# Special Education and Section 23 Department Update

Executive Superintendent Uton Robinson

SEAC Meeting of February 6th, 2017

***1. Article in the Toronto Star about TDSB student with autism left on a bus for 6 hours***

We find what happened to this student completely unacceptable. Since it happened, the school has been working very closely with the student and her family to offer any supports we can and to reassure them that this will not happen again. We have also been in contact with Stock Transportation, which is responsible for the bus, and we understand that the driver in question has now been terminated. While all bus drivers who work for our contracted carriers undergo Child Check training that requires drivers to visually check the entire bus prior to locking it, we have reiterated with all carriers our clear expectations that this must be done and that drivers receive regular training on this process. We have also ensured that automated and/or manual attendance calls at this school and similar schools will be made regardless of the student’s age.

***2. Home School Program***

The Integrated Equity Framework was approved by the Board of Trustees on October 26, 2016. Within the first year goals under "Inclusion and Special Education", reference is made to “remodel” the Home School Program. It is good practice to ensure that programs are meeting the needs of the students they serve.

Over the next few years, we will continue to move forward with greater inclusion in special education program and service delivery. Any changes to our special education delivery model will be implemented thoughtfully, based on extensive research, an understanding of best practices, professional learning and with a consistent focus on student achievement and well-being. We continue to value active and meaningful collaboration with all stakeholders. There will be ongoing consultation on these changes with students, parents, staff, trustees and community members, including the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), Toronto School Administrators Association (TSAA) the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and Elementary Teachers of Toronto (ETT).

We believe that moving to greater inclusion will provide all students with the most enabling learning environment for both academic and social success. Going forward, we remain committed to ensuring that the learning needs of all students, including those with special education needs, are met in the most equitable, supportive and inclusionary environment possible.

We have begun steps to remodel the Home School Program. The goal of the framework and the Home School Program review is to promote greater student achievement and well-being. The model of program delivery will become more flexible. For example, some of our students who are currently served through a withdrawal method may receive the necessary support in their classrooms, while in other instances some students with special education needs may require that a portion of their learning day be in a small group setting. ‎The overall staffing allocation in these areas will not be reduced.

The change to the Home School Programs will be a phased in process. After conversations at a number of staff meetings, a decision was made to provide examples of what a number of Elementary Principals are doing to provide a more inclusive Home School Program for the 2017/18 year. We will continue to provide ongoing professional learning to staff on Universal Design for Learning, Differentiated Instruction, and the use of assistive technology as a way to build capacity to better meet the needs of students.

The plan would see no grade 1 students in Home School Programs for the upcoming school year and moving to a Junior and Intermediate program for the 2018/19 school year that support successful inclusion practice.

***3. Toronto Coordinated Service Planning***

As outlined in the December 21, 2016 document, “Backgrounder*: Toronto Coordinated Service Planning”* there is a special needs strategy that began in 2012. Families and service providers told former Minister Tracy MacCharles, when she was Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Children and Youth Services, about their experiences with special needs services. The Parents said, “We don’t know where to go or what to do when we have a concern about our child.” “Finding services can be confusing and services can be difficult to navigate.” “The current system can create unnecessary waits for and gaps in services.”

In 2014 the Ministries of Children and Youth Services, Community and Social Services, Education and Health and Long-Term Care introduced the Special Needs Strategy to improve services for children and youth with special needs in Ontario guided by the following vision:

“An Ontario where children and youth with special needs get the timely and effective services they need to participate fully at home, at school, in the community, and as they prepare to achieve their goals for adulthood.”

The goal of the coordinated service planning is to improve service experiences and outcomes for children and youth with multiple and/or complex special needs and their families through the support of a Service Planning Coordinator who will connect them to the multiple, cross-sectoral services they need as early as possible, and monitor their needs and progress through a coordinated service plan. This was a recommendation from many groups, including TDSB SEAC during the Tri-Ministry consultation.

Special Education and Professional Support Services staff will be attending a meeting on February 23rd to discuss this partnership agreement that involves four Ministries.

