**Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)**

## MINUTES for Monday, December 5, 2016

### SEAC – Representatives and (Alternates) Present:

Association for Bright Children Diana Avon

Autism Society of Ontario – Toronto Lisa Kness

Brain Injury Society of Toronto regrets

Community Living Toronto regrets

Down Syndrome Association of Toronto Richard Carter

Easter Seals Ontario Deborah Fletcher

Epilepsy Toronto Steven Lynette

Learning Disabilities Association Toronto Mark Kovats

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 regrets regrets

TDSB South East Community Diane Montgomery Olga Ingrahm

TDSB South West Community Nora Green Paula Boutis

TDSB Trustees Alexander Brown Pamela Gough regrets

Regrets: Jordan Glass (NW Community), Clovis Grant (Community Living), Trustee Alexandra Lulka, Phillip Sargent (NW Community), Cynthia Springings (Brain Injury Society), Dick Winters (SE Community Alternate)

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

Margo Ratsep, SEAC Liaison

Guest: Manon Gardner, Executive Superintendent, Teaching and Learning, Alternative & International Education

Recorder: Margo Ratsep

MINUTES

## Call to Order

## SEAC Chair David Lepofsky called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and invited SEAC members and staff in attendance to introduce themselves to the guests in the gallery.

## Declaration of Possible Conflicts of Interest

## No conflicts of interest were declared.

## Approval of the Minutes

On motion of Diana Avon, seconded by Richard Carter, the Minutes for Monday, November 7th, 2016 were approved as amended. Amendments included the addition of:

1. a 2nd Post Script to the response under Item 5, SEAC Input 17 indicating that upon reviewing the paper, SEAC representative for the Association for Bright Children, Diana Avon, noted that the research paper only included 2 exceptionalities (Behavioral and Learning Disabilities). It did not include Gifted students, or students with Autism, Developmental Disabilities, Mild Intellectual Disabilities or Physical Disabilities;
2. a statement clarifying that Appendix A is a presentation of recommendations made by Toronto Family Network and received by SEAC, and not recommendations from SEAC, and
3. Trustee Gough as present at the meeting.

Chair Lepofsky announced that the Provincial government is moving forward on developing an Education Accessibility Standard under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. He credited the successful advocacy of the AODA Alliance to much of what SEAC has been doing. He emphasized that everything included in the four previous SEAC motions and the Draft Motion 5 under consideration tonight addresses this, and he credited SEAC with ideas that can be helpful across the province.

Alexander notified SEAC members about an on-line Ministry survey and quoted from the Ministry website about the need for a focus on well-being. The survey is available until January17th on line and members were encouraged to complete it. Visit: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/wellbeing2.html>

David welcomed new SEAC Association member Kim Southern Paulsen, who represents Integration Action for Inclusion in Education and Community. He then invited Executive Superintendent Manon Gardner to address SEAC on the two topics (Items 4 and 5) on the agenda:

**4. What TDSB does to Ensure Its Lesson Plans Include Principles of Universal Design in Learning?**

**and**

**5. TDSB's Efforts to Educate Students in Mainstream Settings about Students with Special Education Needs**

In advance of the meeting, a slide presentation prepared by Executive Superintendent Manon Gardner was distributed to SEAC members. At the meeting, she reviewed the major points in the presentation and responded to SEAC questions and input. Points covered in her review included:

* Curriculum expectations are mandated by the Ministry. The expectations provide input about what the learning expectation looks like and sounds like in the classroom. It is left up to teachers how it is delivered. It can look or sound differently depending on the learning environment and on how teachers deliver the curriculum.
* If 100 teachers are asked about Universal Design for Learning (UDL), some will know what it is, others might have heard mention of it but are still a little unclear, many might not recognize the term. In their classrooms they might be using aspects of it without knowing it. Looking at faculties of education, not many actually teach UDL. The board has not yet presented UDL as mandatory. But this is where we are going.
* This year, with the new “Vision for Learning”, we are asking staff to use a different approach to school improvement and teaching.
* Slide 3 focuses on developing a culture of shared leadership to support student learning. Principals are asked to spend dedicated time and effort in questioning about the learning culture in their school. (I.e. What do we need to put in place so students can learn better?)
* Slide 4 focuses on creating the necessary conditions for a culture of shared leadership, leading to reach all students more effectively. It will require providing workshops and professional learning to help teachers teach the curriculum, share new learning and solve challenging issues.
* Slide 5 outlines specific questions provided for the fall PA Day for principals to use in meeting with their staff, in a focused look at equity, to identify who in each school is not learning and why.
* The province provides the curriculum expectations, not the how to teach it. The questions on slides 7 and 8, listed under categories Content, Access, Climate and Pedagogy, are designed to require staff to look at how the curriculum is taught.
* This kind of cultural change takes time and one size does not fit all. Principals are asked to continue to go deeper with this approach at their schools. The intent is to have more common understanding, in that everyone is asking similar questions. The next PA day will continue this conversation so schools can come up with answers – identify bias and focus on equity and student achievement.
* We must ensure teachers are well-equipped. We rely on the professionalism of teachers but must be more intentional. In follow-up to SEAC’s input and conversations with Executive Superintendent Robinson, the plan is to offer professional learning opportunities in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) for teachers and principals, with the objective that they know about UDL and determine how they can implement it better at the school level.

