**Report to Toronto District School Board Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)**

from SEAC Chair David Lepofsky for the November 7, 2016 TDSB SEAC Meeting

Date: November 2, 2016

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

Chair

Toronto District School Board Special Education Advisory Committee

## 1. Getting Your Input on Ways to Improve Inclusion for Students with Special Education Needs at TDSB

The majority of the time at our upcoming November 7, 2017 meeting will be spent gathering ideas on what we might recommend to TDSB as concrete strategies for improving the extent and experience of inclusion for students with special education needs at TDSB. Bring your ideas and be ready to brainstorm. Be ready to share stories, good and bad, on which we can build.

To help us with pooling ideas, we will have a presentation by the Toronto Family Network, in which they will share their ideas on how inclusion can be improved at TDSB. This all will be very timely for our providing input to the TDSB's new Integrated Equity Plan, which places a specific priority on inclusion for students with special education needs.

At the same time, we will also invite your feedback on any items you want us to include in our submission to TDSB on its proposed Special Education Plan for 2016.

## 2. Heads Up for Our December 2017 Meeting

I have shared with Executive Superintendent Uton Robinson that we would like TDSB to fill in more concrete details on what TDSB is doing to embed Universal Design in Learning on the front lines in the classroom at TDSB. To that end, I have asked that Manon Gardner, Executive Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, speak to us about the 7 questions set out in my SEAC Chair's report for our October 24, 2016 meeting. I have emphasized that the information TDSB staff have provided to date on this tends to be at a very high, general or aspirational level. We want to know what exactly is going on, on the front lines, not just what TDSB wants to be going on, on the front lines.

I was told that Manon Gardner is not available between 7 and 9 pm on November 7, 2016, so I have asked if she could make herself available at our December 2016 meeting.

In addition to the 7 questions set out in my SEAC Chair's October 2016 report, I have asked for specifics on what TDSB is doing to overcome the barriers that some students with special education needs can experience in the important area of STEM learning (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). The Ontario Government has made improved math performance a priority. What is TDSB doing to address the added accessibility barriers that students with special education needs can experience in this area? Are new math teaching coaches hired on the basis that this is part of their expertise? What is happening on the front lines and at head office?

If Uton has any preliminary information to share with us either before or during our November 7, 2016 meeting that will help with this, we always welcome it in advance of any presentation or report by Manon Gardner and her staff.

You will shortly find on our website that I had my October 2016 Chair's report corrected. Where TDSB staff plugged in TDSB's answers to our 7 questions, those were not my words. Therefore they are now removed from the report. Only the questions remain. A separate document will be posted on our website showing TDSB's answers. I don't imply there was anything wrong done here. I merely asked for this as a clarification.

## 3. The Call for the Ontario Government to Create an Education Accessibility Standard under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

At our October SEAC meeting, I briefed you on the non-partisan campaign that has been underway for over five years to get the Ontario Government to create an Education Accessibility Standard under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act to give school boards, colleges and universities direction on what needs to be done to address recurring accessibility barriers in our education system. I noted that our work at SEAC is helping inform this campaign, by showing where recurring accessibility barriers exist and by highlighting ideas for solutions. Our four motions for special education reform, passed last June, are a great example of this.

Just to bring you up to date, the topic of the proposal for an Education Accessibility Standard came up on the floor of the Ontario Legislature on Monday, October 31, 2016, during Question Period. It was raised by Ontario Conservative MPP Bill Walker. For your information, here is the exchange:

**Ontario Hansard Monday, October 31, 2016**

**Question Period –** Accessibility for the Disabled

**Mr. Bill Walker:** My question is to the Premier. Thirteen years ago, the Ontario Human Rights Commission’s ground-breaking report showed that students with disabilities face far too many unfair barriers in our society. Sadly, as a result, people with disabilities face very high unemployment rates that former Lieutenant Governor, David Onley, your accessibility adviser, calls “a national shame.”

There are 334,000 students with special education needs in Ontario-funded schools, one of every six students. This government has no comprehensive plan to ensure that our education system will become fully accessible by 2025, as the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act requires. The AODA Alliance has pressed you for over half a decade to agree to develop an education accessibility standard under the AODA to tackle these barriers. It’s a great idea. Will you agree now to do this?

**Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:** I know the Minister of Education is going to want to comment, but I want to tell the member opposite that I had the opportunity to meet with David Lepofsky, actually, and with the minister responsible for people with disabilities. We had a very good conversation about the education standard.

As the member will know—or may not know—there is a health standard that is being developed right now. That was one of the things that the AODA had been advocating up until this time. As I say, we had a very good conversation about the education standard.

I know that the Minister of Education and the minister responsible for people with disabilities are having a conversation about how we might move forward with that. I appreciate the question from the member opposite.

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Supplementary?

