**Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)**

## MINUTES (Revised) for Monday, September 12, 2016

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

Association for Bright Children *regrets*

Autism Society of Ontario – Toronto Lisa Kness

Brain Injury Society of Toronto Cynthia Sprigings

Community Living Toronto Clovis Grant

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 Jordan Glass Phillip Sargent

TDSB South East Community Olga Ingrahm (Dick Winters)

TDSB South West Community Nora Green Paula Boutis

TDSB Trustees Alexander Brown

Regrets: Diana Avon (Association for Bright Children); Diane Montgomery (SE Community), Trustee Pamela Gough

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

Bernadette Shaw, Central Coordinating Principal, Teaching and Learning

Margo Ratsep, SEAC Liaison

Recorder: Margo Ratsep

MINUTES

## Call to Order

## SEAC Chair David Lepofsky called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. and invited SEAC members and staff in attendance to introduce themselves to the guests in the gallery. Ward14 Trustee Chris Moise and Ward 5 Trustee Alexandra Lulka were present and introduced themselves.

## Declaration of Possible Conflicts of Interest

## NW Community Representative Phillip Sargent declared a conflict for the item on Transportation, since he is employed by a transportation contractor with the board.

## Approval of the Minutes for Monday, June 13, 2016

On motion of Jordan Glass, the Minutes for Monday, June 13, 2016 were approved as amended.

The Chair and Vice Chair presented brief updates:

Trustee Brown announced that:

* Dr. John Malloy has accepted a contract as Director of Education and Secretary Treasurer for the Toronto District School Board for a term ending in 2021.
* On Wednesday, a motion is being considered at the board to request that the Director present a report at next Finance and Accountability Committee (September 28 at 5:00 p.m.), regarding the current transportation situation including details about what happened and attempts to remediate the situation. Five minute deputations are welcomed and encouraged.

Chair David Lepofsky gave notice that:

* He and Vice Chair Brown are interested in carrying on in their present roles through 2017, and will place their names forward when the SEAC Chair and Vice Chair elections take place in December.
* He has asked Trustee Brown to investigate the possibility of video-streaming or use of apps, to enable sharing of meeting information in a more timely and public format.

# Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

In June, Bernadette Shaw, Central Coordinating Principal, Teaching and Learning, gave a presentation to SEAC on Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and was invited to return for member questions. She gave a brief description of the two concepts and spoke about the progress which TDSB is making. The follow-up Q & A discussion touched on the following points:

1. SEAC Feedback: There is a need for closer collaboration and partnership between the departments of Teaching and Learning and Special Education, for training and coaching school staff at all levels in Differentiated Instruction (DI) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), so that teaching practice in DI and UDL become more widespread than is currently the case.

Staff Response: The reorganization of TDSB into Learning Centres places Teaching and Learning coaches and Special Education consultants in close proximity to each other and facilitates this kind of close collaboration in the planning and delivery of professional learning to staff in schools.

1. SEAC Feedback: Special education teachers have the resources, tools and experience to practice Universal Design for Learning (UDL), however, UDL has to be a skill that every teacher has and this requires a lot of different competencies (most importantly creativity). Currently, not all teachers have the ability to incorporate UDL. It needs modelling, coaching, reinforcement and metrics for accountability. How is progress being measured?

Staff Response: At the Learning Centre level, we have a cadre of Teaching and Learning coaches – professional learning teams who work with teachers in the schools, providing modelling and support. They are currently receiving training in mentoring and coaching, as well as in various aspects of support such as well-being. There are 15 coaches in each of the four Learning Centres. There are also special education consultants and coordinators in the Centres, whose expertise in DI and UDL can be called upon. The coaches and consultants work with the different school superintendents and principals, to assist in schools where teaching and well-being needs are identified.

1. SEAC Feedback: Universal Design for Learning is a concept, also tied to a mindset. The system as a whole is on its way, but is not there yet. There need to be milestones or benchmarks to measure progress.

Staff Response: Data, such as achievement in courses and EQAO, is used to identify where needs exist. However, it is important to note that there are multiple intersections. It’s not just about the classroom. Learning can happen outside the four walls through experiential learning.

1. SEAC Feedback: The TDSB uses “District Reviews” in evaluating program delivery and needs. Does it evaluate the use of Universal Design for Learning? What measures are done and how do schools measure on other expectations? How do we look at culminating activities to measure for a variety of needs? Who is responsible for ensuring program delivery follows TDSB expectations for UDL? It would be helpful to have Teaching & Learning representation at SEAC meetings to share this kind of information.

