



Inclusive Education: How do TDSB and UCDSB Measure Up?

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Introduction

- Elizabeth Iacoe and Cassandra Banitsiotis - 4th year students in Fanshawe College's Honours Bachelor of Early Childhood Leadership Program.
- The ECL program is designed to equip students to work with a young generation of children, exploring important topics related to early years studies, including child development, curriculum planning, pedagogy, leadership, and advocacy.
- Solutions Placement - Students responsible for engaging in work with an organization that explores/supports work that is centered on child-based practice and is of interest to the students.



FANSHAWE

Presentation Breakdown

Today's presentation will be centered on a compare and contrast of the Upper Canada District School Board and the Toronto District School Board's Special Education systems, an overview of the feedback gathered from a distributed questionnaire regarding familiarity with, access, and family participation in special education systems, as well as a self-reflection of the learning that has unfolded for us as emerging leaders.

- 1) Standards for School Boards' Special Education Plans
- 2) Upper Canada District School Board Special Education Plan Review
- 3) Toronto District School Board Special Education Plan Review
- 4) Critical Comparison of UCDSB and TDSB's Special Education Systems
- 5) Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting Takeaways - UCDSB and TDSB
- 6) Parent Association Advisory Committee
- 7) Questionnaire Results / Family Feedback
- 8) Our Key Learning Moments

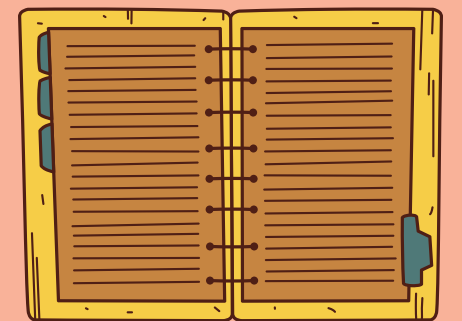
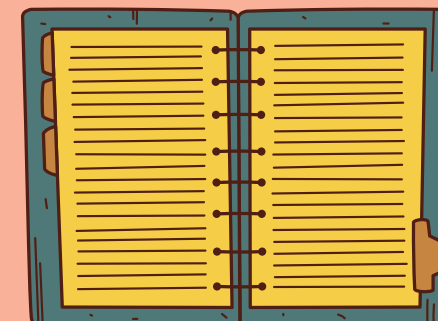
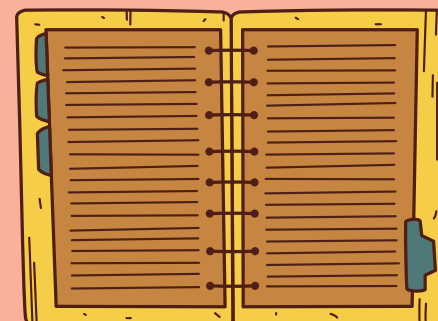
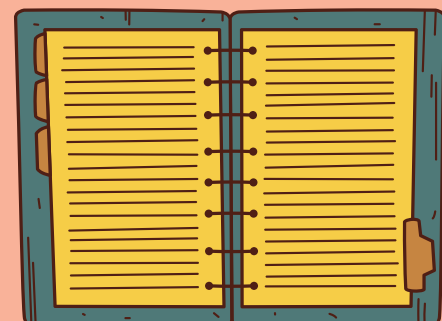
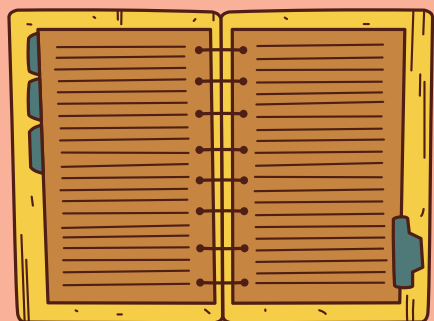
Standards for School Boards' Special Education Plans

