# Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)

DRAFT MINUTES for Monday, October 24, 2016

### SEAC – Representatives and (Alternates) Present:

Association for Bright Children Diana Avon

Autism Society of Ontario – Toronto Lisa Kness

Brain Injury Society of Toronto *regrets*

Community Living Toronto Clovis Grant

Down Syndrome Association of Toronto Richard Carter

Easter Seals Ontario *regrets*

Epilepsy Toronto Steven Lynette

Learning Disabilities Association Toronto Mark Kovats

VIEWS for the Visually Impaired David Lepofsky

VOICE for Hearing Impaired Children Paul Cross

TDSB North East Community Aline Chan Jean-Paul Ngana

TDSB North West Community Jordan Glass

TDSB South East Community Diane Montgomery (Dick Winters)

TDSB South West Community Nora Green

TDSB Trustees Alexander Brown

Regrets: Paula Boutis (SW Community) Olga Ingrahm (SE Community), Deborah Fletcher (Easter Seals), Trustee Pamela Gough, Mark Kovats (LDATO), Cynthia Sprigings (Brain Injury Society), Phillip Sargent (NW Community)

Staff Present: Uton Robinson, Executive Superintendent, Special Education and Section Programs

John Duwyn, Central Coordinating Principal LC1, Teaching and Learning

Margo Ratsep, SEAC Liaison

Recorder: Margo Ratsep

MINUTES

## Call to Order

SEAC Chair David Lepofsky called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. and invited SEAC members and staff in attendance to introduce themselves to the guests in the gallery.

## Declaration of Possible Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest were declared.

## Approval of the Minutes for Monday, September 12th, 2016

On motion of Clovis Grant, the Minutes for Monday, September 12, 2016 were approved.

1. Universal Design for Learning at TDSB (John Duwyn, Central Coordinating Principal) A Vision for Learning in TDSB – A Process for Engagement in School Effectiveness and School Improvement

In follow-up to the September presentation, the Chair had requested an opportunity for SEAC members to have their questions answered about Universal Design for Learning and how it is being used in TDSB schools. John Duwyn, Central Coordinating Principal LC1, Teaching and Learning, gave a presentation to SEAC on “A Vision for Learning in TDSB – A Process for Engagement in School Effectiveness and School Improvement” and responded to member questions. The slide presentation is posted with the October Agenda at: [www.tdsb.on.ca/seac](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/seac).

John gave a brief overview before taking questions. The focus is on addressing systemic barriers and bias for all learners including those with special education needs. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) addresses the complete picture – creating spaces that are the best spaces for learning. John focused attention on the slide titled: 6 Key Conversations For Building Shared Leadership. School teams are asked to focus on students they know, to look at their data – EQAO, perceptual, climate surveys, etc. to look at who isn’t learning and how to move forward. (For example, if we determine a student with Learning Disabilities is not learning, then identify next steps: If Teachers don’t know how to teach to reach the student, we must determine what we need to learn.) John then took SEAC members through the 6 steps outlined in the slide to illustrate how school teams would move forward. Right now Ps are looking at the contexts of their schools. Within that schools determine their goals. We have coaches and resources to support schools when they have identified what they need to learn. We know that students with spec ed needs have IEPs. Some need greater support than others – different strategies etc. Within our new context, we are addressing that and also looking to see if there are any other barriers.

**Q&A Discussion**

The Chair began the discussion with his perspective on Universal Design for Learning (UDL): Looking at UDL from a disability perspective, the school boards and curriculum delivery are designed for students without disabilities. It is important to include lesson planning when considering the term “barrier free”, in that lessons need to be planned in such a way that full participation of all students is facilitated. It is the teachers (not the principal) who prepare the lesson plans and not necessarily with the exceptional students in mind, so a top down solution won’t work.

**SEAC Input 1:** Concerned that the data being used (EQAO, Climate survey, Report Card) does not work for students with intellectual disabilities. Because of the intellectual disabilities, the classroom rigor isn’t what it should be. What kind of data can reveal that a child who is cognitively disadvantaged is progressing? An IEP may have the same goals year after year and the student isn’t progressing. It’s not like physical disabilities where they have similar cognitive ability and progress can be measured with that of regular students.

**Staff Response:** UDL talks about knowing your learners. The data helps do that but it may also be the barrier. If we look at a group of students and they are not achieving, we need to look for all the barriers to achievement. We also want to have a growth mindset. If the barrier in the school is a mindset that “this is as far as the student can get”, that may be the barrier that needs to be addressed.

