# Report to Toronto District School Board Special Education Advisory Committee

# From: SEAC Chair David Lepofsky for the April 3, 2017 TDSB SEAC Meeting

Date: March 27, 2017

By: David Lepofsky, CM., O.Ont,

Chair

Toronto District School Board Special Education Advisory Committee

## 1. Towards Finalizing and Voting on Motion #5 – Inclusion at TDSB

For our upcoming meeting, I am circulating a fourth draft of Motion #5. I aim to secure final feedback on this and call for a vote on it at our April 3, 2017 SEAC meeting.

This new draft includes a series of focused refinements to incorporate feedback at our very constructive March 20, 2017 SEAC meeting. It also includes adjustments at the request of the Association of Bright Children, with whom I met after our last SEAC meeting. At our March 20, 2017 meeting I announced that I would meet with ABC representatives to address their concerns. We had a very good meeting. ABC advised me that they are satisfied with the resulting refinements.

Our discussion at each of our meetings, and particularly at our March 20, 2017 meeting, has been truly superb. SEAC members have offered a good range of their views in a firm, deliberate, thoughtful and respectful way, particularly when addressing areas where opinions may diverge on a topic. This has enabled me, as your Chair, to find wording that reflects where there is common ground. This is supported by the genuine effort by all SEAC members to work towards a constructive consensus. I hope you will find the resulting product to be sufficient.

A few of the key refinements you will find in this draft include:

* To take into account the different views on the use of the term "segregation", I have changed the term "segregated class" and "segregated school" to "special education class" and "special education school". However, in accordance with one SEAC member's suggestion, I have left the term "segregated in”, at some places, where it serves as a verb. The Introduction also notes the range of views on this terminology issue. I hope that this is a good compromise, and lets us focus on content.
* Regarding the concerns raised on behalf of gifted students, I have adjusted the term "students with disabilities " to read "students with special education needs" in a number of places where the motion is referring to both students with disabilities and gifted students. I had earlier missed some of these.

I have also reworded Recommendation 3(f), which focuses specifically on inclusion for gifted students. In wording that ABC approved, it now reads:

"f) The foregoing paragraphs in this Recommendation 3 pertains to students with disabilities. TDSB should also develop policies and practices regarding inclusion of gifted students tailored to their specific needs, in consultation with those who advocate for gifted students. This should include a spectrum of options, e.g. an acceleration policy contemplating all forms of acceleration."

I strongly encourage all SEAC members to support this.

* building on input I received from SEAC, and from the content of the video we found helpful from the State of Virginia, I added a new part in Recommendation 4, which is now 4(e), and which reads:

"e) As part of this transition plan, TDSB should first choose a small number of schools to roll out key changes, monitor what works, and build a record of success. The teachers and other staff at that school, as well as students and their families, can become key players in then helping build support for spreading these successes to other schools across TDSB."

* I expanded Recommendation 4(f) in accordance with suggestions at the March 20, 2017 meeting, to read:

"d) Regularly monitoring and measuring individual student placement and program for success, including regularly checking to see the extent to which students with special education needs feel that they are effectively included in the regular educational setting."

* + In Recommendation 10, I added that TDSB should not lose expertise in the process of putting the Special Education Department within the Teaching and Learning Department.
  + Recommendation 11(b) has added to it, a proposal that TDSB post at schools

I do not list here all the other minor changes. There are not many. I took careful notes at our March 20, 2017 meeting and worked through them as best I could when finalizing this text. I moved a couple of paragraphs around in the introduction, just to make it read better.

If you want to see every change, just use the "compare documents" feature on MS Word, comparing this draft with Draft #3, the version discussed at our March 20, 2017 meeting.

If there is any final feedback on this Motion's wording, please email it to the SEAC group as quickly as possible, this week, preferably by this Thursday, March 30, 2017. From all our discussions at several meetings, and all our email exchanges, I believe we have reached a solid proposal. Let's try to address any final refinements, if possible, via email this week, so that we can work towards a final vote at our April 3, 2017 meeting.

I am deferring any discussion on what, if anything, to do with the longer Backgrounder document, until we finalize this Motion. It may be that SEAC will find this Motion, standing alone to be sufficient. Let's just focus on this Motion for now, and try to get it done.

Please remember that if this Motion is finalized and passed, we can always revisit any topic at any future meeting, and further elaborate on anything this Motion contains. Moreover, as discussed below, our discussion at the April 3, 2017 meeting of input to the TDSB's Special Education Plan will give you ample chance to raise other issues of importance to you.

## 2. Proposed Motion #6 on Exclusions at TDSB

At our April 3, 2017 meeting, time permitting, I again wish to address the proposed Motion #6 on exclusions of students from school at TDSB. We won't vote on that motion now, because TDSB will be making a staff report on it at our May 2017 SEAC meeting.

## 3. SEAC Input into the Upcoming TDSB Special Education Plan

At our March 20, 2017 meeting, Special Education Executive Superintendent Uton Robinson requested our input for the upcoming TDSB Special Education Plan. As a first step in this process, I will invite SEAC members, at our April 3, 2017 meeting, to go around the table and offer any suggestion you want to present to TDSB, on how to improve the delivery of education to students with special education needs. You don't need to anchor your suggestions to any page or sentence in the past Special Education Plan. If there is some area where you see a need for improvement, please come prepared to speak up and offer your thoughts. It is best if you can offer concrete suggestions for change.

Of course, TDSB already has our first four major motions from last June, motions we have passed on issues like bussing and has the discussion we have had so far on Motion #5. There is no need to repeat that.

As but one example, a number of SEAC members have raised concerns about TDSB's practice of not holding an IPRC for students before they are entering Grade 1, and instead of holding a SEPRC hearing, something which TDSB has evidently created. If you have thoughts on this, feel free to raise it.

If there are specific concerns you have about the way IPRC or student Support Team meetings are held, or with the way TDSB develops Individual Education Plans, beyond the points in our Motions #1 and #2 passed at our June 2016 meeting, once again, feel free to raise your concerns.

I have asked Uton Robinson in advance of the April 3, 2017 SEAC meeting to share a list of possible questions that SEAC members can speak to.

I want to emphasize that you don't need to plow through last year's massive TDSB Special Education Plan in order to offer comments and recommendations.

If we run out of time at this meeting, I am happy to add it to our May 2017 SEAC meeting agenda for more feedback on the Special Education Plan.

## 4. Meeting with the Elementary Teachers of Ontario

I am delighted to report that on Wednesday, March 22, 2017, I met with the executive of the Elementary Teachers of Toronto. They are the union local that represents the 11,000 primary school teachers at TDSB.

ETT wanted to learn what issues SEAC is raising with TDSB. I told them about the major reform recommendations that SEAC has proposed to improve education for students with special education needs at TDSB, and the topics now under discussion regarding Motion #5.

The Elementary Teachers of Toronto voiced a strong desire to work together with SEAC, on areas where we have a shared interest. It will be important for front line teachers to support the reform agenda which SEAC is recommending. This promises to be an important way for us to make progress.