



Special Education Advisory Committee

Toronto District School Board
5050 Yonge Street, 2nd Floor
Toronto, Ontario, M2N 5N8

June 18, 2018

Dear SEAC Co-Chairs and Members of the SEAC:

On behalf of the Toronto District School Board, we would like to thank you for the important role you play in advising on the effective delivery of Special Education services and programs for our students. Secondly, this letter is to update you on our work and to respectfully decline your request for an independent review of Special Education.

We respectfully decline your request because we will be moving forward with action plans – backed by research, expertise and the appropriate partners – to improve our Special Education model. We believe that this is the right step forward, and we are committed to working with our schools and communities to ensure our students with special needs are given equitable opportunities to achieve.

In addition to these plans, we want you to know that we have been actively listening and taking action to address the various concerns surrounding the Special Education model, including those raised by your committee and parents of children with special needs: inclusion, accessibility, information sharing, and effective processes, policies and programs. Below is an overview of this work.

Inclusion

Under the **Multi-Year Strategic Plan**, the focus for students with special needs is to provide them with equity of access to learning opportunities. As always, the focus is on student achievement, well-being and equity as its foundation.

We are focused on the creation of a more inclusive system of education at the TDSB that requires changes to some of the ways we are presently supporting students with special needs. We are also committed to providing the on-going professional learning our staff need to help our students with special needs achieve.

This past year, all elementary schools were provided with an opportunity to release teachers so that they could engage in learning about UDL and DI with a focus on inclusiveness.

In September, an Inclusion Learning Coach will be assigned to each of the Learning Centres. This coach will work closely with schools in the Learning Centre. They will partner with teachers of students with complex learning needs who are interested in engaging in a collaborative inquiry. These students may have special needs, such as Developmental Disability, Mild Intellectual Disability, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Physical Disability or Multiple Disabilities. The goal of the partnership is to create positive, inclusive learning environments by applying the strategies consistent with the **Learning for All** document.

The Teaching and Learning department and the Special Education department will become one department called the Leadership and Learning department, which will support our commitment to inclusion. Having said this, many of the staff in our Leadership and Learning department will have special education expertise.

The accountability for students with special needs will be at the Associate Director level, and all members of senior team will engage in professional learning to work effectively within this new model.

This change to the executive organization is actually part of one of the motions passed by SEAC. Therefore, it aligns with SEAC's thinking. We know that reorganizing a department alone cannot bring about the required changes; however, structure does matter when we are trying to change attitudes and practices.

Our commitment to inclusion will ensure that we provide the most enabling environment for each student. As a Board, we have made a commitment to using Inclusive Design to inform how we approach the school improvement planning process. This requires us to begin with students' identities, abilities and lived experiences. Inclusive Design incorporates explicitly Universal Design for Learning and differentiated learning approaches to support all students in classrooms.

This is the direction for the school improvement process in all schools, at all grade levels and in all subject areas. All principals have received initial learning about this and we will continue to engage the system in this learning.

This means that many students will learn in their community school with appropriate supports, while some students will continue to be served in intensive support programs and in congregated school sites. As always, we will ensure that all of our programs and services provide students with the most enabling learning environments.



Every commitment we have made, and every outcome we expect, relies on our ability to start with our students' strengths, gifts, interests, identities, abilities and needs. Our commitment includes creating learning opportunities that incorporate student choice and promote student ownership for their learning as they engage in inquiry that is connected to social justice issues and local, national and global challenges to be solved.

Accessibility

Plans are underway to make all schools, including new builds and additions, more accessible – both physically and digitally – for our students, parents and communities.

We are providing technology to meet the educational needs of students, including support equipment for hearing, vision, personal care and physical care for all students who require them. Centrally, we collaborate with schools, administrators, teachers and students to integrate assistive technology as an effective teaching and learning tool in the classroom, and build capacity among in-school staff to share excellent practices.

We are committed to taking steps that will enable all of our students and parents with access to the digital equipment and technology needed for learning. We are also committed to on-going professional learning throughout the year. This can include sessions on assistive technology, including Ministry licensed software (for students, parents and staff), online web casts, online mentoring through conferences, online videos for staff, parents and students. These resources support our culture of high expectation and student voice that promote student outcomes.

Information Sharing

We continue to provide a variety of avenues to share information and communicate with our students, staff and parents, using both print and digital materials. This includes school and corporate newsletters, promotional and creative materials for programs, supports and events, web stories, interactive web casts, parent conferences and more.

We have sought SEAC's input and have refreshed the Special Education website and revised a number of information brochures that parents will use to better understand Special Education processes. These revised brochures will be placed in the **Special Education Plan** and will be reviewed annually.

As we continue to centre student voice and agency, we also pay close attention to the positive relationships that must exist among educators, students and their parents in order for students to be successful.



Effective Processes, Policies and Programs

We continue to review documents pertaining to students with special needs, such as: PR699, Refusal to Admit, Parent Concern Protocol, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Differentiated Learning (DI) and Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) strategies.

We will explicitly identify the IEP consultation process and then, should disagreement arise, we will use the Parent Concern Protocol up to the level of the involvement of the Superintendent of Education always focusing on the student and looking to establish and maintain respectful relationships.

Also, we are hiring three new staff members to support the Human Rights Office of the Board to more effectively address and resolve disputes through effective conflict resolution and mediation.

From a parent perspective, we understand that it is important that our processes are easy to understand and navigate, and that they lead to resolution.

With effective processes, policies and programs, we will continue to remove barriers for participation and provide further opportunities for resources to be closer to local schools through more frequent interactions between coordinators, consultants, teachers, principals and the superintendents.

We understand that there is more work to do and we are committed to that work.

We have the research, expertise and appropriate partners to support moving forward with positive changes to the Special Education model. In addition to our own research department, we are partnering with various agencies like Geneva Centre Foundation, Rick Hansen Foundation, Holland Bloorview Rehabilitation Hospital and The Hospital for Sick Children.


This work will be embedded in and align with the **Multi-Year Strategic Plan** and the **Integrated Equity Framework**. It will help transform student learning, create a culture for student and staff well-being, provide equity of access to learning opportunities for all students, allocate human and financial resources strategically to support student needs, and build strong relationships and partnerships within school communities for student learning and well-being.

If you have any questions, concerns or recommendations regarding the Special Education model or our decision to decline the independent review, we will be available at the **Special**



Education Advisory Committee meeting on Monday, June 18.

Sincerely,



Robin Pilkey
Chair of the Board



John Malloy
Director of Education

