

**Special Education Advisory Committee**

**SEAC**

**Annual Report – 2016-2017**

**SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SEAC)**

**ANNUAL REPORT 2016-2017**

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# SEAC MANDATE

[**Regulation 464/97**](https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/970464) of the Education Act establishes the SEAC as a statutory committee that advises the Board on matters relating to special education and sets out its structure and mandate.

Under Regulation 464/97, SEAC**:**

* May make recommendations to the district school board or school authority respecting matters affecting the establishment, development, and delivery of special education programs and services for exceptional pupils of the board.
* Is provided with opportunity to participate in the annual review of the board's Special Education Plan
* Participates in the board's annual budget process as it relates to special education.
* Reviews the financial statements of the board as they relate to special education.

The members of SEAC represent all students with special education needs who attend schools in the Toronto District School Board.

# 2016 - 2017 MEETING DATES AND TIMES

Over the past school year, SEAC met ten times (as listed below). Meetings were open to the public and were usually held at the Board Office, 5050 Yonge Street in the board room from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Meeting Minutes and all related documentation are posted on the [SEAC pages](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Community/HowtoGetInvolved/CommunityAdvisoryCommittees/SpecialEducationAdvisoryCommittee.aspx) of the TDSB website at [www.tdsb.on.ca/seac](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/seac). This year’s meeting dates were:

Monday, September 12 Monday, February 6

Monday, October 24 Monday, March 20

Monday, November 7 Tuesday, April 3

Monday, December 5 Monday, May 1

Monday, January 16 Monday, June 5

# SEAC MEMBERSHIP

The Committee currently consists of 11 local Association Representatives and 7 Alternates, as well as 8 Community Representatives and 4 Alternates from four geographic regions of the TDSB. Legislation requires that all SEAC representatives must be qualified to vote for the TDSB Board of Trustees (i.e. be a Canadian citizen over the age of 18 and resident in the jurisdiction) and not be employed by the TDSB. Three trustees join the committee each year, one of whom assisted the committee this year as Vice Chair (by SEAC vote). Several alternate representatives for associations and communities attended regularly and participated in discussions at meetings, but did not vote unless substituting for the official representative.

## 2016-2017 SEAC REPRESENTATIVES AND (ALTERNATES)

**MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS**

Association for Bright Children (ABC) Diana Avon (Melissa Rosen)

Autism Society of Ontario – Toronto Lisa Kness (Ginny Pearce)

Brain Injury Society of Toronto (BIST) Cynthia Sprigings (Melissa Vigar)

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 (vacancy)

Integrated Action for Inclusion (IAI) Kim Southern-Paulsen (vacancy)

Learning Disabilities Association Toronto Mark Kovats (vacancy)

VIEWS for the Visually Impaired David Lepofsky *(Chair)* (vacancy)

VOICE for Hearing Impaired Children Paul Cross (Rosary Kwak)

(One Association Vacancy)

**COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES**

TDSB North East Community Jean Paul Ngana (Nominee to be confirmed)

Aline Chan (vacancy)

TDSB North West Community Phillip Sargent (Valerie Gonzalez-Chavez)

Jordan Glass (Nominee to be confirmed)

TDSB South East Community Diane Montgomery (Dick Winters)

Olga Ingrahm (vacancy)

TDSB South West Community Nora Green (Ken Stein)

Paula Boutis (Colin Ballosingh)

**TRUSTEE REPRESENTATIVES**

WARD 3 Pamela Gough

WARD 5 Alexandra Lulka

WARD 12 Alexander Brown *(Vice Chair)*

## 2016-2017 CHANGES TO SEAC MEMBERSHIP

SEAC welcomed Integration Action for Inclusion as a member association. There were motions to the board to appoint new members as Community Alternate Representatives (1 for NE and 2 for NW) and Association Alternate Representatives (VOICE, ABC, BIST, IAI). For September there continues to be one Association vacancy and 6 Alternate Representative vacancies to be filled. The names of the Representative and Alternate for Community Living will also change following resignations in June.

