



Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)

Monday, January 11, 2016 – 7:00 p.m. Board Room

Groups Represented on SEAC – Representatives and (Alternates):

Association for Bright Children	Diana Avon	(Catherine Drillis)
Autism Society of Ontario – Toronto	Lisa Kness	(Ginny Pearce)
Brain Injury Society of Toronto	Cynthia Sprigings	
Community Living Toronto	Clovis Grant	(Margarita Isakov)
Down Syndrome Association of Toronto	Richard Carter	(Elaine Dodsworth-Lever)
Easter Seals Ontario	Deborah Fletcher	(Adebukola Adenowo-Akpan)
Epilepsy Toronto	Steven Lynette	(Sheelagh Hysenaj)
Learning Disabilities Association Toronto	Mark Kovats	
VIEWES 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	Phillip Sargent	Jordan Glass
TDSB South East Community	Olga Ingrahm	Diane Montgomery (Dick Winters)
TDSB South West Community	Nora Green	Paula Boutis (Ken Stein)
TDSB Trustees	Pamela Gough	Alexander Brown Howard Kaplan

Regrets: Diana Avon, Clovis Grant, Howard Kaplan, Phillip Sargent, Cynthia Sprigings, Ken Stein

Staff Present: Uton Robinson, Ian Allison, Margo Ratsep

Recorder: Margo Ratsep

Minutes

1. Call to Order/Quorum

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m., with 2015 Chair Steven Lynette presiding.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Paul Cross moved that the Agenda be approved.

3. Declaration of Possible Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest were noted.

4. Confirmation of Minutes for the December 14, 2015 SEAC meeting

Richard Carter moved that the Minutes of December 14, 2015 be approved as amended. The motion carried.

5. Election of SEAC Chair and Vice Chair for January to December 2016

Superintendent Uton Robinson assumed the Chair to oversee the election of the 2016 Chair and Vice Chair. David Lepofsky self-nominated as Chair and Alexander Brown self-nominated as Vice Chair. There were no other nominations. Uton confirmed the election of David Lepofsky as 2016 Chair and Alexander as 2016 Vice Chair and they assumed their positions for the rest of the meeting.

SEAC Chair David Lepofsky spoke to his election and thanked Steven Lynette, outgoing Chair, for his leadership over the last year.

He outlined the priorities he holds as SEAC Chair, including to:

- Make strong use of the expertise and passion of SEAC members
- Organize meetings to provide the best opportunity to make recommendations to the board
- Utilize creative ways to use less meeting time to hear information and more time to talk and make recommendations
- Ensure TDSB consults with SEAC before decisions are made (on budget, Special Education Plans, staff allocation, etc.)
- Make use of social media for parent outreach, having already established a Twitter hashtag or search term, which is #TDSBSEAC

David referred to the findings of the Hall Report and distributed copies of two points raised in the report, for SEAC attention:

Hall Report

- *We also heard comments about the lack of physically accessible schools, characterized as a disregard for the right to freedom from barriers to access for those with disabilities. We heard that there is no plan to make all schools accessible by the year 2025, as required under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. Frustration was clearly expressed that equity and accessibility do not seem to be core values demonstrated by the TDSB.*
- *There is also a strong perception among participants that too often children with disabilities are not being well served. We heard time and again that there is no long-term plan for special education, but merely a series of reactions to related problems and issues as they continue to arise. Some felt that the Special Education Advisory Committee could play a more active role in developing a long-term plan to support students. Many participants perceived that the board lacked a culture of caring for its most vulnerable and disadvantaged students. Parents expressed frustration at their inability to advocate for their children's special education needs in an effective way. They feel isolated, afraid and unsure of how to work with the school board administration to support their children's learning needs. They also said that the specific information they require to be informed about the options available to support students is not easily accessible on the website or from any other source.*

Vice Chair Alexander Brown spoke to his election and stressed his role to support the SEAC Chair. He also thanked everyone for their hard work over the last year,

6. 2016 Calendar of SEAC Meetings

Margo Ratsep reviewed the proposed calendar of meetings and noted three newly requested changes to move SEAC meetings as follows: April 4th to another date the same week); June 13th to the 20th and September 17th to the 24th. The calendar was approved as amended, with decision regarding the April meeting date on hold.

Action Item:

Members are to inform Margo Ratsep regarding their availability for a SEAC meeting on April 5, 6, 7, 8 or 11.

7. Reports/Updates from Active SEAC Subcommittees

PIAC/SEAC Parent Conference – Clovis Grant

On behalf of Clovis Grant, Margo Ratsep reviewed the planning details for the 2016 TDSB Parent Conference “Parents as Partners”.