The Toronto model is a multi-agency approach. Surrey Place Centre assumes the lead agency role with overall responsibility for implementation of the model. The Project Coordinator for Toronto Coordinated Service Planning has offered to provide SEAC with a presentation.

***4. Wexford Public School Deaf and Hard of Hearing Co-Enrollment Program***

Last week I had the opportunity to visit Wexford Public School to see an inclusive program that benefits all students, staff and parents. At this school, students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing receive an inclusive education in Full Day Kindergarten (FDK) classrooms. Their teacher works collaboratively with the FDK teachers/support staff and educating their peers on their listening needs. Throughout the day students interact with peers. During this time, small group learning occurs that focus on language activities (stories, poems and finger play) curriculum based lessons and play based learning. One of the FDK teachers at the school shared the following about this effective program:

“The DHH Co-Enrollment program has provided many benefits to me as a teacher and to my students. My students have had the opportunity to work with children who have a hearing loss, allowing them, at a very young age, to realize that people who have disabilities are capable and just like them. Our students who are members to the DHH program have had great opportunities to work with children without hearing loss. This has given them the chance to spend time with children with age appropriate language. Hearing these children speak and having the opportunity to speak with them, is helping to improve their language development. “

It was clear during my visit and all students were benefitting from learning together.

***5. Special Education Staff Allocation 2016/17***

Special Education Staff as of July 31, 2016

**Elementary Teachers**

Qualifications: Minimum Special Education, Part I

Teachers of resource withdrawal programs: 497

Teachers of HSP Program: 226.5

Teachers for full time special education classes: 694

**Secondary Teachers**

Qualifications: Every effort is made to staff our classrooms with appropriately qualified teachers. However, some staff may be deemed to teach with a Letter of Permission.

Teachers required for preparation time: 132

Teachers for full time special education classes: 354 (Includes Teachers required for Prep Time provision)

**Other Teachers**

Qualifications:Minimum Special Education, Part 1

Elementary & Secondary Itinerant Teachers

Total 65

29 Deaf/Hard of Hearing

16 Blind/Low Vision

8 Behaviour

4 Special Equipment Amount

8 Alternative

**Consultants**

Qualifications:Specialist Certification in Special Education

Total 33

24 Learning Centre

2 Low Incidence,

6 Autism Services,

1 Special Equipment Amount

**Support Staff – Elementary & Secondary** **Special Education Class**

Qualifications: For EA: High school diploma or educational equivalent, plus a certificate Elementary and Secondary or diploma equal to two years full-time post-secondary studies in Community Services program related to educational growth and development of children.

* Educational Assistants :796.5
* Lunchroom supervisors: 64
* Noon hour assistants: 327
* Resource/HSP Educational Assistants: 418

**Child and Youth Workers** (Excludes SIP CYW): 220

Qualifications: Child and Youth Worker diploma from a community college or university degree in a directly related field.

**Behaviour Regional Services CYWs**: 16

Special Needs Assistants (Includes unassigned; Excludes SIP SNA): 496.5

Qualifications: High school diploma

**Orientation and Mobility Specialists**: 3.5

Qualifications: Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists, Certification Program (1 year) through Mohawk College

**Oral Interpreters** (for students who are deaf): 0

**Sign Interpreters “Facilitators”** (for students who are deaf): 10

Qualifications: Three-year Community College Diploma – English, ASL Interpreting

**Transcribers** (for students who are blind): 1

Qualifications: Certification as a Literary Braille Transcriber from a recognized agency (e.g., CNIB)

**Intervenors** (for students who are deafblind): 14

Qualifications:Two-year Deafblind Intervenor Program at George Brown College

**Auditory-Verbal Therapists**: 0

**Professional Support Services Staff Allocation as of July 31, 2016**

Qualifications: All are registered members of their respective Colleges. Some psychologists and psycho-educational consultants perform under the supervision of a member of the College.