**SEAC Input 2:** How do you build the community and students into the process? The impression is that the learning environment and the teaching environment are 2 different things and that instruction is one-way. We have to find a way to shift the mindset from a teacher saying “you have to do this” to understanding how to see the potential of all students – to help students achieve to their full potential.

**Staff Response:** This is the beginning of a process involving a conversation that includes the students and the community (i.e. the School Climate Survey). We are looking at four areas – content, pedagogy, access and climate. John referred to the 3 Equity slides in the presentation, and the questions being used to carry out the shift in approach. The questions help school teams to create the goals to address the systemic barriers they identify.

**SEAC Input 3:** Bright children seem to be left out in Learning for All. Does this process address engaging the bright learners, particularly the younger ones since there are not Gifted programs below Grade 4. What are we doing to help specific teachers with this population?

**Staff Response:** Differentiated Instruction addresses all learners in the classroom. When asking who’s not learning, it could be the gifted children too. In individual learning we look at global competencies. We have the Teaching & Learning Department that will help wherever it is needed, with strategies, resources, coaching. Educators also get together and form networks for learning because they share similar challenges. We are building capacity as schools share with each other to learn new strategies.

**SEAC Input 4:** Looking at the MID/Mild Intellectual Disability population, an experience was described in which at a Curriculum night, when asked about providing more challenge to a student, the teacher said she was teaching at the level of the lower level where the majority of students are. By classifying students we are creating barriers for them. How can this barrier be removed as soon as possible?

**Staff Response:** This question speaks to the mindset created by labels. We want to ensure that such teachers are given the resources to improve their practice so it does take in the full scope of the students in the class – through resources, coaching, in-school processes (IST/SST), consultants and coordinators – to help teachers understand how they can address the needs. The question speaks to the issue of labelling that comes with biases. Rather than starting with a label and a deficit model, we are focused on removing bias and always having an open mindset. It starts with the leaders in the schools to get the first focus on what John is sharing. Principal feedback has indicated the new process is extremely helpful. Ours is a large system and support is required on many levels.

**SEAC Input 5:** There are the times when grades need to be combined and this is a challenge where students are left out. For example, there are students who are one level higher, others one level lower. Also employers are expressing opinion that we are behind in literacy and numeracy. Is it possible to share the different kinds of data being used?

**Staff Response:** Through the School Effectiveness Framework, we are trying to address the barriers, looking at who and what is needed to move forward. This includes perceptual data that could identify the barriers/biases for all students. Regarding the kinds of data in use, there are a number of resources available for both special education and regular classroom teachers. One thing improving is our building of capacity to ensure that all students are taught by all teachers.

**SEAC Input 6:** SEAC is interested in the really concrete, not asking about the IEP, but about making sure the teaching/learning process is more designed to include them. The individual teacher decides how to deliver the lesson – deciding what kind of textbook, (which may also be driven by teachers), what kind of activity, etc. The end result might be a student who is visually impaired being excluded from a chosen learning activity (i.e. such as using Charades in a class that has a student who is blind and cannot fully participate). What in this process gets at that, to ensure teachers choose the curriculum, lesson option and teaching tools to address the needs of all of the students in the class? What is being done by TDSB to monitor this, to make sure it happens?

**Staff Response:** We need to look at who’s not learning and look at the action part – including what action is happening in the classroom. Given this example – one would ask is Charades the best choice? If the teacher didn’t know, the question is what do we need to learn? Through the process we are outlining, we are identifying the systemic barriers and bias that exist (identifying who is not learning) and identifying what we need to do to address those barriers.

**SEAC Input 7:** Thinking about the whole concept of removing systemic barriers and the application of UDL and Differentiated Instruction – it is a gargantuan task at the teacher level to make all classroom curriculum content universally accessible and useful. As a college professor, all my content has to be AODA compliant. I can’t imagine how teachers in elementary can create universal design for everyone in the classroom. It’s what we want, but how do we do that? Isn’t that a provincial responsibility providing teachers with the needed package of plans?

SEAC follow-up comment – Under “Next Steps”, how are we building this to be systematic – to sustain it so it is consistent across the board, (enforcing guidelines, policy)? How do we make it part of the system so it is already enforced?