Action Item:

All members are to inform Margo and Clovis regarding their own availability to participate at the conference, as well as the names of any Associations wishing to host an information table in the not-for-profit Marketplace. (Nil reports were requested.) Suggestions for keynote speaker were also invited.

8. SEAC Business and Open Discussion

SEAC chair David Lepofsky asked Uton Robinson to indicate when he would respond to the request for documents relating to SEAC Priority #1, in his December 5, 2015 email to Mr. Robinson. (See Appendix A). After a discussion, it was agreed that the SEAC chair and Mr. Robinson would meet to address this.

David reviewed SEAC Priority 1:

To make recommendations about how TDSB informs parents about opportunities for kids with special needs, how decisions are made about kids with special needs and the formal and informal processes used by the TDSB to make those decisions.

He opened the floor to SEAC members to speak to what they have been hearing from parent and community contacts regarding the delivery of special education programs and services. He offered the following discussion points:

1. What is the actual experience of families? Having heard the board about policies and practices, tell what you have heard from parents – to what extent they know about these? What do parents know whose children have not been designated? What have parents been told regarding how to

seek help? What can they find out on their own? What about parents who are not happy? What can we recommend to improve things?

2. How can we as SEAC reach out to parents, families and students to learn more about what their experiences are?
3. We have people representing various associations – Do parents know what their choices are? Do they find it easy to find out?

The following input was provided, (recorded in the Minutes by topic):

Home School Program (HSP)

- Families feel the Home School Program (HSP) model is inadequate – HSP is seen as “a grab bag of needs” that are difficult to meet due to differences in needs and grade levels in one class. They question the value of the model given the mix of needs and ages, without appropriately targeted intervention and believe it is too overwhelming for HSP teachers. They feel the withdrawal is not benefiting their child and does not support inclusion.
- HSP is seen as a catch all. The board needs to revisit/reassess its value. It seems to be more of an interim placement, because the students don't fit into the ISP.
- It is hard to see how one teacher can instruct so many different needs effectively. Regular classroom with peer support could be more valuable.
- Families are frustrated, as are teachers because they don't have the skills needed to meet needs.
- There is a real struggle in teaching children that have special needs, who are placed in HSP because they don't fit elsewhere. The problem relates to having a provincial curriculum and EQAO testing to check if we are meeting the standard, but standardized isn't working with students with special needs. We need to switch back to a focus on teaching to the child. Every child cannot be expected to learn the same way. Teach to the child – not teach to the curriculum. Makes students more included – part of the process – more supported.

Individual Education Plan (IEP)

- Once an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is initiated – what parents don't realize is that a gap is developing. The child's future in secondary school is being narrowed and their future options and opportunities are being narrowed or closed. Parents are not aware of this until middle school. The gap can be so great, that the child will not earn a secondary school diploma. These outcomes need to be more transparent and spelled out in the Transition Plan
- Teachers have difficulty following through on IEPs
- It's like snakes and ladders – depending on the square you land on, you will go different places. Opportunities are eroded and narrowed by the earlier choices made. Need greater transparency regarding the long term implications from modifications made to program.
- IEP a big issue. People in this room have an opportunity to change the perception. Remove the word “individual” and substitute the word “inclusive”...*Inclusive Education Plan*”
- The IEP is legal documents signed off by the principal. I have seen sign offs on IEP plans that have items listed (as suggested by the reports) but teachers have asked for their removal.
- In own experience, parent comments have never been incorporated in an IEP. Although not unhappy about what is happening now for a daughter, there is a need to move away from language that suggests a child does not belong.
- The IEP is a formal document not always executed as intended. Parents are given the option to provide written input or attend meetings – but the second option is not always possible. Resources are an issue.
- Timing of the development of IEPs is not helpful

SEAC Parent Outreach

- To access more parents – this formal venue is not friendly to outsiders – didn't feel there is a purpose for sitting in the audience. Parent Involvement Advisory Committee (PIAC) meetings are more informal and get a lot of first calls on special education concerns. They have information to share with us.
- In such a diverse city, how do we help parents in communication and understanding what is really a complicated process, such as In-School Support Team (IST), School Support Team (SST), Individual Education Plan (IEP), Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) etc.?
- A potential solution is to have a school council representative for special needs who can be approached by other parents for information or with input about concerns.
- Recall from last year's Provincial SEAC conference the idea of inviting a family to present at each SEAC meeting about their story.
- A survey to every family, although this would require staff and survey development skill