**Psychologists:** 130.0

**Psychiatrists**: 0

**Speech-Language Pathologists**: 74.5

**Occupational Therapists/Physiotherapists:** 26.0

**Social Workers**: 114 (+ 2 Term)

**Educational Audiologist:** 1.0

***6. Staff Response to the Recommendations in Motion #5***

### 1. Adopt an Effective Definition of "Inclusion"

TDSB should adopt a clear definition of "inclusive education" for students with special education needs by using either or a combination of these definitions:

1. (from the Canadian Association for Community Living) Inclusive education occurs 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.
2. (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.

*Response: Staff will work with SEAC to develop a comprehensive Definition of “Inclusion” that will be captured in the Special Education Plan and on line resources. Sentences currently found in the Special Education plan that state “…education providers must first make efforts to accommodate students with disabilities in a way that promotes their inclusion and full participation” should be captured in the definition.*

### 2. Comprehensive Inclusion Strategy Should Include Students with Any Kind of Disability

TDSB should adopt a comprehensive Inclusion Strategy, that includes students with any kind of disability whether or not that disability is identified as ”exceptionality" under Ontario's special education laws. For example, it should include students with any mental health condition, whether or not that condition constitutes a behaviour exceptionality under Ontario's special education laws.

*Response: As outlined in Ministry of Education documents, students who have behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are included within our Inclusion Strategy. We are mindful that there is need to ensure that students with other exceptionalities are served appropriately.*

### 3. Comprehensive Inclusion Strategy Should Make Segregation a Last Resort, And Should Include Effective Transition Safeguards

The Inclusion Strategy should include:

1. Students with disabilities should be educated in the least restrictive environment with needed educational accommodations in place. Segregation of a student with a disability should be the last resort. It should only occur after all less restrictive alternatives have been considered and rejected.
2. Where TDSB proposes to refuse to provide a student with a disability in a regular class setting with needed accommodations, supports or services, over the objections of the student or their family, on the grounds that TDSB cannot serve that student in a regular classroom setting, the principal should be required to give written notice of this to the family and to tell the family has the right to request the principal to give his or her reasons in writing.
3. The Inclusion Strategy should include effective and monitored transition safeguards to ensure that no students with special education needs are put in a worse position as a result of the new Inclusion Strategy. This should include, among other things, TDSB officials who are independent of the student's school, checking with the family during the transition period to monitor that the transition is working effectively.

*Response: Staff support the points made in this recommendation. There was, however, opposition to the use of the term “Segregation”. This word does not accurately reflect the choice that many parents have made to appropriately meet the needs of their child who may be viewed as having a disability. The Ontario Human Rights Code recognizes that for some students there is need for “supplementary aids and services” that are offered in other educational environments.*

**4. Identify TDSB Accessibility Barriers and Develop Comprehensive Action Plan and Timelines**

TDSB should systematically review its educational programming and facilities to identify recurring accessibility barriers that can impede the effective inclusion of students with disabilities. A comprehensive plan for removing and preventing these accessibility barriers should be developed with clear time lines and clear assignment of responsibilities for action within TDSB.

*Response: Staff is involved in ongoing work to address accessibility barriers. Programs and facilities are reviewed in support of “effective inclusion”. Our Vision for Learning & Service documents speak to ensuring that all students learn in equitable environments that promote their achievement and well-being.*

### 5. Rename and Redefine Misnamed Intensive Support Programs

TDSB should promptly rename and update its descriptions of its "Developmental Disabilities" and "Mild Intellectual Disabilities" Intensive Programs, assigning names that are more neutral and accurate.

*Response: Staff will continue to use Ministry of Education Definitions to identify programs that are offered to students. We review the descriptions of the programs mentioned to provide greater clarity.*

### 6. Phase Out Schools that Are Entirely Segregated

TDSB should develop and implement a long-term plan to ensure that none of its schools is entirely segregated exclusively for students with disabilities. This should be done over a reasonable time, without displacing any students now situated in one of those schools absent the consent of the student or their family.

