# SEAC Chair’s Report to Toronto District School Board Special Education Advisory Committee

From: David Lepofsky, SEAC Chair

Date: December 2, 2024

Here are key points to help prepare for the next SEAC meeting, which takes place at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, December 10, 2024. Please remember that we meet on Tuesday this time, not our usual Monday.

More SEAC members came to our November 2024 SEAC meeting in person than has been the case in some time. All enjoyed the chance to re-meet, or even meet for the first time. I vigorously encourage as many of you as possible to come to our meeting in person if your time and circumstances permit.

### 1. Reflecting on the First SEAC Town Hall

At this meeting, we will take a significant amount of time to get your reflections on what we heard from parents of students with special education needs during the first-ever SEAC Town Hall. Our mail-out materials will include TDSB staff’s consolidation of what parents of students with special education needs told us. Staff have endeavoured to incorporate summaries they received from the SEAC members who led the 3 feedback break-out groups.

I will go around the table for your impressions and thoughts. It would help if you aim to let us know what the take-aways are that SEAC should draw from the messages we received from parents. Also, please plan to offer what you feel are the major priority areas for reform at TDSB that SEAC should focus on over the next months, in light of the feedback we received from parents.

I am not proposing that we reach any final decisions on this at this meeting. I am proposing that we brainstorm and pool our thoughts at this meeting. Afterwards, we can later plan next steps.

Earlier this year, TDSB staff asked for priority areas to be identified. We identified and have been working on three areas, as we have discussed:

1. Getting TDSB to let parents know what is available for students with special education needs at TDSB, and how to access it, including, among other things, the opportunity to ask for an IEP meeting to discuss what should be included in the student’s Individual Education Plan.
2. Establishing a more effective way for parents to seek relief if TDSB does not deliver supports and accommodations to their child to which TDSB had agreed, or to get TDSB to deliver a support or accommodation to which TDSB as not agreed.
3. Greater protection for students with special education needs against full day or partial day exclusions from school.

On the first two issues, we have had extensive discussions at SEAC meetings over this past year, passed motions to the trustees, and will be dealing with the first of these further at our December meeting. See further below. On the third of these, we will be focusing on it at our December meeting as well. Once again, see further below.

You may find that the feedback at the town hall meeting reinforces the need for action in the 3 priority areas we have already identified. You may also find that other priority areas for reform at TDSB arise from the feedback we received from parents of students with special education needs.

Remember that our mandate is to advise TDSB what TDSB needs to do. There is of course a need for the Ontario Government to do more. However, we need to remain laser-focused on proposing reforms at TDSB.

Remember also that when we focus on priority areas, that never precludes SEAC members from raising other areas of concern as the year unfolds, either with staff directly or via SEAC meeting agenda items.

### 2. Encouraging Ontario’s Other SEACs to Hold Town Halls for Parents of Students with Special Education Needs

I have written an email to the SEAC Chairs of Ontario’s 71 other school boards. I tell them about our successful town hall, encourage them to hold one, and offer our help with advice on how we did it.

Getting this email delivered to the other SEAC Chairs has become a challenge. There is no list of them that I could find. There is no online email listserve of them, something we really need. TDSB staff advised that they cannot send this email to the other boards on our behalf.

I have therefore written to the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) I ask Code to send my email to all Directors of Education in Ontario with a request that it be forwarded to their SEAC Chairs. I set that letter out at the end of this report. Here’s hoping CODE will help us with this. It is frustrating that this is such a difficult thing to do.

### 3. Exclusions from School, Including Partial Day Exclusions (called “modified school days)

SEAC passed a detailed motion on this topic in late 2017 or early 2018. As a result, and after extensive and positive TDSB staff consultations with SEAC, TDSB eventually adopted its first policy in this area. Thereafter, the Ontario Government-appointed K-12 Education Standards Development Committee made detailed recommendations for provincewide reform.

Last year, TDSB staff reported to SEAC on what it is doing in this area. It also provided numbers of how many exclusions had taken place at TDSB, according to TDSB staff data or records. At that time, several SEAC members told TDSB staff that from feedback they have received, there are many more such exclusions from school than TDSB statistics describe. TDSB staff had indicated that they are working on this issue.

Earlier this fall, I asked TDSB staff to bring forward its latest data in this area. I believe they may focus on partial-day exclusions. They will again summarize their current practices for monitoring this.

After that, if there is still a gap between TDSB statistics on the one hand, and the experience of SEAC members (including association members), I propose that we go around the table and brainstorm possible reforms that TDSB could adopt to better track and address this issue. Please plan to bring your ideas forward.

At the end of this discussion, I anticipate that TDSB staff would want to take away any feedback received and reflect on it. If so, we can ask staff to offer their reflections at a future SEAC meeting.

### 4. TDSB Staff’s Proposed Revisions to the TDSB Letter to Parents About the Individual Education Plan

At our September 2024 meeting, TDSB staff presented its revised text of the standard TDSB letter to parents of students with special education needs seeking input on the student’s Individual Education Plan (IEP) SEAC members gave feedback on that letter at our September 2024 meeting. Additional changes to the letter were requested. TDSB staff said they would take back our feedback.

Included in TDSB staff materials for our December 2024 meeting is TDSB further revised version of this letter. Please review it before our December SEAC meeting. SEAC members will be asked for their feedback at this meeting.

### 5. Special Education in the Media

The difficulties facing students with special education needs in Ontario schools have recently gotten increased media attention. As a recent example, I set out below an excellent report in the online publication “You might also wish to watch the [November 25, 2024 news item](https://youtu.be/nnUs4qoU4lg) included in the CTV Toronto TV news broadcast. The Local.” TDSB SEAC’s efforts have gotten media coverage more so than I can ever recall in the past 9 and a half years during which I’ve served on SEAC.

### 6. SEAC Chair and Vice Chair Elections

As earlier agreed, the elections for Chair and Vice Chair of SEAC will take place at our December meeting. To accommodate this, I will surrender the virtual gavel at 8:40 pm, so that TDSB staff can manage the elections process. I’ve tried to design the agenda so that we can easily stop at that point, and defer any unreached or incomplete agenda items to our January meeting.