

Approved Minutes

**Name of Committee:** Special Education Advisory Committee

**Meeting Date:** April 8, 2024,from 7:00 p.m.– 8:51 p.m. (Hybrid)

**Chair:** **David Lepofsky – Chair**

**Vice-Chair:** **Richard Carter - Vice Chair**

A meeting of the Special Education Community Advisory Committee convened on April 8, 2024, from 7:00 p.m. to 8:45 p.m. at 5050 Yonge Street, with David Lepofsky (Chair) and Richard Carter (Vice Chair) presiding.

**Attendance:**

**Members**:

Leo Lagnado - Autism Society of Ontario (Toronto Chapter)

Richard Carter- Down Syndrome Association of Toronto (DSAT)

Steven Lynette- Epilepsy Toronto

Nora Green- Integration Action for Inclusion in Education and Community

Diane Montgomery (Alternate)- Integration Action for Inclusion in Education and Community

Aline Chan (Alternate)- Community Living

Dana Chapman (Alternate)- Ontario Parents of Visually Impaired Children (OPVIC)

Bronwen Alsop- VOICE for Deaf and Hearing Impaired Children

David Lepofsky- Ontario Parents of Visually Impaired Children (OPVIC)

Nerissa Hutchinson- Sawubona Africentric Circle of Support

Aline Chan (alternate) – Community Living

Aliza Chaqpar- Easter Seals Ontario

Guilia Barbuto- Learning Disabilities Association Toronto District

Beth Dangerfield- Centre for ADHD Awareness Canada CADDAC

Tracey O'Regan Community Living Toronto

Jordan Glass- LC2 Representative

Kirsten Doyle- LC3 Representative

Izabella Pruska-Oldenhoff – LC4 Representative

Trustee Patel

Trustee Hassan

**Staff**

Louise Sirisko- Associate Director

Nandy Palmer- System Superintendent, Special Education and Inclusion

Effie Stathopoulos- Centrally Assigned Principal, Special Education

Andrea Roach- Centrally Assigned Principal, Special Education

Katia Palumbo- Centrally Assigned Principal, Special Education

Alison Board - Centrally Assigned Principal, Special Education

Elizabeth Schaeffer- Centrally Assigned Principal, Special Education

Mun Shu Wong- (Audio/Video)

Lianne Dixon- TDSB SEAC Liaison

Regrets :

Saira Chhibber- LC1 Representative

Jean-Paul Ngana- LC2 Representative

Trustee Aarts

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| **Item** | **Discussion** | **Action Items/Recommendation** |
| Land Acknowledgement | Richard Carter read the land acknowledgment |  |
| Approval of Agenda | Agenda Approval. | Moved Nora Green Seconded Leo Lagnado |
| Conflicts of Interest | No Conflicts of Interest were declared | no conflicts identified |
| Approval of Minutes | Deferred to later in the meeting |  |
| **Deputation by Latoya Aldridge - Inner City Community Advisory Committee** | * David Lepofsky welcomed Latoya Aldridge, a delegate from the Inner City Community Advisory Committee, to share her experiences and insights.

**Delegate's Presentation:*** Latoya expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share her stories and perspectives with the committee. She emphasized the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive environment for students to succeed.
* Latoya identified herself as a Jamaican Canadian mother of two children with disabilities and shared insights into her family's journey navigating the education system. She shared the challenges faced by her child with special needs, and discussed systemic issues such as the underrepresentation of gifted students with disabilities and the need for cultural sensitivity in advocacy efforts.
* David Lepofsky thanked Latoya for her passionate and insightful presentation. He acknowledged the impact of her words on the committee's discussions and expressed appreciation for her willingness to share her experiences.
* He highlighted the importance of incorporating Latoya's perspectives into future discussions and initiatives, including an upcoming meeting of the Inner-City Advisory Committee.
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| **Presentation by ARCH Disability Law Centre**Rob Lattanzio | **Introduction:*** David Lepofsky introduced Richard Lattanzio from ARCH Disability Law Centre, an organization providing legal services and advocating for disability rights in education.

**Key Points****Focus on IEPs and Human Rights:*** **Importance of Procedural Fairness:** Parents have rights and need to be involved in IEP meetings (Individualized Education Plans). IEPs should be collaborative efforts outlining how schools will meet the needs of students with disabilities.
* **Human Rights Lens:** ARCH approaches education issues through a human rights lens, which may differ from the Education Act's definition of "exceptional pupils." The broader definition of disability under the Human Rights Code applies, meaning students with disabilities have a right to accommodation even if they don't meet the Education Act's criteria.

**Focus on IEP Meetings and Communication:*** Disagreements with IEPs: Families should advocate for what they believe their child needs and can seek legal advice if necessary. IEPs are living documents that should be reviewed and revised regularly.

**School Refusal and the Duty to Accommodate:*** Schools cannot refuse to enroll students with disabilities without proper investigation and exploring alternative solutions (duty to investigate). The Moore Decision (2012) established that school boards must consider their entire budget when determining how to accommodate students (duty to accommodate).

**The Pandemic's Impact on Special Education:*** Many students with disabilities struggled during remote learning and with IEP implementation. Ongoing challenges related to learning gaps and lack of clear plans to address them may lead to further issues.

**Advocacy and the Role of Trustees:*** Trustees can play a valuable role in mediating communication between families and schools, advocating for student needs, and navigating the process.
* Parents often feel isolated and overwhelmed; having a strong support system can be crucial.

