1.  **Special Education and Section 23 Department Update**

Executive Superintendent Uton Robinson

SEAC Meeting of Monday January 15, 2018

**Happy New Year Everyone!**

On behalf of staff at TDSB, we trust that 2018 is off to a great start for SEAC. We thank you for the work that you continue to do in service for students and families. Prior to the Winter Break some time was spent responding to questions about gifted programs. The following are the questions and answers that were provided by staff. This information is also located on the TDSB website.

**New Vision for Student Transportation**

The Ontario Government has provided information about the release of the **Discussion paper on a new vision for student transportation in Ontario** to support stakeholder engagements in creating a New Vision for Student Transportation, and provide engagement details and timelines.

As announced in July, the ministry is undertaking a broad engagement over the next year to develop a new vision for student transportation. This new vision will focus on how transportation can support the goals of the education system now and into the future. The new vision will also provide guidance for future policy development such as funding and accountability. There is a link to provide feedback. This information is being collected up until March 29th, 2018. (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/discussion-paper-new-vision-student-transportation>)

**Will Special Education and Gifted programs continue?**

Yes, Special Education programs will continue to be offered. The Enhancing Equity Task Force, specifically, recommends:

Review Special Education Learning programs with an emphasis on:

* Placement and inclusion of students with special education learning needs;
* Retaining congregated sites while exploring options to include Special Education at a home school;
* Professional development for staff;
* Providing a process and clear information for collaborative decision-making about student needs, as well as a process to appeal and revise decisions;
* Identifying physical and attitudinal barriers;
* Ensuring that all families, including those new to Canada and those whose first language is not English, can successfully navigate the Special Education system with confidence.

The report does not recommend phasing out or closing congregated Special Education sites or Special Education programs, which includes Gifted. It is, however, important to review Special Education programs and services to assess the impact of these supports on students’ achievement and well-being.

**Will congregated sites for Gifted programs continue?**

Yes, congregated Gifted classrooms will continue in TDSB schools.

**What happens once a student is identified as Gifted?**

An IPRC meeting will be held. The IPRC will review all information and make a decision regarding exceptionality and placement.  As with all IPRCs, the committee will first consider how the needs of the student can be met in regular class. The parent/guardian will be asked their preference regarding placement - regular class or special education gifted class.

**How are students identified as gifted supported in their local school ?**

Students identified as gifted who attend their local school have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that would outline their unique learning needs and detail the enrichment program that would best support them.

**What are the next steps in determining what happens with Gifted programming?**

At the December 13 Board meeting, Trustees voted to have TDSB senior staff conduct a full review of the recommendations of the Enhancing Equity Task Force. Following a closer examination of the recommendations, the Director of Education will present high level, proposed next steps to the Planning and Priorities Committee on January 31, 2018.

No final decisions will be made on January 31, 2018. Community members will have the opportunity to share their thoughts as part of the committee process. Please visit the TDSB Website for updates on the process and how you can get involved.

The items below were in the December Staff Report:

# Universal Design for Learning

Helpful documents and their website link have been shared with staff, as part of an introduction to Universal Design for Learning. The resources are from the National Center for Universal Design for Learning, available at: [http://www.udlcenter.org](http://www.udlcenter.org/).  While Professional Learning Sessions have been running on a smaller scale since February 2017, there will be many more opportunities available in 2018.  In these sessions, participants will learn about the set of three primary principles (i.e., representation, expression, and engagement) that guide planning and delivery of instruction. These will also include assessment strategies to support all learners and how they apply to a variety of learning environments.

# 2. After School Leisure Program

Following up on the November Update, the following letter is being distributed to parents/guardians of students in Junior and Intermediate grades who are identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder, informing them about the new Ministry-funded after school program being offered by TDSB starting in January:

“Welcome to an exciting opportunity to participate in a newly funded after school program for students grades 6-8 with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) called ***Doing* *What I Love: At Home, At School and In the Community!*** This is a Ministry funded after school program that offers an opportunity for students to develop, build and enhance their skills through leisure activities.

