# Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)

MEETING NOTICE – Monday, September 11, 2017 at 7:00 pm – **Board Room**

**Minutes**

Association for Bright Children (ABC) Diana Avon (Melissa Rosen)

Autism Society of Ontario – Toronto Lisa Kness

Brain Injury Society of Toronto (BIST) Cynthia Sprigings

Community Living Toronto vacancy (Margarita Isakov)

Down Syndrome Association of Toronto Richard Carter

Easter Seals Ontario *regrets*

Epilepsy Toronto Steven Lynette

Integrated Action for Inclusion (IAI) vacancy

Learning Disabilities Association Toronto *regrets*

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 *regrets* Paula Boutis

TDSB Trustees Alexander Brown Pamela Gough (TC\*)

Regrets: Olga Ingrahm (SE Community), Mark Kovats, (Learning Disabilities Association –Toronto District), Phillip Sargent (NW Community), Nora Green (SW Community), Trustee Alexandra Lulka, Valerie Gonzales-Chavez (NW Community Alternate)

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

Angela Nardi-Addesa, Superintendent of Education, Learning Centre 1, Learning Network 06

Garry Green, Sr. Manager of Community, Business Development and Student Transportation Services

Lori Moore, Centrally Assigned Principal

Margo Ratsep, SEAC Liaison

Visitors: Trustee Abdul Hai Patel

Minutes by: Margo Ratsep

**MINUTES**

*(All notes included in these minutes are paraphrased by the recorder*.)

## Call to Order

SEAC Chair David Lepofsky called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. He opened with remarks related to his trip to New Zealand, where the needs of special education students are similar to those in TDSB. He welcomed visitors in the gallery and invited SEAC members and staff in attendance to introduce themselves.

## 2. Declaration of Possible Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest were declared.

## 3. Approval of the Minutes

On motion of Paul Cross, the Minutes of June 5, 2017 were approved as amended. Amendments included adjustment to the wording in some of the discussion comments made by members. The motion carried.

**4. Applications for new SEAC members**

This item has been postponed to the October meeting.

**5. Brainstorming SEAC Priorities for the upcoming year**

A request was made to hear the staff report before Item 5 on Priority Setting. A vote was taken with a majority supporting the request. Item 5 was postponed to the October meeting.

**6. Staff Report/Input Request**

Executive Superintendent Uton Robinson spoke to the Department Update distributed in advance of the meeting, with reference to the following topics:

**6.1 Transportation (moved forward from Item 9 on the agenda)**

He introduced Garry Green, Sr. Manager of Student Transportation, Business Development and Community Services, to respond to SEAC questions about transportation.

Mr. Green provided a review of last year’s difficulties and spoke about the kinds of advance planning that took place this year to proactively address the issues. In a model implemented by the province some time ago, transportation is provided through a consortium that works together to provide transportation to Toronto DSB and Toronto Catholic DSB. He gave a brief synopsis of some of the start-up challenges. This year:

* 99% of all routes were covered as school approached, 21 with an assigned spare driver.
* Still experiencing delays for such issues as book-offs
* Traffic remains a challenge; as construction projects occur, routes must be adjusted.
* Continue to receive many new applications for transportation later in the summer (i.e. 800 in first two days of operation)
* Distances traveled for special needs students are of great significance. Comparatively the distances traveled by special needs students are greater for TDSB than TCDSB. In TDSB 23.6% of special needs students are traveling 8 km or more to get to their programs compared to TCDSB at 15.7%
* TDSB has 6563 special needs students bussed compared to 1990 TCDSB
* This year have improved communications (i.e. regular monthly meetings, conference calls, transportation portal for parents with over 6500 parents signed up)
* New call centre has worked to improve speed and number of calls picked up, with an average 3 minute wait time and 5-10% call drop, compared to previous 40-50% of calls being dropped due to volume of calls
* Routes were provided to carriers 3-4 weeks earlier so could match drivers with the routes.
* Minimal changes to school bell times has helped. Have also worked closely with operators for recruitment of drivers.

Questions resulted in the following information:

