**Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)**

## MINUTES for Monday June 13, 2016

### 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 *regrets*

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 *regrets* Jean-Paul Ngana (Dick Winters)

TDSB North West Community Jordan Glass Phillip Sargent

TDSB South East Community Diane Montgomery *regrets*

TDSB South West Community Nora Green Paula Boutis

TDSB Trustees Pamela Gough Alexander Brown

Regrets: Aline Chan (NE Community), Clovis Grant (Community Living), Olga Ingrahm (SE Community), Cynthia Sprigings (Brain Injury Society of Toronto)

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

Ian Allison, Coordinating Superintendent, Special Education and Section Programs

Bernadette Shaw, Central Coordinating Principal, Teaching and Learning

Margo Ratsep, SEAC Liaison

Guest: Shelley McKeen, Client Services Consultant, City of Toronto

Recorder: Margo Ratsep

MINUTES

## Call to Order

## SEAC Chair David Lepofsky called the meeting to order at 7:02 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

Paula Boutis declared that as a member of Integration Action for Inclusion, she would not participate in any vote on the proposed new association membership.

# 3. Approval of the Minutes for Monday, May 2, 2016

On motion of Jordan Glass, the minutes for Monday, May 2, 2016 were approved.

# 4. SEAC Association Membership Application

An application to join TDSB SEAC, received from Integration Action for Inclusion in Education and Community was considered. Discussion about the nomination was followed by the following recommendation to the board:

**\*\*\*MOTION:** Moved by Lisa Kness

***Whereas there are 2 association vacancies on TDSB SEAC and***

***Whereas SEAC has received a nomination from “Integration Action for Inclusion in Education and Community” and***

***Whereas Clayton Eaton, the President of the Board for Integration Action for Inclusion, has nominated Kim Southern Paulsen as representative, therefore***

***SEAC recommends that the Toronto District School Board appoint Integration Action for Inclusion as a TDSB member association on the TDSB Special Education Advisory Committee for the 2015 to 2018 term, with Kim Southern Paulsen as its representative.***

The motion carried.

**5.** **Presentation: City of Toronto Youth Services Ombudsman**

North East Alternate Community Representative, Dick Winters introduced Shelley McKeen, Client Services Consultant, who coordinated the process for establishing Toronto Children's Services appeal processes. The service covers 38,000 families needing child care subsidies and managed 927 potential appeals in 2016, of which 267 went forward to appeal (as unsettled by intermediate steps). During the presentation and follow-up discussion, the following information was shared:

Appeal Process

The focus is on customer service and the right to appeal is automatic. Appeals are managed on a first-come, first-served basis – unless considered urgent. Some appeals result in policy amendments. For example, management of a number of appeals about children with autism led to the revision of an existing policy on documentation requirements for decision-making. Evaluation is carried out through logged compliments/complaints (automated) so issues can be addressed as they arise. Appeal process steps include:

1. The client writes a letter to their case worker detailing the policy being challenged and reason for its being challenged. The case worker looks to see if s/he can help

2. An electronic process is engaged to explain the issue to the office supervisor, who may help if can.

3. If not, the appeal is forwarded to the Client Services Consultant. With a goal of supporting the client, she investigates the issues and prepares a form that depersonalizes and summarizes the issues and writes a recommendation to the Appeal Committee.

4. The Appeal committee is made up of a Senior Manager and two Directors. Appeal decisions are made by unanimous vote and sent to the Client Services Consultant privately.

5. If disagreement persists, the issue is discussed via email until the committee can come to an agreed upon decision. The General Manager can make the final decision.

The Chair thanked the presenter and invited SEAC members to keep the information in mind for possible future consideration of the need for a TDSB ombudsperson

# 6. Four Motions on TDSB Special Education Reform

# Discussion and voting on 4 Motions (Revised)

The Chair proposed that SEAC review each of the motions and seek a consensus on member readiness to vote on each motion as a whole, rather than voting on the individual parts of each motion. If members indicated preparedness to vote for a motion, a vote would be held. If not, the motion would be put aside for further discussion of the components. The immediate intent is to:

1. Clearly identify and articulate what SEAC wants to recommend to the board

2. Work with staff on ways to make things happen to help the students

3. Decide on a strategy for what is ultimately taken to the board as a formal motion and when it is taken to the board

The Chair clarified that if passed at this meeting, the motions would appear in the Summary Report to Program and School Services Committee (PSSC) for information purposes, but would not require any action at this time by PSSC.

SEAC members agreed on the voting process described and it was carried out for each of the four motions, with the following results:

Motion 1 – moved by Jean Paul Ngana – The motion carried.

Motion 2 – moved by Paul Cross – The motion carried.

Motion 3 – moved by Paula Boutis – The motion carried.

Motion 4 – An amendment was introduced by Richard Carter that in item 1(a) the word “classrooms” be changed to “educational settings”. The amendment was accepted as friendly and the amended motion was moved by Steven Lynette. The motion carried.

The Chair clarified that the next step is to turn the motions into action. This involves communication with trustees, parents and staff. He proposed that ideas be shared by email over the summer about how to position the motions going forward into the new school year and that SEAC set up working groups to develop ideas on getting support for the recommendations.