**Staff Response:** The easy part is launching a strategy and the hard part is to make it sustainable. We have taken steps to do that – i.e. “walk abouts” by Superintendents in all their schools every three weeks, to monitor and ensure steps get done. We already have learning coaches involved. Our Director has created a climate of trust so that teachers and support staff grappling with questions feel that they are supported and can seek assistance. This is not “the next new thing” but is designed to move students forward to realize their potential.

**SEAC Input 8:** Learning coaches get training in pedagogy and are on top of the latest research but that doesn’t necessarily include special education. The relationship has not always been close between learning coaches and special education staff. The coach doesn’t have special education. How many have both?

**Staff Response:** There is the intention to ensure special education consultants and coordinators learn alongside the coaches in the respective Learning Centres. The work will be in ensuring that cross-pollination takes place. The only way to move forward is for all teachers and support staff to be learning together and not dividing up roles. We are not there yet, but there is a greater appetite for working collaboratively between Teaching & Learning and Special Education.

**SEAC Input 9:** How is the TDSB measuring the move towards individual responses and the group mindset?

**Staff Response:** We want to ensure that the students get what is required. We are always looking at what the barriers are and how to remove them. Sometimes teacher bias and mindset is the barrier. We want to ensure we are having the conversations that help teachers realize this. It’s done one child at a time. As with SEAC advocacy, we don’t want to work with stereotypical expectations. The way we know we are progressing is through EQAO results – and the moves we have already taken have shown good results (i.e.: the application of no EQAO exemptions).Teacher evaluation too will take this into consideration – that they are moving in the right direction, that they are taking the steps they are expected to take.

**SEAC Input 10:** Can we learn from what happens in college? Example, for a student with ASD in college the biggest learning was about being labelled and being different – having tools and resources that are available, but others having a hard time using them. How can we bring all the technology and resources to the classroom that anyone can use, so that the exceptional learner sees others using it too and doesn’t feel so different? Also, without EAs, how do you manage a classroom of 30-35 where you have a huge variety of learners? Are you looking at new ways of teaching, such as re-organizing instructional groupings?

**Staff Response:** Not sure this question could be answered with specifics. We are always looking at best practice. We have team-teaching in some instances.

**SEAC Input 11:** Regarding the ability of teachers to come to the central staff to seek out assistance. Is there a culture or climate encouraging teachers to do that?

**Staff Response:** We are moving to create that culture through this process – people coming forward to look for learning opportunities – what we need to learn. This is a shift in thinking, looking through the equity lens and it has not been measured. One way to look at this is to look at numbers of staff taking courses.

***ACTIONS***

1. ***In response to requests, Uton Robinson undertook:***
* ***to provide SEAC with some kinds of data sets in use to measure progress in literacy and numeracy and perceptual data that can identify biases/barriers.***
* ***to provide a new organization chart for special education.***
1. ***Closing discussion, the Chair volunteered to put together a response from SEAC.***

## Streaming SEAC Meetings Online (David Lepofsky, Alexander Brown)

Vice Chair Alexander Brown investigated the possibility of live streaming SEAC meetings and reported that the existing technology would not easily support this. He also spoke to considerations that would have an impact on the decision. (i.e. board’s consideration of purchase of new equipment, accessibility needs, such as close captioning, signing, etc., public sharing of personal information about own experience/family.) Other options were put forward to consider (recording meetings, live webinar at the Peckham Centre (with one hour call in Q&A). SEAC members indicated a desire to continue to investigate the possibilities.

***ACTION***

***Alexander Brown under took to seek more information about TDSB experience with board webcasts.***

## Motion to seek Paula Boutis to represent SEAC on TDSB Budget Committee

Uton had been asked to investigate what takes place in other boards. One board responded that a SEAC member sits on the budget committee. There is not a TDSB mechanism in place that permits a non-trustee to sit on a board committee. Members of SEAC are encouraged to attend Budget meetings but are not seen as part of the Budget Committee. A SEAC trustee does not sit on the Budget Committee but the SEAC trustees do attend the meetings. If you are not a member of the committee you cannot make comments.

***\*\*\*Motion*** *by David Lepofsky and seconded by Jordan Glass*

***Whereas the TDSB is required to consult the Special Education Advisory Committee on its special education budget,***

***SEAC recommends that TDSB appoint SEAC member Paula Boutis to the SEAC Trustees' Budget Committee, with voting privileges if possible, and if not possible, then without voting privileges.***

The motion carried unanimously

## Scheduling 2017 SEAC meetings

SEAC has normally set dates for the year after the board establishes its calendar of meetings for the new year. This is so that SEAC meetings do not conflict and to align meetings in advance of the Program and School Services Committee meetings. the Chair proposed that SEAC establish the January meeting as Monday, January 16, 2017 at 7:00 pm. SEAC approved the date.