*Response: Staff will continue to provide placement choice for parents in the TDSB. Again, staff disagreed with the use of the word “segregated” given the choice that parents want and the comprehensive services offered in these school environments.*

### 7. Situate Multiple Intensive Support Programs in Same Regular School to Facilitate Gradual Progression to Regular Classroom

Where possible, TDSB should locate in the same school a combination of two Intensive Support Program classes that involve different levels of support, in order to enable a student to progress towards a regular class setting in that school, without having to switch schools in order to switch to a different level of Intensive Support Program. For example, TDSB should aim to locate one more intensive program (such as the one now called a Developmental disability class) at the same school as one involving less intense support (such as the program now called a Mild Intellectual Disabilities class).

*Response: Staff will continue to align special education resources with the wide range of student special education needs across the TDSB. Where possible, a cluster of classes is provided to minimize student transitions.*

### 8. Ensure Universal Design in Learning Is Used in Regular Classrooms

TDSB should develop and implement a plan to ensure that all teachers and teaching staff effectively and consistently use principles of Universal Design in Learning (UDL) when preparing and implementing lesson plans and other educational programming. For example:

1. TDSB should survey its front-line teachers to find out how much they know about UDL, how much they incorporate UDL into their lesson plans, and what more they would benefit from learning about practicing UDL.
2. TDSB should develop a comprehensive plan to train its teachers on using UDL principles when preparing lesson plans.
3. TDSB should include knowledge of UDL principles in recruitment of teachers, other teaching staff and principals.
4. TDSB should develop strategies for monitoring and assessing how effectively UDL is incorporated into lesson plans and other teaching activities.
5. TDSB should develop a specific strategy for monitoring and reinforcing the use of UDL in situations where a teacher in a regular classroom setting has very limited exposure to their students with disabilities e.g. where a student, placed in a segregated class, only spends an hour per day in a regular class setting.
6. TDSB should review the curriculum, text books and other instructional materials and learning resources used in its schools to ensure that they incorporate principles of UDL.
7. TDSB should ensure that teachers in the areas of science, technology, engineer and math (STEM) have resources and expertise to ensure the accessibility of STEM courses and learning resources. This should include ensuring that any math coaches hired under the new Ontario Government math strategy have the expertise to effectively assist teachers in meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

*Response: Staff supports the use of Universal Design for Learning. We realize that (UDL) is not just a principle for students with special education needs; rather it is a principle to enhance the learning of all students. Professional Learning opportunities on (UDL) has started and will be a long term focus going forward. It should be noted that many of our teachers and support staff utilize (UDL) principles without identifying them by that name.*

### 9. Tearing Down Counterproductive TDSB Senior Management Silos

TDSB should subsume its Special Education Department in the Teaching and Learning department, so it will become an integral part of oversight of teaching and learning, not as at present, as a separate organizational silo.

*Response: Staff continues to work together. There is an open realization that Special Education, Teaching and Learning and a number of other departments intersect on a daily basis. We all work together to serve all of our students.*

### 10. Tearing Down Attitudinal Barriers Against Students with Disabilities

To remove attitudinal barriers among students, TDSB staff and some families of TDSB students, TDSB should:

1. Develop and implement a multi-year program/curriculum for teaching students and staff about inclusion and full participation of students with disabilities, tailored to age levels. Where possible, this should include TDSB students meeting and interacting with people with disabilities.
2. Send information to all families of TDSB students on TDSB's commitment to inclusion of students with disabilities, and the benefits this brings to all students.
3. Provide targeted training to all TDSB staff that deal with parents or students, on the importance of inclusion.

*Response: Within our Vision for Learning & Service, the commitment is made to “improving student achievement and well-being for each and every student by closing all gaps while continuously raising expectations and improving instruction in every classroom and school in TDSB”. It goes on to point out that this will be done through. “ Addressing the needs of all students, including those with special needs, through an inclusive framework of practice that is “good for all, necessary/essential for some.”.*

### 11. Removing Barriers to Participation in Experiential Learning

To ensure that students with disabilities can fully participate in TDSB's experiential learning programs, TDSB should:

1. Review its experiential learning programs to identify and remove any accessibility barriers.
2. Ensure that its partners who accept TDSB students for experiential learning placements are effectively informed of their duty to accommodate the learning needs of students with disabilities.
3. Create supports for placement organizations who need assistance to ensure that students with disabilities can fully participate in their experiential learning opportunities.
4. Survey students with disabilities and experiential learning placement organizations at the end of any experiential learning placements to see if disability-related needs were effectively accommodated.

