To: TDSB Special Education Advisory Committee

From: David Lepofsky, SEAC Chair

Date: March 13, 2024

Subject: Chair’s Report

## Plans Regarding Upcoming SEAC Meetings

Our SEAC vice-chair Richard Carter and I are taking pro-active steps to try to ramp up SEAC’s impact at TDSB at the highest levels. Here is what we are aiming for at our next few SEAC meetings.

* At our April 8, 2024 SEAC meeting, we will be joined by the executive director of the ARCH Disability Law Centre, Robert Lattanzio, to speak to us and take questions from SEAC members. ARCH is a widely-respected legal clinic, funded by Legal Aid Ontario. It specializes in disability rights issues. It has done extensive work in the area of the rights of students with disabilities to an equal education. ARCH receives many requests for advice and representation from families of students with disabilities who have issues in the education context around Ontario.

He last addressed SEAC at our February 2017 meeting. His presentation to SEAC had a major impact. He there focused on the issue of exclusions/refusals to admit. This in turn led SEAC to make detailed recommendations for reform in this area, some of which were adopted by TDSB.

He will speak to us about the issue of exclusions from school, and about expanding parent participation in the development and implementation of Individual Education Plans, among other possible topics. If you have questions for him, send them in advance to Lianne Dickson, so he can do what he can to prepare. Of course, he may not get to all of them. You are free to come up with other questions for him at the April meeting. Please remember that he cannot give legal advice at an open SEAC meeting about specific individual cases or incidents.

* We have invited the TDSB Director of Education Colleen Russell-Rawlins to speak to us at our May SEAC meeting, and the Chair of the TDSB Rachel Chernos Lin to speak to us at the June SEAC meeting. The Director of Education has acknowledged our request of her. We have not yet heard if either of them will be able to attend. If those dates don’t work for them, we will do our best to try to get each of them to come later.

It has been several years since the Director of Education has attended a SEAC meeting. It has been about a year and a half since a TDSB Chair did so. The last TDSB Chair, Alexander Brown, was himself a SEAC member and thereby was regularly at SEAC meetings.

* Traditionally, three TDSB trustees serve as members of SEAC. Other trustees have always been welcome to attend our meetings, but others rarely come. We would like as many trustees as possible to come, meet us, and join in our discussions. We are therefore going to invite other trustees, three at a time, to come to our upcoming meetings. We do not know how many will take up this invitation. It will help whenever any additional trustees get a chance to speak with us and to join in our lively and thoughtful discussions and deliberations.

## Major Topic at March 18, 2024 SEAC Meeting

A major agenda item at the March 18, 2024 SEAC meeting will be a report from the K-12 Working Group, which will be included in your meeting materials. This will be a chance to collectively discuss this issue and offer verbal feedback to staff. It is not proposed that a motion be debated and voted on at that meeting.

## 3. SEAC Chair’s February 21, 2024 Letter to TDSB Trustees regarding Its New Policy on Community Advisory Committees

As you know, on February 21, 2024, I wrote the TDSB trustees setting out a series of concerns with TDSB’s proposed new policy or procedure regarding Community Advisory Committees. At our February 2024 SEAC meeting, I had indicated my intention to do so.

On the weekend before that letter went out, I sent SEAC members a draft of my letter, in order to get feedback before finalizing it. I had spent quite some time drafting the letter, after studying the Community Advisory Committee policy and protocols themselves, and all the feedback that SEAC members had early sent via email to TDSB. When composing that letter, I also drew on feedback regarding the TDSB documents that had been shared during earlier meetings and informal discussions where I was present. I tried my best to capture the thrust of the concerns with those TDSB documents of which I was aware.

I had planned to finalize the letter to TDSB trustees on Wednesday, February 20, 2024, and to send it out that day. Time was of the essence, given TDSB’s time lines for these documents.

Out of an abundance of caution, I re-sent my draft letter to all SEAC members on the morning of February 20, 2024, in case there was any feedback. It was only then that I found out that no one had received it when I sent it to SEAC members on the previous weekend. I apologize for that, and have no idea why it never reached you.

That morning, I got around 8 emails from SEAC members who very much supported the draft letter, but also learned that it had not reached anyone when originally sent.

Two members voiced frustration at not having gotten the draft letter sooner. I therefore extended the time by one day to send me feedback.

I again apologize to anyone who could not meet that extended deadline. As always, if you don’t agree with any of the contents of my letter, or if you wish to raise concerns that it does not cover, feel free to send your concerns to TDSB via the always-helpful Lianne Dixon.

## 4. Food At SEAC Meetings

A suggestion has been proposed that TDSB provide food such as sandwiches at SEAC meetings. TDSB has advised me that to do so, the cost would come out of the special education budget. In light of that, it is my view that we should not do so. This is especially so since we have gone on record advocating against TDSB making any cuts to the special education budget. SEAC should lead by example. I would like to avoid taking up any SEAC meeting time on this issue, if possible.