**Mr. Bill Walker:** Back to the Premier: You’ve been having lots of conversations but there’s still a lot that needs to be done. Ontario is not on schedule for full accessibility by 2025, the deadline this Legislature set.

The Toronto Star recently reported that new accessibility barriers are still being built in new buildings in Ontario, including on university campuses. The renovated Osgoode Hall Law School is much harder for a blind person to get around than it was before it was renovated. The new Ryerson Student Learning Centre has a student area that requires students with disabilities to climb steps they can’t climb. This violates the Premier’s promise that public money would never be used to create new barriers against people with disabilities. Recent Ontario Building Code changes don’t solve this problem.

Will this government agree that Ontarians with disabilities need an educational accessibility standard to do what the Premier’s throne speech promised: to build up Ontario for all Ontarians?

**Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne:** Minister responsible for accessibility.

**Hon. Tracy MacCharles:** I want to thank the member for the question. You know, I’m pretty proud to be the first Ontario minister responsible for accessibility in this province.

It’s very important to remember that Ontario is a leader in accessibility. Ontario was the first to move to a modern regulatory regime that mandates accessibility reporting, the first that requires staff to be actually trained in accessibility, and the first in Canada with legislation that sets out clear goals for accessibility by 2025. That’s in all aspects of daily living, whether it’s transportation, whether it’s employment, whether it’s our buildings and our built environment, whether it’s the information and communication systems we use. It’s important that everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential and that barriers be removed for persons with disabilities so they, too, can have full participation in our daily—

**The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):** Thank you. New question?

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## 4. The Spring 2017 TDSB Parents as Partners Conference

I recently learned that planning is already underway for the spring 2017 TDSB Parents as Partners Conference. I am eager to open up a discussion on ideas for this. Time permitting, we may discuss this at the November 7, 2016 meeting. In any event, if you have any ideas, please share them on this list so our SEAC reps can bring them forward.

For my part, I start our discussion with these suggestions:

1. We should ensure that at the conference we get to share with all attendees through a presentation to all about the motions for special education reform that SEAC has presented, both the four from last June and any others we develop now. This would be a great way to get feedback and support from all present at the conference. This should not be done by simply having a pile of our motions on hand for people to pick up. It should include an oral presentation to the entire audience of attendees.

2. As a broader matter, we should have built in to all workshops wherever possible a chance to get input from attendees on special education generally, and on the educational experience at TDSB of students with special education needs, whether in mainstream or segregated settings.

3. We should use this conference as a platform to encourage everyone to complete our SEAC parents' survey which is about to go live very soon. Another huge thanks to Paula Boutis for steering this project.

4. It would be great if at least some of the workshops can be organized under the themes that SEAC's reform motions have identified.

5. I encourage the organizers to reduce the amount of time where a single speaker talks to the whole audience and increase the time for workshops. Some of the large group presentations last spring were not centrally important to the attendees, and I fear we can lose our audience.

## 5. Streaming SEAC Meetings Online

Because there was a general interest in our exploring this, Trustee Brown and I have agreed to explore the possibility of testing this out at one meeting. Trustee Brown will explore setting up live streaming of our February 2017 meeting, after which we can consider whether we want to expand on it. I would propose that if anyone wants to discuss an item on the agenda at that meeting without the cameras on, they should simply ask and we will honour that request.

## 6. Member Association Announcements

Back by popular demand, we will put this on the agenda at our November 7, 2016 meeting and see how it goes. It will come at the end of the meeting, so plan to make your announcements zingy and punchy. I recommend that you circulate any in advance via email, so I can include them in my Chair's report or otherwise get them posted on line. They will then reach a larger audience. That also ensures we get the word out even if the meeting runs overtime and we don't have enough time for these association announcements

## 7. Trustee Report

SEAC vice-chair Trustee Alexander Brown has agreed to soon start circulating a trustee's update in advance of our meetings, which can be shared on our website with the public.

## 8. Future SEAC Meeting Agenda Items

As I have emphasized over the past months, I am trying as your Chair to ensure that our meetings make the best use of your time which you so generously make available to SEAC. If you have ideas of items you want raised, please share them with me in person, by phone or by email any time. I juggle many issues that compete for our attention. When I learn of a topic that someone is interested in, I explore with them whether this is better dealt with as a meeting agenda item, or by other strategies e.g. getting a report from TDSB, setting up a short-term working group.

I aim to make sure that we can address each issue you want addressed, whether at a meeting or through other avenues, while making the best use of the time of all of you on SEAC.

So please feel free to contact me any time if there is something you think is important and I will work on how best for us to plug it into our shared work. Raising ideas with me during the month between each of our meetings gives me a good chance to try to address it. If an idea is raised at a SEAC meeting, I will typically note it for follow-up after, but won't be able to address it on the spot.