# 7. The Effects of Gifted Programming in Secondary Schools on Students in the Academic Stream

# Review of the Program and School Services Committee (PSSC) requested report

# A copy of the report was made available with the agenda. In an April 2016 motion, Program and School Services Committee (PSSC) had invited SEAC input before its presentation to PSSC. In a preface to discussion, the Chair clarified that the board should never put any restrictions on a student with special education needs being in a mainstream classroom and invited members to express their views on the issue. The following views were offered:

Inclusion

* Part of inclusion is the idea of natural distribution. Natural distribution would mean that certain exceptional populations would not be even close to 50% in a class. There should be a concern with any exceptionality when there is an imbalance such as that described in the parent delegation.
* There is a natural tendency to evaluate classroom performance based on norms within a class. Norms vary from class to class and community to community. That is why EQAO tries to standardize performance across the province. A teacher would not intentionally make the course more difficult for all students because of a high number of Gifted students in class, but it would likely happen. For example, if 50% of students in a class had developmental delays, the instruction would likely result in different norms based on the teacher’s experience
* On one hand we have said we believe in inclusion, yet some staff say we have 7 times more gifted classes than other boards. In the name of “Inclusion”, TDSB has been decreasing classes for some populations (Learning Disabilities, Mild Intellectual Disabilities, Behaviour), but increasing for others (Gifted). In actuality we are fighting for enrolment and won’t aggravate a portion of the population that has the ability to leave the system. Other options don’t exist to the same extent for other exceptionalities.
* Important we hear about the experience of students in a regular stream that also has a large number of gifted students.
* Important that we hear about the impact of programming across the board on any population of students. For example, in duo-track schools with French Immersion, there is a greater concentration of students with special education needs in the English stream. We are creating a tiered educational system.
* Gifted programs are also inclusionary, containing children with duo-exceptionalities such as LD, ASD, PD. TDSB has been cutting gifted programs in schools because funding is reduced.
* The discussion should not be limited to slanting the program towards gifted. That issue exists no matter which exceptionality is involved that tilts the balance
* The issue about tilting the balance and focusing on certain students, the board is returning to an environment of teaching to the student rather than the aggregate – the curriculum mandated by the province compounds the issue.
* Inclusion of students that are working at different levels is important and needs to be reinforced at the level of the classroom teacher. All of us have examples of situations where a student is excluded because of exceptional needs, (seizures, Down Syndrome, ASD, LD, physical disabilities) and not being welcomed into certain environments. It is important that teachers and other students understand that every student in the classroom has the right to be there and for them to be supportive of each other.
* The program is the program – not the school. Special education programs are put into schools but can sometimes be moved. Students are offered a placement which can sometimes move from school to school. If fewer students in LD – they are moved to another school, based on numbers in an area.
* Natural distribution doesn’t really exist. We have classified kids into exceptionalities and limited choices for placement, creating streaming unintentionally rather than by design. It is all about the same problem of dividing students by their skills rather than making greater use of Universal Design for Learning. IPRC Review data shows only a small number of parents opting for inclusionary placements. Hard to see how TDSB can make inclusion work by giving parents all the choices in the world for other placements.

Secondary Gifted Programs

* The data shows that the highest achievers are not necessarily gifted. Gifted children are not necessarily hard-working. Children with Gifted/LD have different kinds of special education needs. They learn differently and need support but the programs are being cut.
* In some schools there has been an increase rather than decrease in Gifted programs. For the first time, there are gifted options where they did not previously exist.
* The provision of programs for giftedness is to meet the requirement of the Education Act. In some cases, students have not been provided Gifted options and end up dropping courses. For example, a student wanting a Physics (Gifted) option was redirected to e-learning and ended up dropping Physics. If the program is not offered, the requirement for Gifted programming is not being met

In the interest of time to cover the rest of the agenda, the Chair drew discussion to a close and directed that other input on the issue be emailed to Margo Ratsep by Wednesday, June 15th.

# 8. Motion regarding On-Line Petition

# NW Community Representative Jordan Glass

Jordan Glass spoke briefly to an on-line petition to the Ministry of Education to investigate TDSB treatment of special education students and asked that SEAC formally endorse the petition. Discussion resulted in a consensus that members respond individually as they see fit. Additionally, the following motion was put forward by Paula Boutis:

***That, without endorsing it, SEAC recognize the petition, accepting it as a piece of information and taking its concerns into account as would be taken other kinds of parent feedback, in terms of any recommendations SEAC makes moving forward.***

The motion carried

**9. Parent Survey**

Review and finalize the draft Parent Survey

The Chair recommended that critical email feedback be sent to Paula Boutis within the next 10 days. She will work with the original working group to provide a final survey for consideration by SEAC at the September meeting.

A vote to extend the meeting by 15 minutes was passed.

**10. Accessibility and TDSB curriculum**

Bernadette Shaw, Central Coordinating Principal, Teaching and Learning reviewed information in the slide presentation distributed with the agenda in advance of the meeting. Her talk focused on the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction (DI) to make the mainstream classroom receptive and welcoming to children with different exceptionalities. She stressed the importance of Growth Mindset and the impact on student success made by the presence of caring adults in a school setting.

SEAC member input:

Concern was expressed that while agreeing with the ideas presented, the reality falls far short in its implementation. The need to hire for the competencies of creative thinking and caring for students and for greater accountability was stressed.

The Chair closed discussion due to meeting time having expired and invited members to email any unfinished comments or questions to Margo Ratsep

**11. Update on TDSB Learning Centers**

Executive Superintendent Uton Robinson

Requested information was distributed in advance with the agenda and is also available on the TDSB website at <http://www.tdsb.on.ca/AboutUs/DirectorofEducation/LearningCentres.aspx>

# 12. Other Business

# There was no time left on the agenda for new business.

**13. Adjournment**

Lisa Kness moved that the meeting be adjourned at 9:20 p.m. The motion passed.

Uton Robinson thanked SEAC members for their on-going commitment and hard work. He looks forward to working with them again in September and wished them a happy summer.

**Next Meeting: Monday, September 12, 2016**