## Gathering SEAC Input:

1. **TDSB 2016 Special Education Plan**

**SEAC Input 1:** MID/DD ISPs have to be renamed so as not to refer to specific disabilities and the description that ties participation in the programs needs to be changed to reflect what is happening in those programs. Labelling has harmful effects. One student in a program for other reasons for being in the program will wear the label.

**SEAC Input 2:** Students who move from ISP to mainstream should be permitted to remain in the school in which they have been.

**Staff Response:** There are potential barriers that would have to be addressed (i.e. bussing wouldn’t necessarily happen, optional attendance policy would have to be looked at)

The Chair commented that this is a good example of identified barriers that prevent something from happening that should not be prevented.

**SEAC Input 3:** Speaking insupport of some kind of mechanism for choice to return to the regular class, but that choice shouldn’t be a default – if supports aren’t in place in the regular program, the parent won’t choose inclusion. It needs to be real choice. If a child needs high support, then to be included in home school the supports must be present. Inclusion shouldn’t force parents to make the choice to opt out because the needed support is not there. If the child can function in the regular program with appropriate supports, the supports need to be there for inclusion to happen.

**SEAC Input 4:** We need the right kinds of support – i.e. for a student with ASD, peer mentoring and positive role models can help the student go into a different environment. Also teacher support is needed. Exclusion is a growing phenomenon. i.e. At JK/SK level provincial supports are not being provided. What kind of inclusion will address the needs?

**SEAC Input 5:** While inclusion works for many groups intensive support programming works better for some children – i.e. a student with Asperger syndrome can be partially integrated and go to a special room when in need of quiet time. The regular classroom may find these students learn quickly but may not have social skills. Inclusion is not the solution for everyone.

**SEAC Input 6:** There are a number of possibilities. We can advocate for a person being placed in break out spaces. We also need to make sure the academics are taught – there are limited choices for moving forward for some students if they are placed in some congregated programs. Equity should mean – what is right for the person, at that time, in that place.

**SEAC Input 7:** Inclusion – when a child comes to school, the first place should be in the regular classroom and from there the system determines what is right for the child. We want contributing members of society and for all students to achieve to their highest potential. How do we support these students so they can achieve their best? How many “integration assistants” (as opposed to educational assistants) do we have? – The role is to ‘bridge the gap’ and ensure the success of all students in the best environment for their learning.

The Chair ended discussion, to be continued at the November meeting. He asked members to write any ideas down and be ready to bring them to the next meeting.

1. **Draft TDSB Integrated Equity Framework Action Plan**

Uton Robinson had distributed a copy of the Draft TDSB Integrated Equity Framework Action Plan in advance to SEAC members but an opportunity for SEAC input was not provided at the meeting.

## The Need for an Education Accessibility Standard under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities

As Chair of the AODA Alliance, the SEAC Chair David Lepofsky spoke to the Alliance’s call on the Ontario government to develop a Standard for Accessibility in Education. He explained that, without a provincial standard setting benchmarks, parents have to fight on their own and boards respond without any consistency throughout the province. The province has not yet agreed but the Alliance has endorsements from the major groups (OSSTF, ETFO, CUPE) and the provincially appointed Youth Advocate. In presenting to the province, he is able to use examples brought forward at TDSB SEAC.

Members were invited to send questions by email to David.

## Other Business

* Alexander Brown announced that the SEAC Survey has been finished and put up on Survey Monkey. It will be posted on the TDSB website and distributed to trustees for their newsletters
* Jean Paul Ngana requested that the SEAC Chair bring back Trustee and Staff Updates as agenda items at meetings so SEAC can be informed about what is happening in the board
* Richard Carter: Requested that the SEAC Chair bring back Association Announcements as an agenda item at meetings.
* Deputation Policy – In a response to a question, Alexander Brown explained that the Deputation Policy for the board will be taken to the upcoming board meeting. It allows for SEAC as the only group that can delegate directly with the board.
* Lisa Kness reminded SEAC that October is Autism Awareness Month in Canada

***ACTION***

***David suggested that an email be sent to him with any requests for inclusion on the agenda.***

## Adjournment

On motion of Clovis Grant, the meeting was adjourned at 9:04 p.m.

Next Meeting: Monday, November 7, 2016