Staff Response: The Ontario Curriculum expectations are infused with ‘enquiry’ and their curriculum teaching-learning processes are problem-based. The teacher is expected to have an understanding of the strengths and needs of students when evaluating culminating activities. It is the responsibility of the principal to oversee curriculum delivery in the school. Teaching & Learning staff are in place to support principals and their staff. All kinds of professional learning, in and outside the classroom is available to teachers.

1. SEAC Feedback: TDSB has 24000 ipads across the board with accessibility features. How do we make sure teachers know the accessibility features?

Staff Response: Both Special Education and Teaching & Learning teams have sub-groups, providing training on the use of adaptive technology in the classroom.

1. SEAC Feedback: How does TDSB ensure the use of Universal Design for Learning in experiential learning so that students know and can use all the technological features they have access to?

Staff Response: There is always a focus on providing accommodations to students. For example, in “low incidence” programs, experiential learning coaches support the learning of students as they prepare to exit the system. They also ensure accommodations are in place for students with physical disabilities. Co-op/work placements have modifications and training of work supervisors in place, to ensure student needs are met. There are thousands of employers in the experiential learning data base, and all new employers are surveyed for interest in students with special needs.

1. SEAC Feedback: The practice of Universal Design for Learning is uneven for children with special education needs. Many children in full time special education classes do not participate in the same field trips, or the same number of fieldtrips as other children. In experiential learning, employers will not take some students with special education needs due to liability issues. Other problems are caused by transportation that makes students late or leave early and results in excluding the students from experiential learning opportunities.

Staff Response: Cooperative experiential learning is a Student Success strategy. As such, students who are at risk of disengaging, including students in congregated school settings, are frequently targeted. However, safety comes first and self-regulation is an issue. Careful placement around materials and tools is required, with placement based on interest and choice, but also safety. Staff works with students to prepare them for the workplace. For example, before students are placed, such skills as mock interviews, resume development, accessibility needs are addressed first and matches are carefully made.

The Chair concluded discussion with the following points:

1. The definition of UDL which the presenter gave in June appears to have missed a key ingredient relevant to students with disabilities. It involves designing curriculum and lesson plans to ensure that the broadest range of students can in fact learn effectively. This is not a matter of differentiated instruction, but of a mainstream instruction method that is inclusive.
2. The presenter did not provide specific information about how these are operationalized on the front lines in the classroom or to what extent it is happening. SEAC expressed a strong interest in TDSB staff attending a future meeting to provide that information.
3. Since staff responses suggest that these issues are all dealt with on the front lines and SEAC feedback suggests that UDL is not clearly the universal practice, SEAC needs to look further into this.
4. UDL is pivotal to any inclusion strategy. Students with special education needs are more effectively included in the mainstream where there are no learning barriers in the curriculum or teaching methods deployed in the mainstream classroom.

Executive Superintendent Uton Robinson invited SEAC members, especially from the various associations, to provide input on effective applications of Universal Design for Learning for the different exceptionalities they represent, as well as possible experiential learning placements.

The Chair suggested that members send their ideas directly to Uton. He announced that SEAC would address curriculum design and adaptive technology again at a future meeting.

1. **TDSB Transportation Problems**

The Chair asked Executive Superintendent Robinson to update SEAC on the transportation problems experienced in the TDSB last week, recognizing that the request was made at short notice. Uton was able to provide the following information:

* TDSB transports 20,000 students: of those students, 6511 have special education needs, including for giftedness
* As of Friday, the driver shortage still affected 116 special education students and the number is decreasing daily
* A letter was sent from Associate Director, Carla Kisko to affected families explaining the situation and steps being taken
* The board is seeking additional information through a report, as mentioned by Trustee Brown

The Chair drew SEAC’s attention to a motion he had outlined in his September 2016 Supplemental Chair’s Report, a copy of which was in member folders. (NW Community Representative Phillip Sargent removed himself from the room for the discussion and vote.) A friendly amendment was made to remove the word “current” from *“…discuss the current problems…”* in part 2 of the motion:

**\*\*\*Motion**

**On motion of David Lepofsky:**

***Whereas significant problems with TDSB bus transportation services have been reported as of the beginning of school this fall,***

***And whereas students with special education needs are a key population that receive TDSB bus transportation services,***

***And whereas students with special education needs can be in an especially vulnerable position when receiving TDSB bus transportation services:***

***The Special Education Advisory Committee of the Toronto District School Board recommends as follows:***

***1. TDSB staff and trustees should fully include and consult with the Special Education Advisory Committee on any inquiry into and discussion of resolution of the current problems with TDSB bus transportation services, and***