Uton Robinson responded to the Item 5 question about strategies used to educate students *without* special education needs, about students *with* special education needs. There is no formalized curriculum or program to do this – it is mostly arranged by school principals and individual teachers. A number of ways are used in which students can interact and develop better understanding, at times through planned activities. Close proximity among students with and without disabilities provides the best opportunity, since students are most receptive based on curiosity and interests. Parents come in and share with a class or entire school around a situation or how special needs of their child are being met. The Community Living program “*Spinclusion”* is also used in schools.

The Chair opened the floor to discussion and questions.

**SEAC Input 1:** Regarding creating the right environment in the schools – is it possible to know what has happened between principals and teachers to create that environment? How does teaching the curriculum align with creative thinking? How are teachers helped to discover their own biases?

Response: Learning and performing are complimentary but students can learn and not able to convey that learning. This is why the teacher has to look at other ways students can share learning. We want *learning* environments, not *teaching* environments. We want to learn creatively from each other, not just one-way from the teacher. We are working at creating the conditions to achieve this – we don’t dictate, but give principals a series of different activities to have teachers address the questions they need to answer to get there. Principals use the questions differently and get at the content differently, including about biases. We do not give specific training to identify biases.

**SEAC Input 2:** Regarding Universal Design for Learning (UDL), SEAC wants to hear that focused training in UDL is provided.

**SEAC Input 3:** UDL is ideal. How do you roll it out in a classroom with a mix of students with Autism, Giftedness and other exceptionalities, in a single classroom.

Response: Teaching and Learning is working closely with special education colleagues to identify learning styles and put together specific workshops for staff. But we must first develop common understanding of UDL. We will work closely with Uton and special education staff and have job embedded learning.

**SEAC Input 4:** How are the results of the P. A. Day with teachers captured? I believe it would indicate the level at which teachers in the current environment can understand the questions and do something about what we are asking of them. On the topic of bias, what does “well-being” mean, how is it measured? When will the children be asked, “How do you feel about your teacher and how does your teacher make you feel?” To address bias, there must be psychological testing, part of which is bias testing. A special education teacher once commented on how more able students are leaving the class, saying “We are being left with the lowest of the low.” That teacher would not self-identify a bias. Unless work is done, the talk about bias is irrelevant. What will we do when we identify teachers with a bias?

Response: Results are captured in a variety of ways – notes taken, audio/video taping – information shared with school superintendents. Principals are asked to identify a school’s top three needs and where they need assistance in moving forward. Principals plan professional learning for meeting the identified needs of the school – some training, some enquiry, some workshop, some school talks, etc. When talking about well-being, we are also talking about *wanting* to be in school…how a student feels about the teacher and learning environment. This brings in such things as mindfulness and dealing with mental health. I have noted the comments on bias to take back.

**SEAC Input 5:** The majority of people in the room have a child in an intensive support program (ISP). How do we create inclusion and give children the learning inclusion environment we want when they are in ISPs. How do we bring UDL and inclusion together? Inclusion and UDL should go hand in hand.

Response: Inclusion and UDL do go hand in hand, but we are not there yet. We have a lot of work to do. The key is awareness – bringing and supporting UDL, providing our staff with the necessary tools and at the same time helping them see that with UDL everyone is learning. We have to teach, model and identify teachers who are successful at it. Inclusion and UDL go hand in hand but we must ensure that it is seen as a good framework for teaching and learning.

**SEAC Input 6:** Thank you for mentioning that we need awareness first, that we are not there yet but hoping we can do more. We invite you to share what SEAC members can do to help in the different communities. On the topic of Ministry curriculum and specifically regarding Locally Developed Courses, these are not available in proportion to courses for Applied and Academic pathways. Students must fit into what is available at their school rather than having real choice. They need more. Regarding non-credit courses, the employability skills certificate is not being recognized.

Response: We are carrying out a review of secondary programs. We want to ensure all secondary schools offer all pathways and the courses that are needed. The Integrated Equity Framework Action Plan addresses this. We need to identify what students want and need, so we are doing a 3 year study, extending to grade 7 and addressing all pathways. I have noted the comments about the certificate to take back.

**SEAC Input 7:** When do you see UDL implemented – how long is this to take? Use of differentiated assessment methods is a huge issue – how do you see that fitting in?