**Funding and Transparency:*** While funding is important, leadership, training, and creating inclusive school cultures are also essential for effectively supporting students with disabilities.
* Transparent data collection on special education needs is necessary for effective advocacy efforts.
* David Lepofsky emphasized the importance of collaboration between parents, educators, advocates, and policymakers. He proposed implementing the Kindergarten-Grade 12 Standards Development Committee Report to create a more accessible school system, potentially reducing the need for costly accommodations in the long term
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| Chair Report | Due to time constraints and the focus on other pressing agenda items, including deputations, presentations, and reports from various stakeholders, the Chair's report was not discussed in this meeting.The Chair’s Report was distributed before the meeting and posted on the SEAC website. |  |
| **People for Education Report****Presenter: Nora Green** | * **Introduction to the Report:** Nora Green presented a summary of the People for Education Report, focusing on the shortage of educational assistants (EAs) in schools. Approximately half of administrators across the province reported a shortage, leading to significant challenges.
* **Impact on Vulnerable Students:** Principals resorting to using special education staff to cover for absent teachers has left the most vulnerable students without the necessary support. This practice disrupts service consistency and may push students into segregated or congregated models, impacting their education negatively.
* **Legal Perspective:** Arch Representative Rob Lattanzio emphasized that denying students access to education due to the absence of an EA is unlawful. He stressed schools' obligation to ensure appropriate supports for students with disabilities, even in the absence of an EA.

**Feedback from Committee Members:**Frustration was expressed at the lack of data and the board was urged to be proactive in addressing the issue* + concerns were raised about this common practice of pulling teachers to cover classes due to staff shortages
	+ A proposal was raised of using a unique attendance code for students who are not in school due to directives from the school to better track the frequency of such incidents and hold schools accountable.
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| **Leadership Report****System Superintendent Nandy Palmer** | **Summary:**1. **Training Initiatives:** A session held in March for superintendents emphasized changing mindsets, specifically targeting three beliefs:
	* Students with learning challenges automatically have special education needs.
	* Students are better served in intensive support programs or integrated/congregated sites.
	* Special education needs are best addressed by special education teachers.
2. **Professional Learning Sessions:** Efforts were made to support principals and vice principals amid staffing shortages by organizing drop-in sessions on special education. These sessions aimed to provide learning opportunities and address any queries from school leaders.
3. **Special Education and Inclusion Summer School Program:** It was announced that the Special Education and Inclusion Summer School program will run from July 2 to July 26. Registration information will be available on the website and through distributed flyers.
4. **Education Community Partnership Program (ECPP):** The ECPP summer program, in collaboration with various agencies, including Humble River Hospital and Sick Kids Hospital, is also scheduled to take place.
5. **Blind and Low Vision Newsletter:** The tradition of the Blind and Low Vision Newsletter was highlighted, providing students with opportunities for self-expression and sharing perspectives in accessible formats such as Braille, large print, and audio.
6. **Success Stories:** The success of a field trip for deaf and hard-of-hearing students was noted, with positive feedback received from families. Additionally, a video featuring a parent and child aimed at raising awareness for World Down Syndrome Day was shared, emphasizing the importance of education and understanding.

A question was raised about the frequency and content of professional learning sessions for superintendents, System Superintendent Palmer provided insight into past PL sessions, highlighting previous sessions' focus on human rights, legal aspects, and historical processes. She emphasized a shift in focus towards addressing mindsets and biases in response to feedback from SEAC.  |  |
| Trustee Report | Trustee MacLean expressed gratitude to the presenters for their contributions to the Financial Planning and Budgeting Committee (FBEC). He reflected on the board's budget challenges over the past six years and emphasized that reducing the special education budget has never been considered as a solution. Despite facing ongoing deficits, the board continues to prioritize special education funding. Trustee MacLean highlighted the importance of timely budget approval to address staffing challenges and ensure the stability of educational services. He acknowledged the current deficit situation, estimated at around $10 million, and emphasized the ongoing efforts to identify potential solutions.TDSB is on a 3-year recovery plan and must pass a balanced budget but due to the pandemic we do not have reserves.  The coming year is the third and final year of the recovery plan. FBEC March 19 – There will be a discussion of the current financial position and areas where staff will be looking for portions of funds to balance the budget. Looking at programming not covered under GSN (Grant for Student Needs), modifications to Adult Learning, Outdoor Education, and Central Staffing.  |  |
| **Working Group and Association Reports** | Nora Green summarized her presentation regarding the FBEC, highlighting efforts to advocate against potential cuts to special education services. She clarified that based on discussions with trustees, there are currently no anticipated cuts to special education services, which is a positive development compared to the previous year.Tracy O’Regan presented on behalf of Community Living Toronto. She addressed concerns raised by parents regarding exclusion and modified days in schools, emphasizing the impact on families and the need for trustee awareness. Tracy highlighted the trend of parents having to adjust employment to accommodate their children's needs.**Additional Comments:** David Lepofsky acknowledged the contributions of Robert Lattanzio, emphasizing the importance of effective allocation of existing funds rather than solely seeking additional funding from the province. He echoed the sentiment that while funding may not always be sufficient, creative allocation and effective spending are crucial to meeting the diverse needs of all students. Leo Lagnado expressed concerns regarding the potential indirect effects of budget cuts on special education, citing instances where reductions in general staffing have impacted special education support indirectly. He emphasized the interconnectedness of funding allocations and urged consideration of the broader implications for special education | Motion to adjourn – Nora Green |
| Other BusinessApproval of Minutes  | **Approval of Minutes from February and March**With no objections, both sets of minutes were approved.**Next Meeting:** The next SEAC meeting is scheduled for May 13.**Adjournment:** With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 8:51 pm. | February Minutes – Motion to approve by Nora Green, seconded by Leo LagnadoMarch Minutes – Motion to approve by Nora Green, seconded by Tracy O’Regan |