*Response: Staff supports this recommendation and will continue to ensure that all students involved in Experiential Learning opportunities are provided with meaningful placement experiences.*

**12. Ensuring French Immersion and Other Specialized Programs Are Barrier-Free for Students with Disabilities**

TDSB should develop and implement a strategy to ensure that French Immersion and other specialized programs are accessible to and barrier-free for students with disabilities, including:

1. Identifying what percentage of the students in these programs are students with disabilities, to document any under-participation;
2. Review the admission process for gaining entry to these programs, for accessibility barriers;
3. Identify what efforts TDSB now makes to ensure that students with disabilities are accommodated in these programs, and the extent to which UDL principles are used in the teaching in these programs;
4. Develop an action plan to address any shortfalls;
5. Actively publicize to students with disabilities and their families about the opportunities to take part in these programs, and TDSB's willingness to ensure that their accommodation needs will be met.

*Response: Staff supports this recommendation. A number of steps have been taken to support students with disabilities in French Immersion and other specialized programs. For example a recent Ministry of Education document provided information of how to better accommodate students with disabilities in French Immersion.*

### 13. Ensuring Student Testing/Assessment is Free of Disability Barriers

To ensure that TDSB fairly assesses the performance of students with disabilities, TDSB should:

1. Provide its teachers and principals with training resources on how to ensure a test is a fair, accurate and barrier-free assessment for disabilities in their class, and where needed, how to provide an alternative evaluation method.
2. Set guidelines for proper approaches to ensuring tests provide a fair, accurate and barrier-free assessment of students with disabilities, and on when and how to provide an alternative evaluation method.
3. Monitor implementation of these guidelines.

*Response: Staff continues to support and ensure that tests and assessments are “Free of Disability Barriers”. Providing accommodations to students with disabilities should be the first option considered in program planning, with instruction based on principles of Universal Design for Learning and Differentiated Instruction to meet the diverse needs of learners.*

### 14. Ensuring Students with Disabilities Can Bring Service Animals to School

Because students on the autism spectrum have reported difficulties at some school boards with being allowed to bring a service animal to school, TDSB should ensure it has a fair protocol to ensure that students with disabilities who need a trained service animal are able to bring them to school. TDSB should also ensure that principals, teachers, school office staff and families of students with disabilities know about this policy.

*Response: Staff is engaged in providing “Guidelines for the Use of Service Animals within the TDSB”.*

*These guidelines have been developed in accordance with PR 549 Animals in Classrooms, PR 604 Use of Service Animals by the General Public, and Workplace Accommodation Procedures for Employees with Disabilities and the Protocol for Entry of Assistance Dogs into the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). When the guideline is completed, staff can be made available to make a presentation at a SEAC meeting.*

### 15. Ensuring Accessibility of Instructional Materials that Students with Disabilities Use

To ensure that instructional materials used at TDSB are fully accessible on a timely basis to students with disabilities such as dyslexia and vision loss, TDSB should:

a) Survey students with disabilities who need accessible instructional materials, and their teachers and families, to get their front-line experiences on whether they get timely access to accessible instructional materials, and

b) Establish a dedicated resource to convert instructional materials to an accessible format, where needed, on a timely basis. It is insufficient to place this workload on TDSB's staff that work with students with vision loss.

*Response: Staff will continue to ensure that instructional materials used by students with disabilities are accessible and meet their learning needs.*

### 16. Ensuring Accessibility of Gym, Playground and Like Equipment

To ensure that gym equipment, playground equipment and other like equipment and facilities are accessible for students with disabilities, TDSB should:

1. Take an inventory of the accessibility of its existing gym and playground equipment.
2. Adopt a policy on specific requirements for accessibility requirements for new gym or playground equipment;
3. Implement measures to ensure this procurement policy is followed and enforced.