- Purpose of the conference is to inform parents. SEAC should piggyback on conferences and ensure their participation and well-moderated sessions
- Working with PIAC facilitates information sharing, since there is membership from all Wards.
- We could reach a lot of families if Family centres were located in every TDSB school

Information Access

- There is too much use of acronyms – The board needs to make information more easily understandable
- Would like to see Ward or Quadrant forums specific to special education available across the board

Transition Planning

- Parents find that the Plan is only begun in detail when the student is leaving the system; Transition planning needs to start much sooner
- TDSB needs to work more collegially on Transition planning. For example, in one school we see no Co-op placements being planned for vulnerable students who would benefit, (possibly viewed as a liability issue). We need to create more and better opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities.

Accountability

- Need to look closer at what staff is doing and ensure they are doing it as should be done.
- A number of years ago there were town hall meetings about Special Education. We have to believe the board is acting on these. The board has the feedback and has heard the concerns and we assume is taking steps to address them. We could seek an update from staff on actions planned and/or being taken.
- There is need to re-examine job descriptions and qualifications required to fill them. For example, the skill set needed for Guidance Counselling is complex, but the qualifications for the position don't match. An English teacher could hold the position, rather than a guidance specialist. Changes are needed to improve the level of education or training required by candidates for certain positions.
- Issues depend on who the teacher is and who the principal is. When measuring the performance of someone, we need to ask: Do they have the skills to do the job? Do they have the motivation? Are they being held accountable? Do they have the environment (resources) to do the job? We have people in these positions, who might or might not care about kids, might or might not have an appropriate degree, etc. It is a matter of luck to have a good teacher. Knowing that teacher education is changing, how do we give feedback to the people in the system? Who is going to listen and do something about it?

Teacher Professional Development

- A SEAC member association runs professional development sessions and an annual conference. There's a registration fee but monies are not adequately provided for TDSB teachers to attend

Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) and Special Education Program Recommendation Committee (SEPRC) Processes

- The job of the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) is not to place a student in an Intensive Support Program (ISP) but to see if the best placement is the regular class. The TDSB goes to IPRC specifically to place a student in the ISP.
- Clarification is needed in the Special Education Program Recommendation Committee (SEPRC) process. It doesn't exist in the legislation and reasons for its existence are rooted in the belief that segregation is better than inclusion. Parents should be told that inclusion exists rather than the ISP is a better placement. No one suggests at a SEPRC that there is a mainstream model that might be preferred.
- SEPRC is awful – children unseen and unknown are being transferred to special education programs. IPRCs were intended to take place when the child is in school and a known quantity.
- SEPRC does not provide the right of appeal and this is a consequence that needs revisiting

Standard Practices

- Standardization may have good impacts since there has to be a minimum standard and requiring special education needs to be addressed to reach the standard has been helpful in improving results
- Withholding recess as punishment should not be used

Accessing Support

- The requirement for a Psycho-educational assessment is a barrier. There is a waiting list to get it but it is required to access more support.

In the interest of time, David closed discussion, expressing appreciation for its value for moving forward with concrete ideas for next steps. He concluded with the following points:

- As SEAC explores recommended actions, members need to make recommendations based on kids
- Fairness is important – to the kids and to the professionals. It is important that we not sit in judgement on anyone. By listening to stories, and by those we reach out to, we can take the understanding that we are hearing only one side's perspective. If a lot are saying the same thing we can make a recommendation.
- TDSB is saddled with special education legislation, 33 years old, from a time when schools and the board viewed students as 'normal' or 'exceptions'. Consequently, throughout Ontario, schools and teachers and curriculums are for normal kids and we are spending time trying to squeeze them into programs not designed for them.
- He will be meeting with Uton and staff to discover other ways SEAC can learn more
- He is asking that staff reports be provided in writing ahead of the meetings
- Members are invited to think about whether they would be prepared to come to the parent conference identified as SEAC so that people could talk to them
- Directed Margo to depersonalize the minutes
- Invited a motion to extend the meeting. So moved by Richard Carter. The motion carried.

9. Business Arising from the December Minutes

None noted at this time.

10. Trustee Reports and Follow-up on Previous Action Items

Trustee Brown reported that Dr. John Malloy has commenced as new Director. He is meeting with Dr. Malloy on February 1st and will bring up any questions from SEAC members. Uton noted that Dr. Malloy will be coming to the February meeting, as well as members of the Inner City Advisory Committee (ICAC) who are very supportive of what SEAC wants to do. Trustee Brown also spoke briefly to a communication from the Minister in response to TDSB's second letter regarding the citizenship requirement for SEAC community representative membership.