- 1) The board's consultation process
- 2) Special education programs and services (Roles and responsibilities, assessments, Individual Education Plans, etc.)
- 3) The board's Special Education Advisory Committee
- 4) Coordination of services with other ministries or agencies
- 5) Submission and availability of school board plans
- 6) **APPENDIX A: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION**
- 7) **APPENDIX B: SAMPLE PARENTS' GUIDE TO SPECIAL EDUCATION**
- 8) **APPENDIX C: SPECIALIZED HEALTH SUPPORT SERVICES**
- 9) **APPENDIX D: CATEGORIES AND DEFINITIONS OF EXCEPTIONALITIES**
- 10) **APPENDIX E: PROVINCIAL SCHOOLS AND DEMONSTRATION SCHOOLS**
- 11) **APPENDIX F: SPECIAL EDUCATION STAFF**



UCDSB Special Education Plan Review - Aspects that Resonate with us

- Mission Statement: **“Special education is an integral part of the programming provided to students within the school setting, not a separate system. To this end, every effort will be made to maintain an inclusionary and flexible approach to meeting the needs of those who require additional support and/or challenge.”** - Emphasis on special education services as part of mainstream programming, rather than as a separate or isolated entity.
- Statement that the high-quality educational experiences provided to children with exceptionalities is a responsibility of board personnel, students, parents, and community partners. - Emphasis on moral and ethical obligation, while highlighting importance of collaboration, unity, and partnerships in practice.
- Statement that “In all areas of exceptionality, the mainstream classroom is considered as the first choice”.
- UCDSB Teaching and Learning Philosophy: “The basic human needs for growth and development are: autonomy, personal mastery, acceptance, and a sense of belonging to a social group”. - Appreciate that this philosophy highlights the cruciality of creating safe and inclusive spaces that view children as competent and capable young learners.
- Emphasis on program and services being individualized to meet the specific needs of each individual student supported by the board, including ongoing assessments and program development.
- Commitment to the utilization of “In-School Student Success Team”. This team should consist of the classroom teacher, the special education teacher, principal, and may include support staff or other teachers.



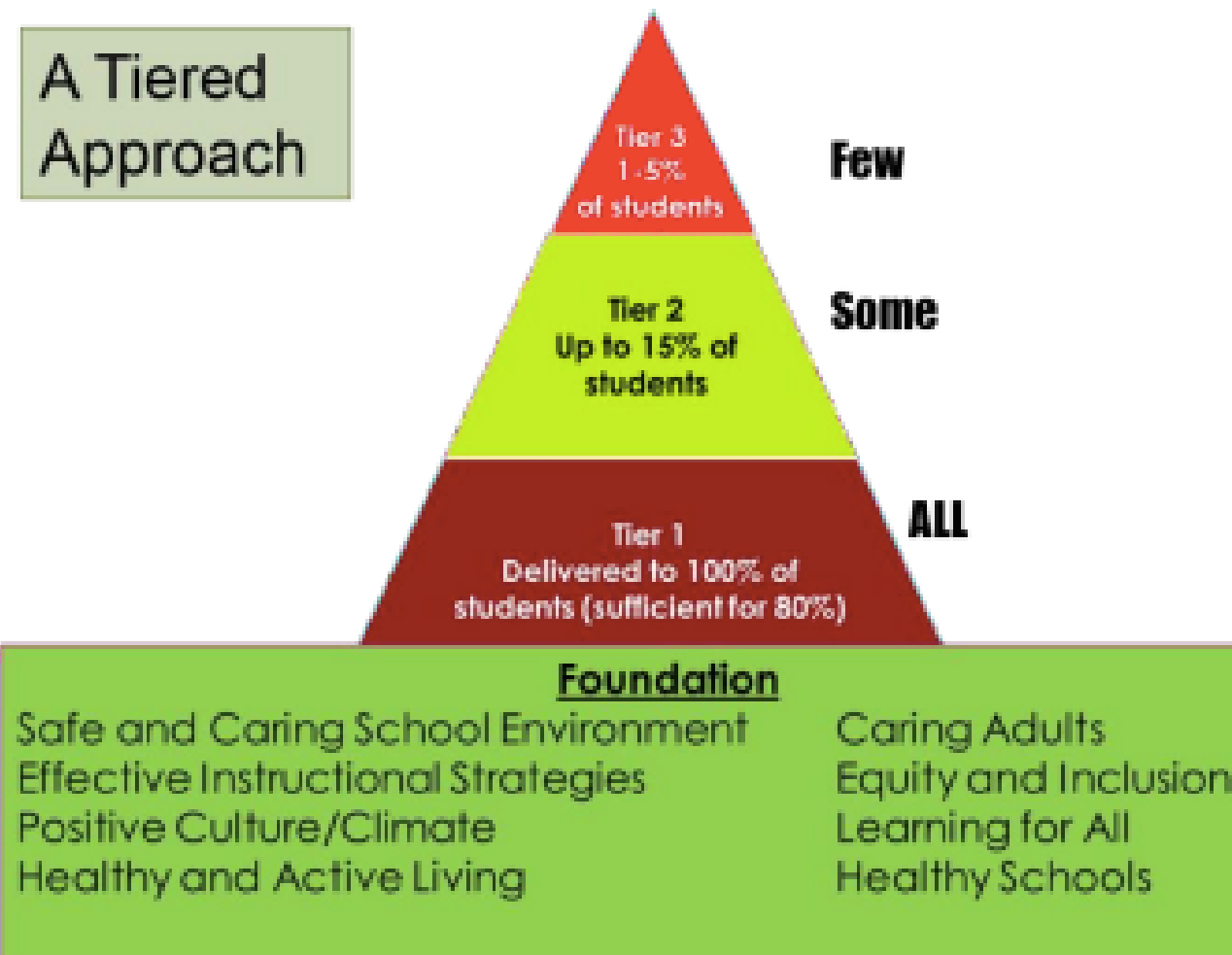
TDSB Special Education Plan Review - Aspects that Resonate with us