*Response: Staff from TDSB Facilities Department provided the following response:*

*Gymnasia equipment*

1. *The inventory of existing equipment will be compiled by the Accessibility Officer, which a new position currently is proposed to be added to the TDSB staffing compliment.*
2. *The accessibility requirements for gym equipment follow the Health and Physical Education Ministry Curriculum Guide to ensure that students with special education needs are able to participate as fully as possible in the health and physical education activities.*
3. *The implementation measures will be determined by the Accessibility Officer.*

*Playground equipment*

1. *The inventory of existing equipment will be compiled by the Accessibility Officer with input from a working group that reviews playground structure.*
2. *All playground designs, including selection of the play structures, require designers and suppliers to follow requirements of Annex H which is part of the Canadian Standard Association standard for Kids's Playspaces & Equipment‎.Annex H will be included as a requirement in the next revision of the TDSB Elementary School Design Guideline.*
3. *The implementation measures will be determined by the Accessibility Officer.*

*The goal is to focus on delivery of curriculum that will make all students successful.  In other words, we accommodate to make all students successful.  In some circumstances, that may mean purchasing a variety of equipment, for example, lighter and smaller balls instead of adult sized and weighted balls.”*

*There is a Working Group to review all playground structures in general and it had been established to work on recommendation to the board. The group will review it system wide and will take into account accessibility.*

### 17. Implement Human Resources Policies and Practices Emphasizing Knowledge and Skills Regarding Inclusion

TDSB should develop and implement human resources policies targeting at inclusion, such as:

a) Making knowledge and experience on implementing inclusion an important hiring and promotions criterion especially for principals, vice-principals and teaching staff;

b) Emphasizing inclusion performance in any performance management and performance reviews at TDSB.

*Response: Staff continues to promote and ensure that Human Resources Policies and Practices focus on our commitment to Inclusion during the hiring and promotion of all TDSB staff.*

### 18. Finding Out What Has Worked on Inclusion Elsewhere

TDSB should investigate effective practices in all the areas addressed in this motion, at other school boards in Canada, the U.S. and elsewhere. Where feasible, TDSB should make its research public and available to Trustees and SEAC.

*Response: Staff continues to research and learn about successful Inclusion Practices in other places.*

*Some of this research has been identified in TDSB research studies. They are available to the public, Trustees and members of SEAC.*

### 19. Establishing a TDSB Chief Accessibility Officer

TDSB should establish the position of Chief Accessibility/Inclusion Officer, reporting to the Director of Education, with a mandate and responsibility to ensure proper leadership on the matters in this motion, as well as the four motions which SEAC passed on June 13, 2016, and to help ensure that TDSB ensures that it provides a fully accessible workplace for employees with disabilities.

*Response: Staff is taking the needed steps to add an Accessibility/Inclusion Officer in support of this work. This position will be in place by the start of the upcoming school year.*

### 20. Reporting to the TDSB Board and SEAC on Plans and Progress

TDSB should establish a time line for action on these motions. It should establish a schedule for regularly reporting to the TDSB Board, to SEAC and to any other related governance bodies, on its plans to implement this motion, and for periodically reporting on progress, with this reporting to begin no later than six months after the date of this motion.

*Response: Staff will continue to update SEAC regarding the implementation of our Vision for Learning & Service. The majority of the recommendations align with our Integrated Equity Frame work.*

*In the section on “Inclusion and Special Education”, the following goals drive our practice.*

*Students are successfully included, supported and empowered when:*

* *All students experience a sense of belonging and social citizenship (e.g. membership, inclusion, shared power and value (Parekh, 2014)*
* *The learning environment is modified to fit the student, not the student to fit the environment (Parekh & Underwood, 2016)*
* *All identities and cultures are celebrated within the learning environment (Parekh & Underwood, 2016)*
* *Deficit thinking is rejected and students are not organized within and outside the classroom by perceived ability (Parekh & Underwood, 2016).*