Response: We haven’t discussed this or established a timeline. Assessment and evaluation is a big component – good teaching and learning goes beyond paper and pen. In good teaching teachers have different tools and exemplars to use – different culminating activities, role playing, etc. We constantly provide professional learning on assessment and evaluation.

**SEAC Input 8:** Thank you for mentioning if students are not performing then evaluation should change so student can demonstrate learning. It relates to UDL and different learning styles. Teachers need to know they will be supported to do this, but there has to be accountability too and this includes evaluating the staff. Bias is a really big deal and addressing it cannot be a random, principal-based decision. Many teachers may not recognize or admit it or may be reluctant to address it. How will you tell whether teachers are succeeding, or need help? If the Director wants a vision implemented, it must be implemented in a controlled way – “These are the workshops. This is how they are to be done.” etc. Specific direction must come from the Director and superintendents. Are you telling staff what to do – this vision… this mandate – to move it through the system?

Response: To build leadership capacity, we are planning professional learning for all principals, 5 to 6 mandatory workshops to cover information they must know about and including the same kind of professional learning we expect to move into schools. They may then pick and choose the improvement focus for their own schools.

**SEAC Input 9:** There must be a portion of P D Days dedicated to special education because in the next 3 years these kids will be in the schools. Kids with learning disabilities are underperforming but shouldn’t be and are in the forefront with the Ministry rolling out the Math Strategy.

Response: The Ministry determines the list of the P A Days every year. Only two are set aside for professional development. There is one Federation Day owned by the unions. This year February 17th is one of the two days offering workshops to the entire board. The other has already taken place.

**SEAC Input 10:** One of every 6 kids in TDSB is recognized as having special education needs and an additional number who aren’t included because their needs are not recognized by the Ministry – as many as 46 000 kids. Half are in a segregated setting for more than half the day, where the provincial average is 15%. With regards to mobility disabilities, the majority of schools are not accessible. There is no plan that digital technology is fully accessed in the classroom. Teachers are not trained to work and meet special education needs. We express gratitude for the honest way in which you admit we aren’t where we should be. It is a practical matter that teachers are not yet ready to teach these kids in the mainstream. It’s not just raising awareness. It requires concrete and enforceable and monitored action – a comprehensive, detailed plan to make significant change. Teachers must learn to teach everybody. Until we get that kind of change, we have to challenge that more is needed and efforts must be more systematic. For example, comparing to another jurisdiction like New York, is there anyone in the TDSB whose job focuses just on accessibility of the curriculum in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM)? Who decides what materials or resources are used and how lessons are to be taught?

Response: The Ministry has a list of approved textbooks that boards are permitted to choose from, but does not dictate which must be used. E-books are not on that list. The board provides guidelines for making selections from the list, looking also at economics. Every year, teachers review the list, recognizing there is a substantial cost to purchasing new books. Elementary grades use fewer hard copies than do secondary. Boards have to pay a different fee to buy e-books. We are going with e books more but still have to vet them and address cost factors. Texts must be reflective of all students and offer more than one way of addressing the curriculum. Curriculum is composed of a variety of materials and teachers have a choice, but sometimes have to get used to a new way of teaching. Part of the seven components of the Integrated Equity Framework Action Plan relates to hiring policies. We need to be able to interview teachers and ask about UDL, of everyone. Down the road it will be an expectation.

The Chair called an end to discussion and thanked Manon on behalf of everyone for the details she had provided. He emphasized SEAC’s message that a concrete plan needs to be developed. In the interest of time, he directed SEAC members to Item 8.

**6. Gathering input for the Spring Parents as Partners Conference**

This item was not covered.

**7. Gathering Input for the TDSB Census**

This item was not covered.

**8. Brainstorming on Preliminary Draft of Motion #5: Gathering SEAC Input: TDSB Integrated Equity Framework Action Plan and TDSB 2016 Special Education Plan**

The Chair spoke briefly to the motion he had distributed to members in advance of the meeting. He introduced the Motion as a springboard for brainstorming. He explained he had tried to capture the ideas SEAC had talked about to make the classroom a barrier free one for students with special education needs. He indicated he would collect input and come back with a revised motion and invited comment.

**SEAC Input 1:** A Royal Commission on Learning stated that acceleration should be an option for gifted students. This is especially so when there are no other options. For some children, the mainstream is where they want to be rather than in a congregated setting. Also, I strongly believe we cannot have inclusion and Learning for All without teacher training.