Action Item:

Margo Ratsep undertook to circulate the Minister's response with the Minutes.

11. Special Education Department Updates

Coordinating Superintendent Ian Allison gave two updates:

- As a team member on the TDSB Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Committee, he brought forward to the December meeting SEAC concerns about the accessibility of information on the website. The committee directed that the issue be investigated further to identify what steps would need to be taken to improve accessibility. While working on it within the special education department, some timelines require immediate dissemination of information on the website in a way that might not yet be fully accessible.
- Following the regional consultation process, TDSB has put into place the revised boundaries and placement process for secondary Gifted programs and will have a website link that provides the information on-line. This is to go live next week in the system.

Executive Superintendent Uton Robinson referred to his update at the last SEAC meeting, in reference to a new compendium TDSB document called "Inclusion: Creating School and Classroom Communities Where Everyone Belongs Research, Tips and Tools for Educators and Administrators" This is a follow up to the report entitled, "A Case for Inclusive Education". The document details international, national and provincial principles, policies and research on the merits of adopting an inclusive education model. This document has been shared with administrators, professional student support services staff, teacher groups etc. and the Special Education department is reviewing the document in support of promoting inclusive instruction practices.

Action Items:

1. Ian Allison undertook to forward the link referred to in his update to SEAC members

2. Uton Robinson undertook to share the new Inclusion document with SEAC members.

12. Correspondence Received by the Chair

- 12.1 Email dated January 4, 2016 from Hilary Wollis, Coordinator TDSB Inner City Advisory Committee (ICAC) re Request from the Inner City Advisory Committee - ICAC - regarding TDSB Inclusion Strategy
- 12.2 Email dated December 17, 2015 from Colin Balloosingh in application to be a SW Community Rep Alternate
- 12.3 Email dated January 10, 2016 from Maxeen Paabo, TDSB Shared Services Liaison inviting SEAC representation at Ward 15 Special Education Parent Forum on January 14, 2016 at Monarch Park C I

13. Business Arising from Correspondence

- 13.1 South West Community Representative Alternate application – Due to lack of time for discussion, this business was deferred to the February meeting.
- 13.2 SEAC representation at Ward 15 Forum – Diane Montgomery volunteered to attend.

14. Member Announcements (Upcoming Events/Items of Interest)

No announcements were forthcoming.

15. New Business

There was no time for new business.

16. Agenda Setting for Future Meetings

SEAC Chair David Lepofsky indicated he would work with SEAC Liaison Margo Ratsep in setting the agenda and that members could email him requested items.

17. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Next Meeting: The next meeting takes place on February 1, 2016.

To: TDSB Officials Supporting SEAC
 From: David Lepofsky, SEAC Member
 Date: December 5, 2015
 Re: SEAC Priority 1 Documents Request

At the November 2015 TDSB SEAC meeting, I asked TDSB staff to send to SEAC members any documents setting out TDSB policies, practices or directions to its employees, that would assist us in addressing SEAC's first priority area. I also agreed to send a more specific description of the kinds of documents we need. Here it is. Of course, other SEAC members may wish to also request other documents to assist us in our work on the first priority area. I am making this document request on my own behalf as an individual SEAC member, and of course, would ask that the documents be shared with all SEAC members.

As a reminder, SEAC's first priority area is as follows:

"PRIORITY 1 – How can TDSB improve its process for deciding what educational services and supports a child with special needs will receive?"

This priority area includes such things as:

- a) What steps TDSB should take to tell parents and students about the educational options available for students with special needs, about the rights to an I.E.P. and an I.P.R.C., and about any other ways parents and students can seek accommodation of their special education needs;
- b) What steps TDSB should take to create a welcoming environment for students with special needs and their parents to seek and receive accommodation of their education needs;
- c) How I.E.P.s should be developed and with what input from parents and students;
- d) How I.P.R.C.s should be conducted and with what input from parents and students;
- e) What avenues parents and students should have available to them to ensure that I.E.P. and I.P.R.C. decisions and recommendations are fully and effectively implemented;
- f) What other opportunities students with special needs and their parents should have to try to get TDSB to address and accommodate the educational needs of a student with special needs, outside the formal process of I.E.P.s and I.P.R.Cs."

We need all documents that set out TDSB policies, procedures, directions or recommended "best practices" for TDSB officials at any level, from senior executives to front-line principals or teachers, on any of the topics in this priority area.

I here give a list of some documents that would help with this. However, we need whatever TDSB has that is relevant to our Priority 1 area, whether or not it is in this list.