***2. If the Board of the TDSB assigns a committee to review or discuss the problems with TDSB bus transportation services, the chair of the Special Education Advisory Committee of the TDSB should be included as a member of that Committee for purposes of addressing the bus transportation services, as a voting member if permitted, and if not so permitted, then as a member with speaking privileges.***

Discussion followed, resulting in a number of questions that Trustee Brown recorded for board committee consideration:

1. What factors went into the decision-making about which routes were covered and which were not? Was a specific group adversely affected by the driver shortage? For example, were bus routes for students in French Immersion covered because of numbers, versus smaller buses for students in special education programs? Were special education students disadvantaged?
2. Who decided which routes would be covered – the contractor or the board?
3. What are the board’s expectations for contracted transportation services? From personal experience, these kinds of “bumps” in transportation are not new. There should be zero bumps in this kind of service industry. What can the board require in contracts to ensure they don’t happen?
4. Improvement in the problem-solving process is needed, especially around communication. The TDSB experience is that even when transportation issues are known early in the summer, they are not addressed in a timely fashion. There should be communication about problems and solutions found before school starts and this is not the case. For example, an issue was brought to a parent’s attention in July, but no one was available at the school to answer the phone or to address it. Even when the school was called the week before school started, there was no response back and the bus was a no show for the first day. Neither was there a call back during the first week.
5. Changes are often made to transportation without thought to the anxiety it provokes in some highly vulnerable students. For example, while it is recognized that many students with autism require careful transition planning for any kind of routine change, transportation changes happen at the last minute with no opportunity to prepare the student.
6. How many hands does any kind of transportation request have to go through before it gets to a company? Can things be streamlined?
7. There is a sense of apathy, where contractors commit to do what they can do and if they can’t, too bad. Thought must be given to contractors and accountability – like any retail service.
8. In the bidding process, careful consideration must be made of selection criteria, based on safety, training and on what a company can actually provide. The best service isn’t necessarily the cheapest service.

The Chair called the vote. The motion carried unanimously.

1. **SEAC Input into Proposed TDSB Equity Plan Draft**

Executive Superintendent Uton Robinson had provided to members in advance a draft called “Integrated Equity Framework Action Plan for Inclusion and Special Education 2016-2019” and invited SEAC input in consultation on this part of the TDSB Equity Plan. The following input was received:

***Year 1:***

* Agreement that it is important to talk about transition planning (PPM 156), since not sure it is happening as it should
* The phrase “outlining a consultation process” is weak, with no obligation or commitment to take into account what is said

***Year 2:***

* Pleasant surprise was expressed about the goal concerning Home School Program (HSP)
* The “how” is a big deal. Excited to see the existing HSP program gone

***Year 3:***

* Year 3 goal is unclear
* Love year 3 but want to know the details too
* Inclusion initiative of a few years ago is not in this document (i.e. goal-setting on how to get kids currently in full time special education class back to the mainstream program).
* In Learning for All and with regards to transitions from school to work, segregation in full time special education classes is contrary to what the board is trying to achieve. Need to look at inclusion as a continuum of levels of support a child needs
* Regarding “Inclusion”, it is important to note that wonderful things are happening in a congregated site to facilitate inclusion into world beyond school. Inclusion is a way of life – a paradigm shift – not a location. If administrators don’t believe in inclusion, it is a difficult thing to achieve. If looking for long term change, have to address what administrators do

***Other:***

* Don’t see a mention of UDL – a connection between inclusion and teaching strategies is needed
* Focus should be on reviewing curriculum practices to ensure UDL is practiced as part of an inclusion strategy, with accountability and outcomes
* I don’t see reference to Education Act – to provide stronger argument than what is said in the document
* There are barriers in the mainstream classroom. Inclusion will be easier when the barriers are removed.
* How do alternative schools fit in in terms of accommodations?
* When students leave a full time special education class, are they allowed to remain in that school and is there a standard consistent across the exceptionalities?
* If the aim is a broadened inclusion strategy, we need to consider also:
1. Allocation of full time special education classes within mainstream schools should be refined to allow a child to move through a progression of differing intensity without having to leave the same school. Current allocation acts as a barrier to inclusion.
2. Congregated sites are segregated schools. Question the pedagogical point. It creates a ghetto. Parents want to access the specialized service benefits but that doesn’t mean segregation is the best way to deliver those.
* Re Section 23 programs, the early dismissal times create problems. We need to build into Section programs additional funding to hire the required staff to keep the kids longer

The Chair suggested that the collected ideas be taken back by Uton Robinson to the next Equity Policy Advisory Committee meeting.