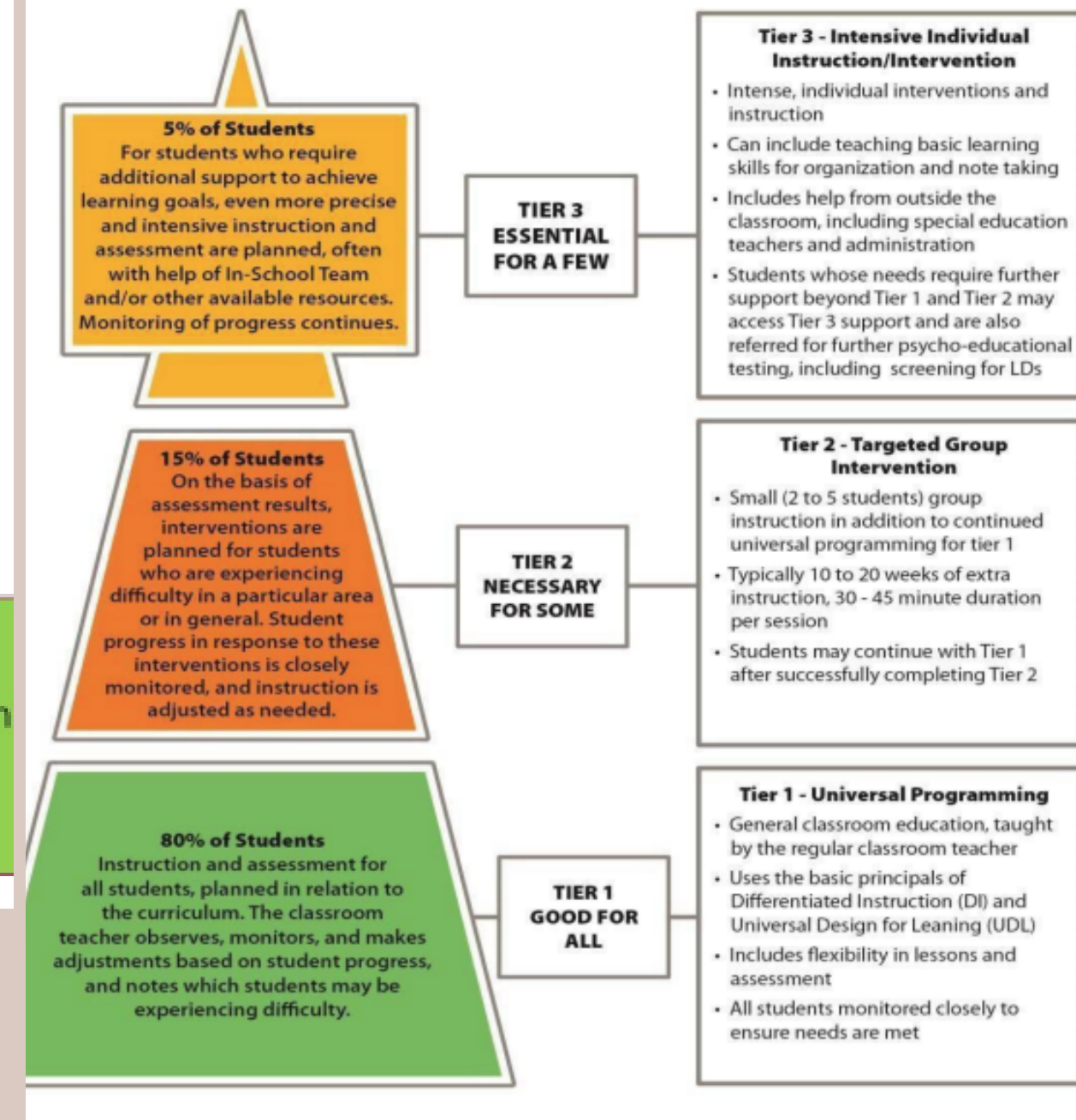
- Mission Statement: **“We believe that equity of opportunity and equity of access to our programs, services and resources are critical to the achievement of successful outcomes for all those whom we serve, and for those who serve our school system. The Board is therefore committed to ensuring that fairness, equity, and inclusion are essential principles of our school system and are integrated into all our policies, programs, operations and practices.”** ~ TDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan
- Teacher’s Role Expectation:
 - Carries the ability to retain knowledge of up-to-date special education practices and policies.
 - Works alongside and in partnership with inclusion staff (parents, guardians, family members) and special education teachers
 - Remains in constant communication with parents regarding exceptional students’ progress.
 - Conducts updates to students’ IEPs in collaboration with parents, guardians, or additional family members.
 - Provides a program which outlines the interests, needs, and strengths of the exceptional student.
 - Is able to provide a program using an anti-bias and anti-oppressive approach to curriculum that remains responsive and culturally relevant.
- The IEP process is extremely detailed in nature and outlines many minority groups and approaches that need to be taken into consideration during the creation of IEPs (equity, dismantling of anti-Black racism and anti-Indigenous racism, inclusion, human rights and anti-oppression and anti-ableism).