* Challenges to serving students with special needs are timing and training – have partnered principals of a special needs schools with operators, with a focus on clarifying special needs and meeting them
* Re: monitoring – have established a continuous feedback to monitor and support the process. Also started a new committee with SEAC rep for feedback
* Re: travel distances – continues to be of concern – bus operators and internal teams are investigating how to address that. 14% of bussed students travel more than 10 km.
* There are 1755 routes – will take question to the transportation team about how many are specific to special needs students going to ISP programs
* Re: late applications – trying for a quicker turnaround, giving consideration to urgency as much as possible
* Re: new technology – takes time and investment. Current software is antiquated (1990s) – new software will become operational next year for more efficient routing; also currently have the transportation portal – It is still incumbent on operators to input delays – Want to have it driven off GPS data but need rudimentary steps in place first
* Re: training of drivers about special education students – Medical information should be on board if there are medical issues that need to be addressed. Drivers are given at least 2 weeks of training and refreshers each year, specifically around special needs and this should be part of recruitment. Having principals working with operators is designed to help with this
* Re: ride alones – based on last year’s numbers, 18 taxied regularly – perhaps 60 in total but will confirm with the transportation team
* Re: ride alones and impacts on student time in class – arrivals and departures may depend on individual student needs and how long they can be in the environment. The ride alone should not impact the day if the student can manage a full day. Asked the transportation team for further detail. Re training – TDSB is involved in the design and delivery of training and spot monitoring is carried out
* Agreement that combining driver and lunch room supervising positions is helpful in recruitment and will ask bus companies for stats on this
* Have identified need to reduce number of “courtesy seats” for greater efficiency as part of work with TCDSB
* Re: reducing bussing needs to support greater inclusion – looking at this and through staff will share a draft idea to address this (Uton)
* Ombudsman report had 42 recommendations, which are all being implemented at the TDSB within a plan developed to do so. Recommendations are on the TDSB website as an appendix to the ombudsman’s report (“The route of the problem”).
* Re: individual transportation plans for students – SEAC chair David Lepofsky asked what TDSB has in place to ensure that all students with disabilities who need transportation have an individual transportation plan, as required under s. 75 o of the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation, enacted under the AODA in 2011, and how TDSB monitors to ensure that these are in place and properly implemented. He noted that because bussing is provided by private outside contractors, it is important to know what TDSB has in place to make sure that these requirements are complied with.

SEAC members were invited to send further questions directly to Garry Green and he undertook to respond to the questions raised. Uton continued with the Staff Report.

**6.2 HSP**

Uton reminded SEAC of the HSP changes outlined in the Special Education Plan as part of the Inclusion strategy: this year, Grade 1 students are not admitted to HSP and next year there will be no primary students in HSP. All schools will be providing the support needed for these students in the regular classroom. There has been a great deal of buy-in among staff and schools are remodeling their programs. It may look different from school to school, with more students served in their classroom, with needed supports and through on-going staff capacity building in differentiated instruction and Universal Design for Learning (UDL).

**6.3 Universal Screening**

Uton introduced Lori Moore, Centrally Assigned Principal for Special Education, who responded to questions with the following information:

* “Universal”, to look at the profile of all students; Looks to identify students with high or low learning profiles and staff are asked to follow-up at In-School Team (IST) meetings
* During the screening, time extensions are available for students on an IEP and this has been communicated to principals
* Information sessions planned for principals and consultants are coming up

**6.4 Ministry Guide to Special Education**

Uton has outlined in his written update the topics covered in the new document. Staff is ensuring thatadministrators and teachers are made aware of it. It is available at: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/os/onschools_2017e.pdf>

**6.5 SEAC Feedback re Autism Pilot program**

Uton referred SEAC to the outline of the Pilot program provided to them in advance of the meeting, and invited input and/or questions. Input and any staff responses (*in brackets*) follow:

* Re: training EAs in ABA, and current EA staff skill levels – a suggestion was made that all EAs working with these children should receive mandatory training and need to work with kids while learning. EAs selected should already have some experience with kids on the spectrum.
* Re: union consultation – *(The Ministry will be providing unions with opportunities for input – doing the required consultation.)*
* Re: on-line training model for ABA as inadequate – *(There is also face to face professional learning with release time.)*
* Several members emphasized the need for training to take place face-to-face with students, learning by doing, under trainer supervision. A suggestion was made that parents may be willing to volunteer their children for this purpose. *(The program is geared to K-12 model with emphasis on early years.)*
* Prefer that any dedicated space not be isolated. There is a need to facilitate social skills, conversation, etc. through inclusive teaching.
* Recommend that training providers include Kerry’s Place and Surrey Place Centre to accommodate more training. *(Uton will ask if only the Geneva Centre or if others are also involved.)*
* Not only the board staff is involved. When carrying out analysis, there should be shared data. Who has access to the data, how is it monitored and can external supports be utilized to collect data? Therapists analysing behaviour of the students being worked with will also have observations. Can external providers partner in sharing information and consult in developing a program for a student? *(Uton agreed that collaboration would be of great benefit.)*
* Re: physical space requirements – *(It requires a small learning area. Presently in schools a small area is generally available for a person coming in with the needed materials for working with a student. It is impractical to choose one school only to do this.)*
* Re: limited resources and building capacity through mobile applications like a mobile library – *(We believe there is a small area in all of our schools where this can take place.)*
* Re: the role of the ABA EA in program delivery – *(The EAs assist with the program and are often frontline implementing the program, but not designing it. This initiative will provide effective practices and skills need to implement the process.)*

**7. Open opportunity for SEAC members to ask TDSB staff about any issues regarding students with special education needs**

In response to questions Uton Robinson and Lori Moore provided the following information:

**7.1 Changes to the Department Structure**

* Last year there were 2 Supervising Principals for Special Education, each with 2 Vice Principals (a total of 6 administrators). Those positions were discontinued and in their place there are five “Centrally Assigned Principals” (CAP): one in each of the four Learning Centres to support the work of consultants and coordinators and one assigned at the central office, supporting Uton in system communication and coordination, data management and professional learning. All 5 CAP report to Uton.
* There are additional consultants working side by side with staff to improve program delivery in the schools. There are now 7 consultants in each of the four Learning Centres – one for every Learning Network.
* Some program supports still have central delivery (ASD, D/HH and B/LV) and each CAP will have some responsibility for the central programs.
* A copy of the new organizational chart will be provided to SEAC members.

