To: TDSB Special Education Advisory Committee

From: David Lepofsky, SEAC Chair

Date: June 5, 2024

Subject: Chair’s Report

## 1. Proposed Motion on Parents’ Right To Know

I will be proposing that SEAC pass a motion at our June 2024 meeting. It would call on TDSB trustees to direct TDSB staff to promptly develop and implement a comprehensive communications action plan to effectively inform parents about the supports, services and programs available to students with special education needs and how and where to advocate to get them.

This is the culmination of SEAC’s raising this issue quite a number of times over the past eight years, of extensive work by the K-12 Working Group over the past two years with TDSB staff, and of two recent and thorough discussions of this issue at full SEAC meetings. In advance of our meeting, I am circulating the following proposed text of this motion. I invite feedback via email on this wording, between now and Monday noon, in the event that it would help to refine the wording.

The Right of Parents, Guardians and Students with Disabilities/Special Education Needs to Know about TDSB Programs, Services, and Supports, and How to Access Them

Whereas students with disabilities/special education needs and their parents/guardians have a right to user-friendly access to important information about the programs, services, supports and educational offerings available for them at TDSB and how to access them. This should be easy to find, written in plain language without education jargon, and available in multiple languages and multiple formats, including accessible formats.

And whereas For over eight years, SEAC has repeatedly told senior TDSB officials that too many families find it hard to find this information. They find this very frustrating. This undermines their ability to advocate for their child’s needs.

And whereas TDSB has told SEAC that it is the responsibility of each principal to convey this information to parents and guardians of students with special education needs, and that parents can look to TDSB’s website, its Special Education Plan posted there, and some brochures. Yet SEAC has advised TDSB that this is not an effective solution.

And whereas TDSB’s 2024 Multi Year Strategic Plan commits to treating parents as partners and to “Identifying, removing, and preventing systemic, procedural, and attitudinal barriers that stand in the way of equity of access and outcomes in education.”

SEAC therefore recommends that the TDSB Board should

1. Direct TDSB staff, as a priority, to create and implement a strong, comprehensive action plan to fully, effectively and pro-actively inform all parents/guardians, including parents/guardians of students with disabilities/special education needs, about the programs, supports, services and educational offerings that could assist students with disabilities/special education needs, and where and how to access and advocate for them, and

2. Direct TDSB staff to report by the end of 2024 and every six months after that to the Board and to SEAC on their progress.

## 2. Staff Presentation and SEAC Discussion of Avenues for Parents/Guardians to Seek an Accommodation or Support for Their Child Which TDSB Has Not Agreed to Provide, or Which It Agreed to Provide But Did Not Provide

At our June 10, 2024 SEAC meeting, TDSB staff have been invited to make a presentation to explain the two avenues that TDSB provides for a parent/guardian to complain that TDSB has not provided an accommodation, service or support that they believe their child with special education needs requires. This could be a situation where TDSB has been asked to provide it, but does not agree to do so, or where TDSB has agreed to provide it, but the parent/guardian believes that it is not in fact being provided.

The two avenues to be presented, as I understand it, are the Concerned Parents’ Protocol, and a complaint to the TDSB’s human rights office. After their presentation, it will be open to SEAC members to ask staff questions. I will also invite feedback from SEAC members on whether these avenues are sufficient to meet the needs of parents/guardians of students with special education needs. I have asked staff to provide a written report in advance, if possible, to help SEAC members prepare for the meeting.

### 3. SEAC Discussion with the Chair of the TDSB

I’m delighted that TDSB Chair Rachel Chernos Lin will be meeting with us on June 10, 2024. SEAC members will be invited to ask her questions or give feedback on any issue that you consider important to students with special education needs.

### 4. Please Consider Volunteering for New SEAC Working Groups

At our June meeting, we hope to establish two new short term working groups:

One will be responsible for reviewing the SEAC terms of reference, and recommending any changes that may be needed for consideration by the full SEAC membership. I will chair that working group.

The second will be responsible for planning and organizing the October 2024 SEAC meeting, which will be devoted to inviting TDSB students with special education needs and their families to give feedback and input to SEAC members. Nora Green has volunteered to chair that working group.

Even in advance of the June SEAC meeting, you can email to Lianne Dixon to sign up if you are interested.

## 5. Looking Ahead

We all recently learned that the Director of Education for TDSB is retiring, and that a search will be underway for a new one. We wish Colleen Russell Rawlins our best, and look forward to welcoming her at the September SEAC meeting.

It will be important for the recruitment of the next Director of Education to be well-positioned to treat improved education for TDSB’s students with disabilities/special education needs as a major priority. I urge TDSB to include us in the process of setting priorities for the recruitment of the next TDSB Director of Education. Improving education for students with disabilities/special education needs should be a major priority among the skill set for the person recruited.

As well, we heard at our last meeting that TDSB will be undertaking a review of its special education program. I have alerted staff that SEAC would like to be fully integrated into and included in that review. It would help, as a first step, for us to be told how that review will be undertaken, and what its goals and criteria will be. It is important for it to be a fully open and transparent process.

## 6. How are We Doing?

With the June SEAC meeting, Richard Carter and I will reach the halfway point in our term as your SEAC Chair and Vice Chair. How are we doing? We welcome feedback as we turn our attention over the summer to planning for the second half of our term. Email us directly, or send your feedback to the always-helpful Lianne Dixon.