Approved Minutes

Name of Committee: Special Education Advisory Committee

Meeting Date: February 14, 2022

A meeting of the Special Education Advisory Committee convened on February 14, 2022, from 7: 30 p.m. to 9:50 p.m. via Zoom.

Attendance:

Melissa Rosen (Association for Bright Children (ABC), Steven Lynette (Epilepsy Toronto), Richard Carter (Down Syndrome Association of Toronto),  Adebukola Adenowo-Akpan (Easter Seals Ontario), Tracey O’Regan (Community Living Toronto), Tania Principe (Integrated Action for Inclusion (IAI), David Lepofsky (VIEWS for the Visually Impaired), Juanita Beaudry (CADDAC), Aliza Chagpar (Easter Seals), Shanna Lino (VOICE for Hearing Impaired Children),  Nadia Persaud (Learning Disability Association), Lisa Kness (Autism Ontario), Tracey Burrell (BPSG), Nora Green  LC1, Aline Chan  LC1, , Jean-Paul Ngana LC2,   Kirsten Doyle LC3, Olga Ingrahm LC3, Diane Montgomery  LC4,  Izabella Pruska-Oldenoff LC4, Trustee Michelle Aarts, Trustee Alexander Brown, Trustee Dan MacLean

Alternates attending: Julie Diamond (Autism Society), Ioanna Agelothanasis (LC2), Caren Watkins (LC1), George Petrovic (LC4)

Regrets: Jordan Glass LC2

Staff:

Andrew Gold, Associate Director, Lucy Giannotta, System Superintendent, Special Education and Inclusion, Janine Small, Centrally Assigned Principal, Special Education, Andrea Roach, Centrally Assigned Principal, Special Education LC4, Effie Stathopoulos, Centrally Assigned Principal, Special Education LC1, Susan Moulton, Centrally Assigned Principal, Special Education LC2, Jennie Petko, Centrally Assigned Principal, Special Education LC 3, Wendy Terro, Centrally Assigned Principal, Special Education, Special Education, Mun Shu Wong, Media Services, Lianne Dixon, SEAC Liaison

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| Item | Discussion | Motion | Recommendation |
| Call to Order - Quorum | Live stream announced |  | Quorum achieved |
| Land Acknowledgement | Read by Chair |  |  |
| Approval of Agenda | Approved with adjustments to order of items. Director Russell-Rawlins was not able to attend. | Motion to approve the agenda | Carried |
| Approval of Minutes from January SEAC Meeting | Minutes were approved with minor corrections to the attendance and adjournment time. | Motion to approve the minutes | Recommendation was made to move discussion summary out of the recommendation box. This change and adjournment time update have been made.  Carried |
| Conflicts of interest | No Conflicts of Interest |  |  |
| ADHD | Discussion   * Recent motion went to PSSC linked to ADHD * Staff have been listening to concerns and reflecting about students with ADHD in the system following discussion at SEAC and shared suggestion for building capacity to assist these students * Ensure strategies are included in the Special Education Plan * Develop professional learning for all staff * Staff will report back to SEAC to see how these strategies are impacting students with ADHD |  |  |
| Parent Delegation | Cecile Farnum and Melanie Medeiros-Sims delegated to SEAC representing parents in Ward 9  Appendix A  Suggestions from delegation included   * Breaking down the silence between PIAC and SEAC * Develop a specific Parent Concern Protocol specifically for parents of special education students * More transparency with Special Education communications * Consider a monthly newsletter * Make available easily accessible points of contact for special education staff |  |  |
| Leadership and Learning Report | Andrew Gold  As per SEAC’s request, a written leadership report has been provided to accompany the PowerPoint and presentation.  **Elementary Switch Updates:**  **Over the past couple of weeks, elementary schools and central staff have been supporting Switch Requests of elementary students.**  **The effective start date for the switch is February 22.**  We had over 33,000 students moving from the in-person to virtual and vice versa and a total of 16 classes that collapsed across the system. In special education we had only one class extraction and no need for additional teachers.  **K-Gr. 1 IEP Strategy and Gr. 2-12 School IEP Review**  Analysis of demographics of the JK/SK and Gr. 1 students in TDSB who had an IEP during the 2015-16 to 2019-20 school years suggests:  ● Male students, Black students and students from families in low socio-economic status, such as less parent education, single-parent households, and low family income were disproportionately high in Kindergarten and Grade 1 special education.  Staff developed and are currently continuing to implement the K-Gr. 1 IEP Strategy to interrogate and interrupt practices that lead to the overrepresentation of marginalized students in special education programming.  Data was shared showing total enrolment numbers of JK to Grade 1 students who had an IEP in special education in the past four school years.  Next steps were shared with SEAC.  **Service Delivery During Staff Shortages**  To avoid having to move in-person classes to virtual learning due to staff shortages, a system was developed to avoid using special education teachers except as a last resort.  **Special Education Plan**  The process of reviewing the annual TDSB Special Education Plan for submission to the Ministry has begun and we are currently in the consultation phase.  **Psychological Assessments statistics for January 2022 were shared.**  **PPM 81** **Provision of health support services in school settings**  DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION PURPOSES (January 2022) was shared with SEAC along with the TDSB’s Response to the Draft PPM.  Members were encouraged to read the Draft PPM and the Response, and provide feedback as there are significant concerns about this PPM outlined in the TDSB response document. |  |  |
| Recommendation – K-12 Working Group |  | David Lepofsky proposed a motion regarding implementation of K-12 recommendations and establishment of a Working Group. | Appendix B  Revised motion was passed |
| Recommendation - SEPRC |  | Melissa Rosen presented draft recommendations regarding SEPRC | Motion was deferred pending receipt of additional information around current SEPRC process and any possible changes that have taken place. |
| Trustees Report   * Trustee Aarts * Trustee MacLean * Trustee Brown | Nil |  |  |
| SEAC Member Reports/ Input | Nil |  |  |
| Other Business  Other Business  A. Association Updates  B. Correspondence (shared prior to meeting) ·  Email TFN ·  Letter Renfrew County Catholic DSB Jan. 13, 2021 · Letter Waterloo Region DSB Dec 3, 2021 ·  Adjournment  Next Meeting: March 21, 2022 @ 7:00 pm | Correspondence was distributed prior to the meeting. |  |  |

