the next meeting.

3. A staffing update was given *(see the written Update).* Within the figures around the allocation of support staff, there is flexibility to ensure needs are met. There is a slight increase in elementary teaching staff.

4. Regarding Home School Program (HSP), we have made a change going into next year. We need to ensure that attitudes and mindsets and resources are in place for a successful process. The HSP has been operating since 2002. Currently there are 5221 students in HSP (from Kindergarten to Grade 8). Much of the program has been delivered through withdrawal and we know the composition is over-represented on all levels racially and with boys. We see also that withdrawn students are not as successful as those not withdrawn. Several factors needed to be looked at in regards to removing a large group of students when staff did not believe they could work with them. We are working on changing mindsets and resources to address this.

In the fall, Grade 1 students will no longer be placed in HSP. The following year, this will extend to students up to and including Grade 3 (800 students). HSP was originally primarily for Junior Grade (Grades 4 to 6) students. It has become a program to support the Junior/Intermediate cap on class size.

On March 8th, 100 administrators met to talk about how HSP is used, with the purpose of looking at a more inclusive model. They have identified what they need. They spoke about the need and want to explore alternate models of inclusion; about how to support teachers/staff towards greater inclusion; about how to advance inclusion with professional development in Universal Design for Learning and Differentiated Instruction. As a follow-up, on March 27th there will be a workshop looking at timetabling and to bring people together for team and co-teaching, taking from Learning for All and Growing Success.

We are also looking at staff placement so the best staff are working with our students. Turnover is disappointing and it affects our students. Staff attitudes are front and centre – we have a number of ways of looking at equity and staff attitude is paramount. The Panel discussion explained how administrators are able to make a difference in their schools. This kind of work is transformative and on a long term basis looks at structural change for greater inclusion. Participants identified the need for more professional development for teachers and support staff, more resources, greater flexibility in hiring staff, more consistent messaging across the system (for example in the Special Education Plan).

5. With regards to the Special Education Plan, the question is how does SEAC want to be involved in the annual review? The motions can be woven within the Plan, but what time is SEAC able to give to this work? In the past, a small group from SEAC looked at the document and discussed it section by section and the individuals have given good feedback. We can put a process together, but in the spirit of collaboration we invite SEAC’s suggestions. We want to meet the timeline of June/July so it is in to the ministry on time.

The Chair suggested that SEAC members exchange thoughts by email between now and the next meeting about the process for consultation on the Special Education Plan. He proposed that Uton could take the SEAC motions that have already passed and look for ways to weave them into the Plan. He clarified that SEAC had more to say, especially if motion 5 passes in April. As Chair, he plans to use the rest of April and May to give additional input and invited SEAC members o send their individual points in as well.

Uton invited specific feedback on the Special Education Plan topics listed in his Update. The Chair suggested members address the five they consider most important.

**7. Request for Live Streaming or Audio Recording of SEAC meetings**

This topic was not addressed.

**8. Association Reports/Updates**

Richard Carter reminded SEAC that tomorrow is World Down Syndrome Day and drew attention to the website: [www.worlddownsysdromeday.org](http://www.worlddownsysdromeday.org) and read a statement from Ban Ki-moon.

Lisa Kness reminded SEAC that April 2nd is Autism Awareness Day, which extends as well into the week.

**9. Other Business**

General comments were made

Input (JPN): *(In reference to SEAC voting on Motion 5)* Inclusion also includes diversity of ideas and not just saying that if you aren’t happy with it, you can vote against it.

Input (NG): Thanks for sharing about staff. Will you be using the input on the Special Needs Strategy?

Response: Uton will share input with TDSB Executive Council and through elected trustees.

**10. Adjournment**

On motion of Clovis Grant, the meeting adjourned at 9:18 p.m.