A Critical Comparison of UCDSB and TDSB's Special Education Plan

- Length of documents - TDSB substantially longer in length (Is this a challenge for family members to comprehend?).
- TDSB's SEAC board members - 3 Trustees, 8 Community Representatives (Have to be a parent of a child with exceptionality in the board) and their Alternates (2 per regional quadrant), 12 Local Association Representatives and their Alternates
- UCDSB's SEAC board members - 2 Trustees, UCDSB Chair, 12 Association Representatives, 1 First Nations Representative, 3 Members at Large, 5 Administrative Members.
- TDSB's SEAC meetings publicly accessible -- UCDSB's SEAC not accessible to public without acquiring direct access to a livestream link.
- TDSB's Special Education Plan contains a section dedicated to specific categories and definitions of exceptionalities.
- These exceptionality categories are used to inform Early Intervention Programs and Placements, as outlined with the Special Education Plan.
- UCDSB uses a "Tiered Approach" as the model of Special Education in their system, stating that special education cannot be isolated from teaching and learning, rather actively integrated.
- TDSB also uses a tiered approach, with differing priorities.



Upper Canada District School Board's Tiered Approach



Toronto District School Board's Tiered Approach

SEAC Meeting Takeaways - UCDSB

- 1st meeting - Presentation-style meeting (Less discussion-orientated).
- 2nd meeting - Opened room for discussion/questions

Department Priorities and Initiatives:

Priority 1: Collaborative partnerships with system departments in support of the Board Improvement and Equity Plan.