1. Parents of any child at TDSB, whether or not the child has been identified as having an "exceptionality," and students themselves, need to know about the availability of special education services, programs and supports, and about the availability of education and class room accommodations. We need any documents that indicate what all parents are to be told, and if done, what students are to be told, either on enrolling in TDSB, or at any time during their child's education (e.g. at the start of each school year), on what programs, services and supports are available for children with "exceptionalities," or special needs, how to seek these, and whom to ask for more information about this. We need any documents that show who is to tell the parents or child about this information.

This could include, for example, any standard form letters that are sent home to all families of TDSB students on this topic.

2. Please provide the text and link to the TDSB's website point of entry or landing page for parents or others to learn about what programs, services and supports are available for students with special needs, and who to contact to get information about this.

Please also indicate how one gets to this landing page from the TDSB's main website. Is it linked right to the main TDSB home page?

In other words, we need to know this: If a parent or student goes to the TDSB website to learn about what options exist for meeting the needs of students with special needs, and how to go about seeking these, how do they find this on the TDSB website and what are they told?

3. At the November 2015 SEAC meeting, Senior TDSB officials reported that the lead responsibility for explaining to parents the entire process of what options are available for programs, services, supports and accommodations for a special needs student rests with the principal. This includes the responsibility for explaining to parents and students their opportunities for input in to such things as the I.E.P. and I.P.R.C, taking part in a Student Support Team meeting, etc. it also includes explaining what options for placement, program, services, supports and accommodations are available.

Please provide any and all TDSB policies, practices, best practices or directions to principles on what to tell parents, and when to tell them, about any of this.

4. Please provide any TDSB policies, procedures, or recommended “best practices” that pertain to what teachers are to tell parents about the topics in Item 3, above. As one small illustration, if the teacher sends home a proposed I.E.P. that TDSB has prepared, what is the teacher directed or advised to tell the parents about such things as whether they can meet to discuss it, whether they can ask for changes to it, and what they can do if they want changes made but the teacher or principal will not agree to this.

Please also provide any standard form documents that TDSB sends home for families on the topics in Item 3, above.

5. Please provide any documents that set out TDSB policy, procedures or best practices on how a teacher, principal, special education consultant or other TDSB staff is to develop an IEP.
6. Please provide any documents that set out any TDSB procedure for a parent or student to formally or informally appeal within TDSB from a decision of a teacher or principal not to make a classroom accommodation that the parents or student have requested. I ask this whether or not the request is in the context of developing a formal IEP.
7. Please provide any documents that set out any procedure, practice or instructions within TDSB for a parent or student, who has an IPRC upcoming, to try to work out a joint position with TDSB on the placement, program or services to be proposed to the IPRC.
8. Please provide any policy, practices or instructions within TDSB to those conducting an IPRC on what measures constitute a “placement” as opposed to a “program” as opposed to a “service” for purposes of the IPRC decisions and recommendations.
9. Please provide any documents that set out the TDSB’s process available for parents or students to express a concern that a measure in an IEP is not being complied with, and to seek to get that IEP measure fulfilled. This includes any documents that set out what parents and students are to be told about how and with whom to raise concerns if an IEP measure is not being implemented, and who is to inform parents about this recourse.
10. I have previously asked for any TDSB policies or procedures on how to conduct an IPRC, directed to those who conduct the IPRC. If documents provided to date already fully cover that topic, then that is great. I just want to make sure we have the full picture on that topic.
11. Please provide any documents that set out TDSB policy, procedures, practices or instructions on how principals, teachers or other TDSB officials are to be trained on any of the areas covered by SEAC’s Priority 1, including on the specific matters in this list of document requests.
12. Please provide any documents that set out any TDSB policies, procedures, or practices for monitoring or auditing the activities of principals, teachers or other front-line TDSB staff in the preparation of an IEP, the conduct of and preparation for an IPRC, or the provision of classroom or educational accommodations to students with special needs.

As always, I ask that these documents be provided in an accessible format. MS Word documents, if properly formatted, can do the trick. PDFs should not be provided. It would be helpful if TDSB staff could send these attached to an email that describes in brief terms what the documents are, so that we can know what we are reading.

I fully understand that it will take TDSB officials some time to pull together this information. It certainly would not all be available by the December SEAC meeting. Once we receive it, SEAC members will need time to review it.

As I won't be able to attend the December SEAC meeting, may I take this opportunity to wish one and all a wonderful holiday season and a happy new year. I also want to thank one and all for what they do for kids needing accommodation in our school system.