On motion of Dick Winters, the meeting was extended to 9:15

1. **SEAC Input into the Special Education Plan**

In an all-member email prior to the meeting, the Chair had requested that the minutes of the meeting include the following written input from the Chair:

“According to the SEAC Chair, TDSB's draft Special Education Plan is far too massive, detailed and dense for SEAC to comment on in one meeting. An incomplete review of it so far has already revealed that it would benefit from our closer scrutiny.

* It includes some statements that are incomplete, including in relation to SEAC's work.
* It includes this statement which needs to be significantly clarified: "The Special Education Advisory Committee endorsed the recommended schools (located throughout the TDSB) as designated sites." As I understand it, that was some years ago. SEAC has not revisited this at least in the past year.
* Its passage on Accessibility requires very careful review and raises concerns.
* In general, the Plan is an aspirational document. It should be saying what TDSB wants to achieve. However, as written at several points, it sounds like it is saying that it is actually doing what it promises. That, of course, is not always the case. The Plan should be expressed in terms of what TDSB aims to achieve, and not in across-the-board statements of what TDSB is actually doing in all cases. Otherwise, SEAC needs to urge that there be significant qualifiers inserted.
* Its description of Universal Design for Learning seems incomplete.
* In summarizing SEAC's work over the past year, and its input to TDSB, the draft Special Education Plan  does not describe the substantive content of our 4 motions content, passed at last June's meeting. Those motions were the core of our work in recent months. They should each be summarized, if not appended to the Special Education Plan.
* In listing the recommendations which SEAC formally passed and submitted to TDSB, the Plan does not include our motion last fall, criticizing TDSB for their providing information on the budget in an inaccessible document. This was significant to TDSB's obligation to consult SEAC on the budget. It resulted in a concrete SEAC recommendation to the trustees that the Special Education Plan should include.”

At the meeting, the Chair proposed that SEAC give suggestions on how it should be consulted by the TDSB on the Special Education Plan and Budget. He suggested the two consultations may require different processes and that SEAC should focus its energy on having an impact on what really makes a difference. SEAC input into the Plan could help make a change. (For example, a change requested to address concern over names of special education programs). Budget is a process that impacts on policy decisions (for example, cuts and staff allocation). The following ideas were offered by members:

***Re: Consultation on the Special Education Plan:***

* SEAC needs numerical data to understand how the board is moving forward (i.e., numbers of students in regular, HSP, full time special education classes)
* The Special Education Plan is put together to meet provincial requirements and then is submitted to the Ministry. The Plan is not written to reflect the reality of system needs. If SEAC wants to make its independent position and response known, SEAC could issue a response to the Plan or an addendum of "SEAC’s response and recommendations" added to the Plan – what we think we (SEAC) need/want to have available. (i.e. “Here is what is really necessary.”)

***Re: Consultation on the Special Education Budget***

* SEAC should be given the same information that trustees receive
* There is currently no connection made between academic and finance information. SEAC needs to know what the implications of budget decisions are on program/policy decision-making. We need numbers attached to needs, to see if a decision moves beyond addressing the basic needs and into the area of additional needs/wants
* Trustees are also looking at how staff presents the budget to Trustees. The new Learning Centre model brings resources back to the classroom and utilizes them differently to be more responsive to students. We need to look at budget in terms of how we are using resources to focus on students in the classroom

The SEAC Chair had requested in advance that Uton Robinson investigate how Budget consultation is carried out with SEACs in other boards. Uton provided the following information:

* Some boards provide a regular report, knowing that the process starts in October. They provide a monthly update, with questions answered by Business Services staff
* In some boards, a couple of SEAC members sit on the Budget Committee as standing members, permitting insights into the entire budget process and thorough understanding of the full context
* In some boards, the draft budget is put together and shared with SEAC, with Q & A to make sure the budget represents the focus they are interested in, and SEACs keep their eyes on items of special interest (i.e. whether or not changes in funding for Teachers in in some special education programs show up somewhere else in special education).

The Chair encouraged members to email their additional thoughts to everyone. He supported the suggestion made during the meeting that SEAC develop a separate response to the Draft 2016 Special Education Plan. He invited input into how SEAC might divide up and share the work of going over the 2016 Plan and preparing a response, as well as ideas for how the 2017 consultations should be approached. He also suggested that different strategies could be tried for Budget consultation, such as a SEAC member volunteering to sit on the Budget Committee.

1. **Need for Education Accessibility Standard**

This item is held over to the next SEAC meeting.

1. **Other Business**

Richard Carter reported from Down Syndrome Association of Toronto that there is to be a conversation Thursday September 15th in the evening about supportive employment – support network and how to bring it together

1. **Adjournment**

Alexander moved that the meeting be adjourned at 9:22 p.m. The motion passed.

**Next Meeting: Monday, October 24, 2016**