# SEAC Accomplishments for 2016-2017

REPORT OF THE TDSB SEAC CHAIR David Lepofsky, CM, O.Ont.

Starting in the latter half of 2015, TDSB's Special Education Advisory Committee has been embarking on a major top-to-bottom review of TDSB's delivery of education to students with special education needs. We opted on our own initiative to undertake this.

We first established a Priorities Working Group in mid-2015, which I had the privilege of chairing. With input from all SEAC members, it prepared a Statement of SEAC Priorities and an Action Plan to act on those priorities. SEAC approved both in the 2015 fall.

Our stated priorities and action plan have guided our work over the past 18 months. As chair of SEAC since January 2016, I have worked with my colleagues on SEAC, with TDSB staff and with community voices and input, to focus our discussions. As a result, we have passed a series of reform motions over the past year. Listed below, these set out a quite comprehensive blueprint for reform at TDSB. TDSB has indicated an intent to act on some of our recommendations. Others are under study at TDSB.

We obtained staff input as we discussed and refined the wording of our reform recommendations.

In one case, Recommendation 7 of our Motion #5 (passed at our April 2017 SEAC meeting), we subsequently obtained input from parents of students at one TDSB congregated site which led SEAC members to agree to review and reconsider what we earlier had recommended. That review will take place by SEAC after the summer.

In substance, we have found that the delivery of education at TDSB to students with special education needs is in need of significant reform. This bears on the needs of some 46,000 students with special education needs, or one out of every six students at TDSB. At present, TDSB has a rate of placing students with special education needs in special education classes rather than regular classes for more than half of each school day that is more than triple the rate of publicly-funded school boards across Ontario.

As well, through discussions at SEAC meetings, we have learned that there is a significant issue with the use at TDSB of the power under Ontario's Education Act to "refuse to admit" a student. ARCH Disability Law Centre reported in a presentation to SEAC that at TDSB and other school boards, this is a clear special education or disability-related issue.

TDSB has told SEAC that it has no written policy on the use of this authority, and has not been centrally tracking how often, or when or why it is exercised to send a student home. As a result of SEAC's raising this issue, TDSB has in the past few weeks been working on a procedure for the use of this authority. SEAC has been consulted on drafts of this procedure at our May and June 2013 meetings, and will be eager to be consulted on any policy or procedures as they are being developed.

SEAC welcomes the input from staff as it works through its recommendations, and will welcome the opportunity to work with TDSB staff on the implementation of any of SEAC's recommendations that TDSB opts to accept. SEAC's efforts will also help the Ontario Government as it works on developing the Education Accessibility Standard which it has promised to enact under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

SEAC has also formally and informally expressed to TDSB a desire to be fully consulted on the TDSB budget as it bears on students with special education needs, before the budget is adopted. To date, this required consultation process has not been sufficient or timely. SEAC will be exploring ways to have effective and timely input into the budget process.

## INPUT INTO THE TDSB SPECIAL EDUCATION PLAN

SEAC’s mandate is to participate in the annual review of the Special Education Plan and the annual budget process. At its monthly meetings, SEAC provides input into board plans for how it will deliver Special Education programs and services and can make recommendations respecting the establishment, development, and delivery of special education programs and services. This year SEAC provided general input directly to department staff and also passed formal motions to the board. Meetings at which topics were discussed and motions passed are listed below. For more detailed information about the kinds of general input provided at meetings, please refer to the individual [Meeting Minutes](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Community/HowtoGetInvolved/CommunityAdvisoryCommittees/SpecialEducationAdvisoryCommittee.aspx) and formal motions/[Recommendations](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Community/HowtoGetInvolved/CommunityAdvisoryCommittees/SpecialEducationAdvisoryCommittee/Recommendations.aspx) found on the SEAC pages of the TDSB website at [www.tdsb.on.ca/seac](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/seac).