A key component of the program is to learn individualized leisure/recreation activities based on the child’s interest. Activities will be co-taught by “experts” in the leisure activities supported by qualified teachers who will reinforce Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) Instructional Methods throughout the sessions with students. The program offers simultaneous sessions for parents/guardians that include instruction in leisure activities and strategies being taught to the child in order to practice these leisure activities at home and in the community. Parents will also be provided with information regarding the benefits of leisure activities and how it supports their child’s strengths and challenges (e.g., reducing anxiety, overall health benefits, increasing opportunity for engagement in community etc.).

One of the great things about this program is that parents/guardians have the opportunity to participate alongside their child. Parent/Guardian and child can participate in one hour sessions, once a week for 6 weeks. We invite school aged siblings to attend to provide an opportunity for this to be a family event. In addition, child care will be provided for non-school aged children. The program will run for 6 weeks from January 17 to February 21, 2018 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the locations listed below.

Participants are invited to sign up for only **one location**.

* Learning Center 1 – Hollycrest Middle School – 630 Renforth Drive, Etobicoke
* Learning Center 2 – Charles H Best Middle School – 285 Wilmington Avenue, North York
* Learning Center 3 – Buchanan Public School – 4 Buchanan Road, Scarborough
* Learning Center 4 – Nelson Mandela Park Public School – 440 Shuter Street, Toronto

Unfortunately **transportation cannot be provided**, so we ask for your commitment to bring your child and attend all sessions with them. Families will have a unique opportunity to access a Leisure Coach to bridge the gap between after school, home and community.

If you are interested, please fill out the attached application and return it to your child’s school or teacher by **XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX**. Depending on the number of responses received, students may be selected through a lottery process. This program provides your child with an excellent opportunity to get involved in leisure activities at the school and in the community. The first session will begin on Wednesday, January 17, 2018.”

# 3. Rebranding of Section 23 Programs – Inclusion and Anti-Oppression

Section 23 students experience institutionalized oppression. To effect change in attitudes, planning is underway to offer three years of mandatory training to TDSB leadership (similar to that conducted by the Aboriginal Education Centre). These training sessions would include:

* Student voice of lived experiences
* Process of consent for students to participate in a student forum, live or on video.
* Safety and respect – how to keep these in balance.

Plans have focused on anti-oppression and ending stigma.

**Year 1 Educational**

* Presenting to Superintendents and Principals at each Learning Centre in a 2-part series, as part of meetings that are already happening
* Hosting an event during Mental Health Week, in collaboration with TDSB Social Workers
* Producing an online video for use in administration compliance training
* Ongoing submissions to System Leaders’ Weekly and Direct Line about Section 23, the benefits and the routes for student access.

**Year 2 Experiential**

* Experiential and including students’ voice throughout
* Program tours
* Include administrators in agency sponsored training sessions

**Year 3 Sharing**

Sharing the positive experiences – Providing articles for TDSB good news stories, incorporating rebranding and positive publicity

# 4. Individual Education Plan Consultation Letter

The 2015 Individual Education Plan consultation letter accompanies this Department Update. Staff is asking SEAC to review it and provide suggestions for improvement.

# 5. Parent Brochures

One of SEAC’s recommendations was to improve communication with parents, providing important information about Special Education in accessible formats and in jargon-free, plain language. The department previously created a number of information brochures on special education topics and received feedback from SEAC and others about their content being too complex and full of educational jargon. Included with this Department Update are revised drafts of the content planned for the creation of new and hopefully more parent-friendly brochures, on the following topics:

* Individual Education Plan
* Identification Placement and Review Committee
* In-School Team and School Support Team
* Parent Concern Protocol

Before we proceed further, SEAC members are invited to their provide input for ensuring the brochures are parent-friendly, easily understood and contain the information that answers parental questions. This can form a topic for conversation at a SEAC meeting or SEAC input can be submitted through email and collated by the SEAC Liaison.