**SEAC Input 2:** In terms of the strategy and what it can include under point 4, I have never encountered attitudinal barriers on behalf of other students – but have in both teachers and principals. A barrier to inclusion under point 4 is teacher bias. It is not a training issue. When you want to change performance of teachers, training is the tip of the iceberg, but true change happens below the surface from performance management. There is no accountability for teachers or principals in this regard. We have heard that a variety of tools for assessing learning have been out there with training provided and teachers have the option of whether or not to use them. Some teachers are fantastic. Others must be thought of as the product of their own schooling and have a narrow focus – naïve and immature in their approach with a distinct lack of professionalism, transferred up the line. There are also leadership competency gaps. Principals are teachers who take some additional courses. In every organization, there is some kind of screening. Anyone can become a teacher – you just go to teacher’s college and there is no psychological or personality screening. There are teachers not mentally or emotionally healthy. The only way to assess effectiveness is to ask the students and the parents. We cannot allow teachers to choose whether or not to use UDL or allow their biases or personality defects to get in the way. This is the barrier for inclusion.

**SEAC Input 3:** For students who are Gifted or with Learning Disabilities, etc. there is an option of repeating a grade if desired. Differentiated assessment should be mandatory, especially for students who are failing. Half of students on an IEP are not identified – yet they are being given accommodations. For inclusion, when looking at ways to support students, make other kinds of tools and resources available for everyone to use.

**SEAC Input 4:** Principals should be required to know about special education and this requirement should be included in the promotion process.

**SEAC Input 5:** Regarding the wording of point 5 – we need to eliminate the isolation of special education at TDSB. Also, there is mixed use of term “disabilities” and “special education needs”. We need a definition of disabilities. If we expect the board to implement UDL, UDL needs to be embedded in the document. SEAC could recommend that any materials purchased by the board have elements of UDL in them.

The Chair clarified that the definition of disability used in the motion is the same as that used by the Human Rights Commission and AODA, covered by the “duty to accommodate” language of the Human Rights Code, rather than the Education Act definition of “special education exceptionality”. For example, while Giftedness is included as an exceptionality in the Education Act, it is not a disability according to the HRC. However, there are gifted students who have other exceptionalities (learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, physical disabilities etc.) that would be considered disabilities under the Code.

**SEAC Input 6:** A question was raised regarding the implications for services for students who are not formally identified by IPRC as exceptional but have an individual education plan (IEP). Uton Robinson clarified that through the school support team processes, staff makes recommendation for the kinds of support needed, including for an IEP, to ensure the needs of a student are accommodated. In many cases, parents make the decision to go forward to IPRC.

**SEAC Input 7:** A community member asked about addressing transportation issues, such as from school to Variety Village, where the student was denied transportation because Wheel Trans did not cover ASD.

**SEAC Input 8:** At a recent conference, conversation was about the exceptional students in the regular classroom and the questions from participants were all about *how to do it better*. We are so far behind. There are a number of boards that use inclusive practices on a day to day basis (Avon Maitland, Limestone, Upper Canada). As an example, in one board “Learning for All” teachers go from class to class, coaching teachers on how to be inclusive. Here, a student is painted negatively with a safety plan and an SNA is provided but not trained to assist educationally in the classroom. We need better academic support in regular classrooms. Instead, we have a number of support staff that are creating learned helplessness in the students they support. Another concern is around Kindergarten entry and use of the Special Education Program Recommendation Committee (SEPRC) process. For families that have refused a SEPRC, families are told, “… too bad – you didn’t take the placement.” There is more will or positive attitude to support the needs of IPRC’d students than for students who are not identified.

**SEAC Input 9:** TDSB should contact other more inclusive boards and explore how they are doing it. For example, what is the level of staff support in integrated mainstream programs versus congregated special education classes? How can SEAC make that recommendation as concrete as possible?

**SEAC Input 10:** If this motion is our recommendation to the board, I get concerned about the extent of change being requested with no timeline. I worry about the volume of this one motion. If I were a trustee receiving these SEAC motions, I’m not sure how I could direct staff. I would have no idea what we would be asking them to change.

Trustee Brown responded that the first 4 SEAC motions were brought to PSSC and were sent automatically to the director for a report back, because people didn’t understand what was in it. There was not a lot of focus – trustees need to do a better job. The report may bring back recommendations that are more specific.

**SEAC Input 11:** What is the justification for SEPRC?

Due to lack of time, the Chair invited Executive Superintendent Robinson to respond to this question at the January meeting.

**9. Association Announcements**

## Steven Lynette reported that Epilepsy Toronto is having a new kind of fundraiser this year at Nathan Phillips Square – a European Christmas – running from December 8 to 23rd, with shopping, skating, food, etc.

## 10. Other Business

Jean Paul Ngana asked that trustee and staff reports could be brought back bring this back as standing items on the agenda, so there is an opportunity for SEAC to ask questions and capture the dialogue as a whole rather than just through e-mails.

The SEAC Liaison drew attention to a draft calendar of meetings placed in SEAC member folders, for consideration and decision at the January meeting.

**11. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 9:10

Next Meeting: Monday, January 16, 2016 (SEAC Organizational meeting)