Topics included:

* Universal Design for Learning (September; October)
* Inclusion (November, December, January, February, March, April, May) – [April 3 2017 Motion 5](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Community/HowtoGetInvolved/CommunityAdvisoryCommittees/SpecialEducationAdvisoryCommittee/Recommendations.aspx)
* Bus Transportation of Students – [September 12, 2016 Motion](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Community/HowtoGetInvolved/CommunityAdvisoryCommittees/SpecialEducationAdvisoryCommittee/Recommendations.aspx)
* Integrated Equity Framework Action Plan (September)
* Smoothing Dealings with TDSB – [January 16, 2017 Motion](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Community/HowtoGetInvolved/CommunityAdvisoryCommittees/SpecialEducationAdvisoryCommittee/Recommendations.aspx)
* Special Education Plan (September, October)
* Exclusion of Students by Refusal to Admit (February, May, June) – [May 1, 2017 Draft Motion 6](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Community/HowtoGetInvolved/CommunityAdvisoryCommittees/SpecialEducationAdvisoryCommittee/Recommendations.aspx)
* SEPRC (June)
* Special Education Budget – [October 24, 2016 Motion](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Community/HowtoGetInvolved/CommunityAdvisoryCommittees/SpecialEducationAdvisoryCommittee/Recommendations.aspx)
* Educating Mainstream Students about Students with Special Education Needs (December)
* SEAC Parent Survey (May)
* Home School Program (HSP) (May)

## SEAC RECOMMENDATIONS (MOTIONS) TO THE BOARD

This year, five major motions were passed as multi-component recommendations to the board. The major motions contained a number of components, each with related additional steps that SEAC recommended for TDSB to take. A synopsis of this year’s motions and their main components is provided below. For the full text of each major motion, including the background for the motion, the components of the motion and the additional steps recommended to support each component, see SEAC [Recommendations](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Community/HowtoGetInvolved/CommunityAdvisoryCommittees/SpecialEducationAdvisoryCommittee/Recommendations.aspx). All SEAC motions are listed by date on the SEAC Recommendations page of the TDSB website at [www.tdsb.on.ca/seac](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/seac).

### September 2016: Bus Transportation

This motion addressed issues around bus transportation encountered in September 2016, particularly as they applied to exceptional students. It recommended

1. *Including and consulting SEAC on any inquiry into and discussion of the current problems with TDSB bus transportation services*
2. *Including SEAC Chair on any committee to review or discuss TDSB bus transportation problems*

### October 2016: Special Education Budget

This motion speaks to the need for SEAC to have the same information that trustees receive, in order to understand the impact of budget decisions on program/policy decision-making, and know how TDSB is using resources to focus on students in the classroom, (for improved advocacy beyond addressing basic needs into the area of additional needs/wants).

*Whereas the TDSB is required to consult the Special Education Advisory Committee on its special education budget, SEAC recommends that TDSB appoint SEAC member [a SEAC representative] to the SEAC Trustees' Budget Committee, with voting privileges if possible, and if not possible, then without voting privileges.*

### January 2017: Motion on Smoothing Dealings with the TDSB

This motion speaks to ensuring more effective and timely consultation with SEAC. Motion components include:

1. *Facilitating more rapid and direct distribution of SEAC recommendations to all Trustees*
2. *Facilitating the SEAC chair’s ability to speak directly to the board about SEAC motions*
3. *Advance notification to SEAC about board decisions affecting SEAC or its mandate*
4. *Direct communication by trustees of any of their concerns relating to SEAC*
5. *More rapid response by the board to SEAC recommendations*

### April 2017: Motion # 5 – The Effective Inclusion of Students with Special Education Needs in TDSB

This motion, containing 20 component parts (listed below) speaks to what SEAC believes TDSB needs to address as part of its inclusion strategy. The full text (available under [Recommendations](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/Community/HowtoGetInvolved/CommunityAdvisoryCommittees/SpecialEducationAdvisoryCommittee/Recommendations.aspx) on the SEAC webpages of the TDSB website) provides additional recommended steps for TDSB to take to achieve each part of the motion.The motion includes the following components:

1. *Adopting an Effective Definition of "Inclusion"*
2. *A comprehensive Inclusion Strategy, not excluding students with any kind of disabilities*
3. *Wording for this recommendation is under review by SEAC*
4. *TDSB creating a major organizational change transition plan*
5. *Identifying accessibility barriers and developing a comprehensive action plan and timelines for barrier removal and prevention*
6. *Renaming and re-defining misnamed intensive support programs*
7. *Regarding congregated schools (This recommendation is re-opened for further discussion in the 2017 fall.)*
8. *Implementing strategies to reduce the shuffling of students with special education needs from school to school over their TDSB years*
9. *Ensuring Universal Design in Learning is used in classrooms across TDSB*
10. *Tearing down counterproductive TDSB senior management silos*
11. *Tearing down attitudinal barriers against students with disabilities*
12. *Removing barriers to participation in experiential learning*
13. *Ensuring French Immersion and other specialized programs are barrier-free for students with disabilities*

1. *Ensuring student testing/assessment is free of disability barriers*
2. *Ensuring students with disabilities can bring service animals to school*
3. *Ensuring accessibility of instructional materials that students with disabilities use*
4. *Ensuring accessibility of gym, playground and like equipment*
5. *Finding out what has worked on inclusion at TDSB and elsewhere*
6. *Establishing a TDSB Chief Accessibility/Inclusion Officer*
7. *Regularly reporting to the TDSB Board, to SEAC and to the public on plans and progress*

## OTHER SEAC INPUT INTO THE 2017 TDSB SPECIAL EDUCATION PLAN

While all of the SEAC motions are received as input to the Special Education Plan, discussion during the SEAC meetings also provided input of a more general nature about special education program and service delivery. These topics of discussion addressed:

* How to make the information the Plan contains more accessible and user friendly for the public
* Sections of the Plan that require more detail (i.e. SEAC’s Work, Accessibility, Universal Design for Learning, Special Equipment Amount, Alternative Programming, Coordinated Service delivery, Pathways and teaching and support staff numbers by exceptionalities and locations of special education classes)
* What the Plan should include as an “aspirational document”, expressed in terms of what TDSB aims to achieve
* The need for SEAC to reflect the reality of system needs when responding to the Plan (i.e. “Here is what is really necessary.”)
* How SEAC should be consulted more effectively
* The kinds of information and numerical data SEAC needs to understand how the board is moving forward (i.e., numbers of students in regular, HSP, full time special education classes)
* The renaming of intensive support programs so as not to refer to specific disabilities
* How to facilitate the transition of students from special education classes back to regular programs
* Facilitating inclusion through increased and appropriate kinds of support in the neighbourhood
* Protecting parental right to choose the kind of program support wanted for their child
* The need for more support for families during special education processes such as IEP development and IPRC to assist in decision-making
* The need for improved coordination for what is going on to support a student with special education needs
* The need for improved clarity over access to Occupational Therapy/Physiotherapy and Speech-Language services
* The importance of recognizing the impacts of language, poverty, cultural perception, etc. on public understanding of special education – the need to make things more accessible

# **PARENT OUTREACH**

## PARENT SURVEY

In 2015-2016 SEAC obtained board support to survey parents on their concerns about special education. The survey was made available throughout the 2016-2017 school year and results were provided in an interim [TDSB SEAC Report](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/seac) at the May 2017 meeting. The interim report is posted on the SEAC pages of the TDSB website at: [www.tdsb.on.ca/seac](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/seac)

## TDSB PARENTS AS PARTNERS CONFERENCE

With funding support from the TDSB and Ministry of Education, SEAC collaborated with several TDSB Community Advisory Committees to plan and deliver a conference “by parents, for parents”. Partners included TDSB advisory committees for Mental Health and Well Being, Parent Involvement, Aboriginal Communities, Model Schools for Inner City, and Equity as well as staff from the departments of Special Education, Professional Support Services, Early Years, Eco-Schools, French as a Second Language and Parent and Community Engagement Office. Of the 60 workshops provided, 23 were on topics related to Special Education. Through this annual conference, SEAC addresses several goals, including to seek greater inclusion for children with special education needs and to empower their parents to become informed, proactive and effective advocates for their children.