Appendix A

Hello SEAC, My name is Cecile Farnum - I’m one of the parent representatives for Ward 9 on PIAC, the Parent Involvement Advisory Committee. PIAC is a statutory committee, similar to SEAC. I’m here with Melanie Medeiros - Sims, also a Ward 9 parent. For those unfamiliar with PIAC, 2 parent reps from each Ward are elected to PIAC, who:

● Advise the Board on parent engagement; PIAC has monthly meetings with Senior staff at the TDSB, similar to SEAC

● Provide advice and information about the education system to parents and school councils; and

● Host various learning opportunities for parents

I want to be clear on my own lived experience; my children are not currently identified as having special needs. So, I can’t claim to be here for that purpose. However, during the pandemic, in my capacity as a PIAC parent rep, I was approached by Ward 9 allies and parents of children with special needs, who felt, and continue to feel, a great deal of frustration, isolation, and lack of engagement with the TDSB. They were hoping that in my role as a PIAC Ward rep, I could assist them in this regard, and help them find more information about how special education is supported at the Ward and system levels. We met on Zoom, talked about their challenges, frustrations, and the type of advocacy they needed to engage in as parents to ensure their children were receiving appropriate resources and support. I’d like to introduce Melanie Medeiros - Sims, one of those parents, to talk about her experiences, and those of the other parents - (Melanie speaks) Good evening, everyone.

My name is Melanie Medeiros-Sims. I’m a parent and advocate for children with special needs. My middle child was diagnosed with multiple LDs in 2020. We had to have her assessed privately as our school wait list was very high, and we were told that she would most likely not even get on the list let alone get a TDSB assessment during her elementary school career. We were fortunate to have family help and insurance but many in our school community and beyond are not as lucky and that is why I am here. My daughter is now in grade 5 and reading at a grade 2 level. She began in the French Immersion program in SK, and by grade 2, we noticed something was off. She has anxiety, so school drop off was also an emotional struggle for both of us. I reached out to her teacher at the time and was told that she would benefit from tutoring, so I signed her up for twice weekly tutoring. Things were not improving so I went to the principal for advice. It was recommended that she be put on an IEP for her anxiety, which never happened. At the time, our school did not have a French speaking resource teacher for the French Immersion students so they also offered for her to get more one-on-one support from the teacher, who was facilitating a program called Reading Recovery. By the time she was in grade 3 and things still weren't improving, I requested her to be put on an IEP not only for her anxiety and also for her academic struggles. She was taken to IST in October of 2019 and it wasn't until the end of February 2020 that we finally received a copy of her IEP. She was scheduled for assessment in March 2020, right when the pandemic hit. Ironically, that’s when things started changing for the better for my daughter. As they transitioned to online learning, her new teacher saw something in her that no one else at the school had. This teacher recognized that, like herself, my daughter was a 'hands on' learner. She gave us strategies that worked, and just like that, no more morning tears. At this time, we also received the results of her private psych ed assessment, and we made the difficult decision to pull her from the French program, as our school still did not have any resource support in French for FI students. Since then my daughter's anxiety is very minimal and she is happy to go to school. But I ask why, why did I have to advocate so hard and so loud for my child to get supported at school, why did I have to remove her from a program that her peers were in? Why do I have to continue to help other parents navigate the system? Why are students and parents still struggling to access the tools for success? I want to make it clear that we are not the only spec ed family to struggle to navigate the necessary resources. Many families at our school and others in Ward 9 are experiencing similar challenges. All research suggests that Early Intervention is best. So why is the TDSB letting so many students fall through the cracks? The system is broken and there are so many inequalities happening across the board. Some schools have access to resources, while many others do not. This is unacceptable in a publicly funded education system. I also wonder why it is so difficult to get definitive answers from Admins or Resource Teachers. I’ve searched on the TDSB website and can not find the answers I’m looking for. Is this because it differs from school to school? If that’s the case, it is extremely inequitable. I want a system that is equal and equally and easily accessible for all. Anything less is unacceptable. Thank you. (Cecile speaks) Given that SEAC’s role is to advise the board in matters that apply to the delivery of special education services and programs, we are looking for more direct, transparent and consistent communication from SEAC and Special Education staff to the parent community to support their advisory role. We have some direct suggestions on how this could potentially achieved, understanding that some of this may already be in the works:

1. Break down siloes between SEAC and PIAC - the work both committees do intersects on so many levels, that there needs to be better connection and communication between the two. PIAC reps develop relationships with parent communities, school councils, Trustees and Superintendents. SEAC members have similar connections to Senior staff connected to Special Education, their own lived experiences as parents navigating the system, and agency representatives who have extensive experience working with children with special needs. These two worlds need to talk to each other; they share a similar mission, and it can only benefit students and families if information, knowledge, resources and connections are regularly shared.

2. Develop a Parent Concern Protocol specifically for parents of children with special needs - the TDSB’s Parent Concern Protocol outlines a structured process of steps to take to address questions and concerns - first, start with the teacher, then Principal, then Superintendent and Trustee. This process is not helpful to parents of students with special needs; they will often reach a dead end, be referred elsewhere, and likely give up. The positions identified in the PCP often do not have the in-depth knowledge to answer specific questions, particularly at a Ward or system level. This protocol needs to be modified to consider the type of information not available through regular channels. This protocol was not designed with the parents of special education students in mind, and we know that the parents of special needs students are often the ones who need assistance navigating an often challenging system.

3. More transparent, consistent communication and outreach from SEAC to parents and TDSB staff. SEAC is doing great work - I want to stress how reassuring it has been to know that SEAC exists, and that there are passionate, committed people working hard, behind the scenes. But as has been noted at SEAC many times, special education is not ‘behind the scenes’ anymore - it is in every classroom, in every school in our board. But unfortunately, that is not reflected in the communications we see from the Board. Not all parents can dedicate the time to watch SEAC meetings, and glean this information on their own. As Melanie noted to me, she takes screenshots of information presented at SEAC, as she has no idea how to locate this information after the meetings. I would urge the TDSB’s Communications department, Special Education staff and SEAC to work together to try and achieve some improvement in this area, e.g. a monthly newsletter, digesting the often dense, acronym-driven information shared at SEAC meetings. For example, what are Tier 3 behaviors? How are they relevant in terms of the level of support that a child would receive in the classroom? That would be useful for parents to understand. This information would not only be helpful to parents, but for TDSB staff as well. We have often been surprised at how little TDSB staff know about SEAC, particularly those working schools. They are a valuable piece to the referral process for parents and families - you are most likely to ask a SNA, consultant, working with your children, where to go for more information and support. If they are not aware of groups like SEAC, and what work they are undertaking, then a key point of connection is lost.

4. Easily accessible points of contact for parents of children with special needs - parent engagement at the Board is often not approached in a consistent manner, which can lead to confusion on where to turn. For example, the Board and PIAC are organized by Ward representation; at SEAC, it is by the Learning Centre. This is not to say that one approach is better than the other; but it is confusing for the same organization to use these different approaches. We’d also like some more clarity and transparency about the role of the parent representative’s on SEAC - how are they elected or acclaimed to these roles? And is there any obligation in this role to connect with parents in their respective Learning Centres? Are they given any tools to do this? Given how isolated many parents feel, and the system-wide challenges of connecting these families to the available programs and services, this could be an important lifeline for parents experiencing frustration. We are aware that many of these issues are already known to SEAC, and that there is already work being done to address them. We would be happy to discuss our presentation in greater detail, help support this work, and collaborate with SEAC in the future. Please note that I will also send a copy of these comments to PIAC, and the Parent and Community Engagement Office (PCEO). Thank you for your attention, and for all that you do to help students and families in the TDSB - we do appreciate it. Cecile Farnum and Melanie Medeiros-Sims, on behalf of a collective of Ward 9 parents

Appendix B

Whereas in 2018, the Ontario Government appointed the K-12 Education Standards Development Committee ("the K-12 Committee") under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act to recommend the steps needed to remove and prevent barriers in Ontario schools that impede full participation by students with disabilities.

And whereas on June 1, 2021, the Ontario Government made public the K-12 Committee's initial report and recommendations.

And whereas the K-12 Committee's final report has now been submitted to the Ontario Government, and the Ontario Government is required to publicly post it upon receiving it.

And whereas among other things, the K-12 Committee has made recommendations that are the same in substance as recommendations which the Special Education Advisory Committee of the Toronto District School Board has presented to TDSB.

Therefore the Special Education Advisory Committee of the Toronto District School Board resolves:

1. SEAC recommends that the Toronto District School Board implement as many of the K-12 Committee's recommendations as soon as possible.