**7.2 Finance**

A request was made for SEAC to be able to speak with staff responsible for the Financial Facts Report at a SEAC meeting

**7.3 HSP Pilot Programs**

Last year a number of schools expressed interest in involvement in piloting a remodeled HSP delivery. They met several times to plan. Most were larger schools or schools with a smaller age range (i.e. middle schools). Different approaches were used in different schools. For example, in Grades 6, 7 and 8, partnering small class and large class with HSP support. Some schools used other special education qualified teachers on staff. Some schools combined grades. Some continued a withdrawal program but reduced it to less than 50 % of the day. The focus is on improving the sense of belonging and achievement. The comfort level of classroom teachers was elevated. There were follow-up meetings in May/June and we are looking at expanding. Consultants are well versed. At the beginning we had many requests for Principals come together in their Learning Centres, to network and visit programs. Names of schools were shared. There are challenges in very small schools due to small cohorts with different needs and fewer staff overall.

**7.4 Staff Allocation**

Community Based Resource Model (CBRM) allocation is made using a formula that looks at a number of factors: i.e. population, LOI, how many students are supported by special education, and numbers of students returning to home school as part of inclusion. We look as well at challenges in each school. Staffing is a finite resource and there are fluctuations in this each year. There was no change in the overall complement of staffing in the system from the Gr 1 HSP reduction. All schools have a minimum of .5 HSP and .5 resource allocation. Where HSP is still using withdrawal, there may be small enough instructional groupings that permit other students to join them.

The Chair asked that any additional questions be emailed to Uton in advance of the next meeting.

**8. TDSB action on the Ontario Government's request for input on disability accessibility barriers in Ontario's education system.**

The Chair asked about a May 27th call from government (with a July deadline) for school boards to consult with families about the barriers that students with disabilities face. The deadline has been extended to October 16th. He asked what TDSB would be doing to reach out to families to consult on the barriers that students with disabilities face. He suggested a student activity to collect information that can be used at the board and ministry level. (i.e. like a barrier scavenger hunt where students seek and identify the barriers and brainstorm creative solutions.) He concluded that whatever is done can be useful to the board and informative to the province, and at the same time address SEAC recommendation 5 to provide education for all students on accessibility barriers.

Uton responded that the extension provides some time to make staff aware through system communication and appreciated the suggestion about what schools might do to recognize the challenges and come up with creative ways to address it. He undertook to communicate this in the system weekly – although given a short timeline, worth the effort.

**9. Update on TDSB plans to ensure effective bussing services for students with special education needs**

This item was covered earlier in the meeting.

**10. Association Reports and Other Business**

**Down Syndrome Association of Toronto**: Richard Carter suggested that for the next meeting when SEAC priorities are being discussed, each SEAC association representative speak to the most critical issue is that has come up within the special needs population represented by their association.

**Association for Bright Children**: Diana Avon drew attention to an upcoming conference at Northern Secondary School – on Sept 17th from 12:30 to 5:00. This mini- conference is for the parents of children with LD’s and gifted children with other learning challenges, such as ADHD, LD, ASD, etc. It was organized by ABC Toronto in conjunction with the Northern Gifted Advisory Committee, School Council and the Northern LD Committee.

**Brain Injury Society**: Cynthia Sprigings reported on Brain Injury Awareness Month in June. There was a large annual event with 600 turning out. They are coming up to their Annual General Meeting. Young adults groups one of the most successful groups. She invited SEAC members to join her for a photo to include in her report to the AGM.

**Epilepsy Toronto**: Steve Lynette reported they are researching how to set up housing for young adults with epilepsy and cognitive learning challenges. They are also looking into offering life skills training to encourage independent living and running camps to provide respite to families.

**NE Community Representative:** Jean Paul Ngana asked that a Trustees Report be brought back to SEAC meetings so SEAC can learn what the trustees are wanting to achieve this year and what they expect from SEAC for advice.

The Chair suggested that Trustees could provide something in writing before the next meeting.

The Chair brought the meeting to a close, drawing attention to the draft Guidelines for Service Animals that was distributed to SEAC and commenting positively about TDSB taking this initiative.

**11. Adjournment**

On motion of Richard Carter, the meeting adjourned at 9:02 p.m. The next meeting is Oct. 2, 2017.