

PROPOSED TDSB SEAC “FIRST STEPS” ACTION PLAN

These first steps would get SEAC started at working on the SEAC priority list.

1. Choosing One Priority Area To Start With

SEAC could select one of the four priorities to tackle first. We should pick one that is easiest to get our teeth into. By choosing it first, we are not deciding that it is the most important. It may be the easiest one for us all to dig into most quickly, and one which will have an important impact on the wide spectrum of students with special needs.

By starting on one priority area, we don't suggest that we have to finish all our work on that area before starting any others. It just lets us focus our limited time and energy in one area first, so we can try to make some progress, before turning to other areas.

The SEAC Priorities Working Group is proposing that we select Priority 1 first. It addresses this question:

“How can TDSB improve its process for deciding what educational services and supports a child with special needs will receive?”

This deals with such things as how IEP's and IPRC's are conducted, how TDSB lets families know what options are open for providing education to students with special needs, and how families can ensure the needs of students with special needs are met.

2. Get TDSB to Brief SEAC on What it is Doing Now

We could invite TDSB officials to give SEAC a full briefing on what it now does in this priority area. For example, if we first decide to tackle Priority area 1, we would ask TDSB to brief us on such things as how it notifies families of educational options for students with special needs, how it conducts IPRCs, how it develops IEP's, etc.

How could TDSB give us this briefing? It would be the best use of our time if this is done in two steps. First, we recommend that TDSB officials send it to us in writing, well before a SEAC meeting where it will be discussed. Before that briefing, we would invite SEAC members to send in questions that we want TDSB officials to address. This would help TDSB ensure that we are getting the information we need.

This should be sent to us well before the meeting where we will discuss it. SEAC members need time to read it and think about it. That written briefing should also be posted on line to be available to the public.

Second, we could assign a good chunk of time at a SEAC meeting for SEAC members to ask TDSB officials any questions they have, to learn more about what TDSB does in that area. We think it is a better use of the limited time for SEAC members for us to be able to ask questions and receive answers, rather than having TDSB make a long speech to us, which we could have more easily received in writing and reviewed before the meeting.

3. Sharing Experiences of Families and Students with Special Needs

We then propose that at a SEAC meeting, we could go around the table and hear about the experiences of SEAC members and member organizations in the priority area we are discussing for example, if we start with Priority area 1, we could discuss such things as what experiences we know families have trying to learn what

options TDSB offers for students with special needs, and what experiences they have working on a child's IEP or taking part in an IPRC.

We also might wish to invite a small number of depositions to be presented to SEAC from community organizations that help families with students with special needs advocate for students with special needs. Again, we may wish to encourage any organization that is going to do a presentation to us to first send in a short summary of it that we can read in advance.

4. Brainstorming Ideas for Improvements at TDSB

We could then spend time at a TDSB meeting brainstorming ways that TDSB could improve what it does in the priority area we are discussing. If we first focus on Priority 1, we could, for example, share ways TDSB could improve how it explores classroom accommodations for students with disabilities, develops IEPs, conducts IPRCs, and lets families know what options are available for students with special needs.

Once we have a range of ideas on the table that we have brainstormed, we could ask a small working group to go over those ideas, and assemble them together in a list. This would be similar to what our Priorities Working group is now doing with the ideas shared at our June SEAC meeting.

5. Come Forward with Recommendations to TDSB

Once a working group has boiled our ideas down to a list of recommendations for improvements at TDSB, these could be brought back to a SEAC meeting for us to discuss and finalize with any changes that SEAC members decide upon.

6. Reaching out to Families, to Students with Special Needs and to the Public

In parallel with these steps, SEAC could consider ways to reach out to the public, and especially to students with special needs and their families, to get input that can help us bring ideas to TDSB for improvements. This could be an ongoing process, not fixed to any specific point in the steps we list above. We would want to be clear that SEAC is not a body that can investigate individual problems and advocate for specific students. Rather, we would want to hear about experiences at TDSB to help us formulate recommendations for broader changes.

Ways that we could reach out for feedback could include the following. We could test out any combination of these strategies, to see how it goes:

- a) Setting up an email address for people to send us feedback. These could be collected and shared periodically with SEAC members.
- b) Setting up a voice mail box at TDSB for people to leave voice mail messages. We could take turns monitoring and summarizing these, or ask TDSB to take that on.
- c) Arranging to hold some community forums on the experiences at TDSB of students with special needs. We could hold these in schools in different parts of the city. One idea is for a couple of SEAC members to team up with a couple of trustees to preside at such a public forum. By this approach, different SEAC members and trustees could try to cover different parts of the city. It would also draw on the broad pool of talent at SEAC, while engaging different trustees in learning face-to-face about the experiences of students with special needs.