# Report to Toronto District School Board Special Education Advisory Committee

# from SEAC Chair David Lepofsky for the October 24, 2016 TDSB SEAC Meeting

Date: October 17, 2016

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

Chair

Toronto District School Board Special Education Advisory Committee

# 1. Introduction

Here is a heads-up on what I hope we can accomplish at our upcoming October 24 and November 7, 2016 meetings. I want to capitalize on the fact that these meetings are just two weeks apart. This lets us embark on a concerted discussion of a couple of core priority topics for us.

# 2. Streaming SEAC Meetings Online

I propose that we briefly discuss at our October 24, 2016 meeting whether SEAC would like to have its meetings broadcast or streamed online. I think it would be a great way to spread the word on our work and have a broader impact. It is also a great way to encourage the public to give us their input and feedback, to enrich our discussions.

# 3. TDSB's September 2016 Student Bussing Fiasco

At our September 12, 2016 meeting, SEAC passed a recommendation calling on TDSB to include me, as SEAC chair, on any Board committee that looks into the September 2016 TDSB student bussing mess. I presented a deputation by an audio recording to the Board's Finance and Accountability Committee Meeting on September 28, 2016. I have asked TDSB to post that mp3 on the SEAC website. TDSB has not contacted me to act on this SEAC request. At our October meeting, I have asked Trustee Brown to briefly update us on this bussing problem.

# 4. SEAC Input into the TDSB 2016 Special Education Plan

As I shared with SEAC members in my September 29, 2016 email, based on our excellent discussion at our last meeting on how to give TDSB input into the 2016 TDSB Special Education Plan, I have decided to implement Paul Cross's great idea, via these points:

1. Our end product will be a document that we will ask TDSB to append to its Special Education Plan, and which we will prepare. It will be entitled: "SEAC's Feedback on the TDSB Special Education Plan".

2. To create this document, I ask that any of you who want to offer something to be included in that document, to write it up and email it to us all, including Margo, by October 18, 2016. I will ask Margo to accumulate these. She will not summarize or edit them. She will simply paste them all into one document.

In each case, the comment is simply the view of the person writing it. It won't be offered up as if it were something we all voted on and agreed on. This means that your comments don't have to agree with anyone else's. Conflicting views are totally okay.

3. If you wish, your comments can refer to some passage or content in the Special Education Plan that TDSB has sent us. However, you don't have to tie your remarks to that long plan.

You can simply write up remarks on where you think things should be improved in the delivery of education to students with special education needs. Even if you don't have time to read the Special Education Plan, just write out the things that matter to you the most re improving education for the kids for whom we advocate.

Your remarks can be as short as one sentence or a paragraph, or can be longer, if you wish. There is no need to write something long. It is likely better if you keep it short.

4. In addition to anything you email to us, at our October 24, 2016 meeting, I will go around the table and invite you each to offer comments aloud, if you wish. We will have these captured in the minutes, and added to that document we are preparing. If you have set out your thoughts in writing, there is no need to repeat them at the meeting, since they will already be captured by the document we are preparing.

5. Finally, the document will set out all of the motions we have passed over the past 12 months, verbatim, as they also reflect our feedback on education for students with special education needs.

I expect that among the feedback you will give will be points on the issue of improving TDSB action on inclusion of students with special education needs in mainstream classes. As such, I propose that this input-gathering at our October 24, 2016 meeting will be done at the same time as we brainstorm ideas on improving TDSB inclusion strategy.

# 5. Improving TDSB Efforts on Inclusion of students with special education needs in Mainstream Classes

TDSB knows that it segregates students with special education needs far more than the provincial average in publicly-funded schools. Across Ontario 85% of students with special education needs spend more than half of their school day in a mainstream class. At TDSB, this figure is a dramatically lower 50%. We have never been given an informed, researched, evidence-based explanation for this disparity.

I aim for SEAC to work over its next two or three meetings towards formulating a recommendation for improving TDSB action on the issue of inclusion. For those at the SEAC table who are concerned to ensure the availability of segregated placements for some students, I emphasize that we can aim to tailor our recommendations so that improving action on inclusion does not work to the disadvantage of those students. Please come to our next two meetings full of ideas for what we might recommend.

At our June and September 2016 meetings, TDSB staff member Bernadette Shaw explained her understanding of Universal Design in Learning UDL. However she was not able to explain what TDSB actually does to implement this principle. I have asked TDSB to provide a senior staff member who can do so. This is key to an effective inclusion strategy. I have also asked for a senior staff person to address us on what TDSB does to educate students without disabilities on the inclusion of students with special education needs. Here is a list of the questions I have submitted for the staff speaker or speakers to address at our October 24, 2016 meeting:

1. What is TDSB doing to include principles of Universal Design in Learning (UDL) in curriculum in mainstream classes, to enable students with special education needs to be able to be mainstreamed as much as possible?

2. How is TDSB ensuring this at the Board-wide curriculum level?

3. What is TDSB doing to ensure this in the way teachers design their lesson plans?

4. How is TDSB monitoring for this?

5. What supplemental training are teachers receiving on how to design lesson plans to accommodate students with special education needs?

6. It would also be helpful to have that official explain to us how and where lesson plans in a TDSB classroom come from. In other words:

a) What does the Ontario Government set in terms of curriculum? Does it set the subjects to be taught each year, or does it also set the texts to be used, the software to be used etc.?

b) To the extent that the Ontario Government lets a school board decide how to implement a provincial curriculum, to what extent does TDSB decide how it will be taught in each school, and to what extent does it leave it to each teacher to decide how what will be taught and how it will be taught?

7. For students with special education needs to be able to fully participate in our schools, especially in the mainstream classroom or recess, students without disabilities need to be given curriculum on disability and inclusion. What is TDSB doing to educate students without disabilities about people with disabilities, students with special education needs and inclusion?

After this staff report, we can start brainstorming ideas for SEAC recommendations to TDSB on improving its strategy on inclusion of students with special education needs in the mainstream class setting.