Priority 2: Leading and Learning Council in support of special education in secondary schools.

Priority 3: Power Up 2 Spaces: A one-year placement to target lagging skills related to: Literacy, numeracy, self-regulation and social emotional learning.

Priority 4: Develop IEP guidelines for elementary K-6 students.

Priority 5: Enhance the delivery of Special Education and Student Wellness services across the district.

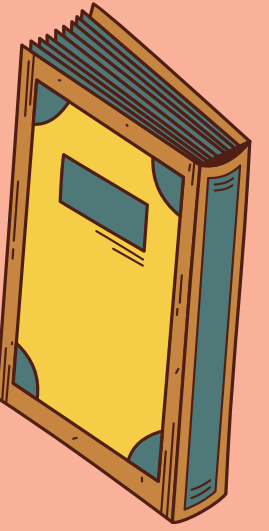
Key Goals + Questions for Consideration:

- Emphasis on the Student Success Team (SST).
- SST program used to identify small group goals the child can meet and to reflect on what skills we are building so the student can be successful in the mainstream classroom.
- Specific tracking and monitoring of skills working with classroom teacher to be integrated into the mainstream classroom.
- SST process provides an opportunity for conversation – What have we tried, what’s next, here’s what’s working, here’s what’s not. Working to encourage flexibility. Encouraging teachers and spec ed team to use the SST.
- Department consists of student wellness and special education.
- Large emphasis on Power Up Program. Power Up 2 program is a ‘success story’.
- “Is there board level advocacy for special education programs?” Response: “No advocacy at board level”. “Advocacy is more individualized” “Reality checks is more of the term”.
- How do we help people who are not educators or not a part of the system team to acquire supports for their child and navigate a system as complex as the education system – Something to consider moving forward.

SEAC Meeting Takeaways - UCDSB

Large Discussion:

- Statement indicates that board is “Changing the environment not the student” – SEAC members ask the question: “But why is our solution removing students from the classroom?” - Confusion in the way it’s been presented.
- ‘Fixing’ the environment looks different for every student supported by UCDSB – Offering alternative expectations.
- Is the removal of students from mainstream classrooms what UCDSB is known for?
 - Being known for the number of spaces we are creating in terms of Power Up 2.
- Question about early intervention – How does the school board work with community programs, especially in accordance with the intervention piece? Response indicating that it is important to have a plan in place for the child’s very first day of school. If this fails to happen – It’s important to bring in system supports (Student Success Team).
- Added (framework for teaching) – To increase the competence of special education teachers. Some schools receiving full time special education teachers. – Staffing is a challenge right now, so this is good.
- Full day of professional development regarding Power Up program – Participate in real-world learning. 2-day training so real-world pedagogy can become a part of system.
- Toolbox of strategies that children can utilize, collaborating across all departments.
 - Inviting any regional staff external support is always welcomed and encouraged based on identified needs.



SEAC Meeting Takeaways - TDSB

Goals of the Board:

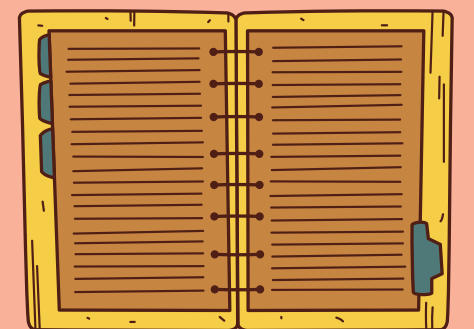
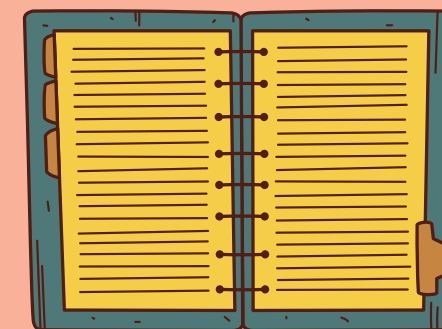
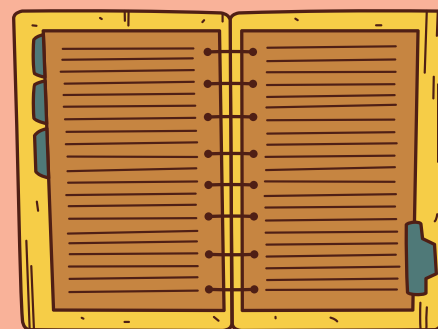
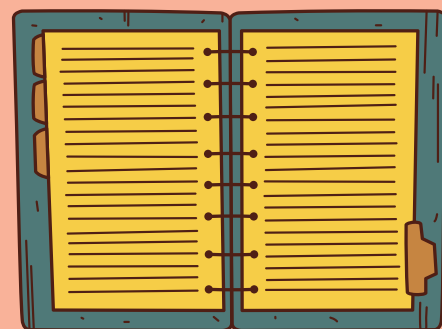
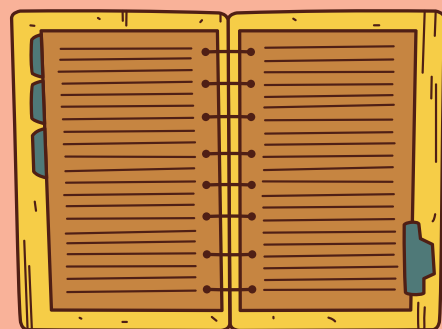
- Goal is to build coherence and alignment.
- Professional Learning used to support coherence, alignment, and consistency of special education and inclusion practices.
- Assistive technology
- Ministry grants – Grant 1: UDL in MID Intensive Support Programs and Grant 2: This is How I Roll – Pilot Project – Encourage student autonomy.

Prevalent Themes / Areas of Improvement:

- School exclusions and refusal to admit is a concern – Parental involvement is a current and repeating theme – Communicating in an enhanced way to parents about how they are able to participate in the guidance of their child’s education is needed.
- Parental feedback to inform board procedures - Is there a document out there to provide guidance to parents on the kind of questions/decisions they can have input on? Parents need better direction.
- What is a standard level of care?
- Educator training– Discrepancy from one professional development opportunity to another – How to bring coherence between the professional development present.
- “31 students were excluded from TDSB in the 2022 school year”.

Personal Reflection:

- Posing questions is acceptable - We are supposed to ask hard questions, as this is how practice is enhanced and accountability is promoted.
- Staff and volunteers should collaborate.



SEAC Meeting Takeaways - TDSB

Recommendations

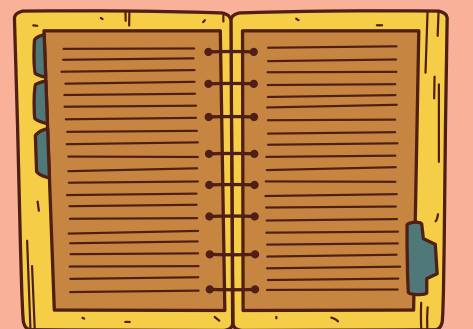
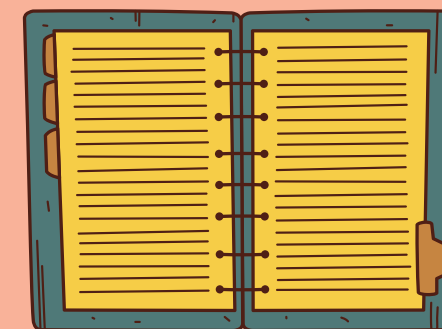
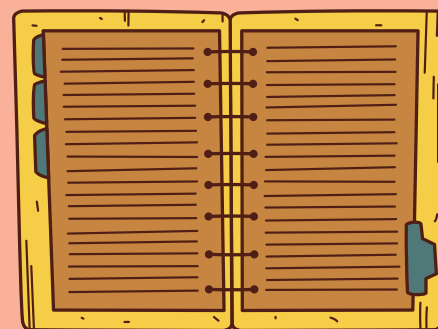
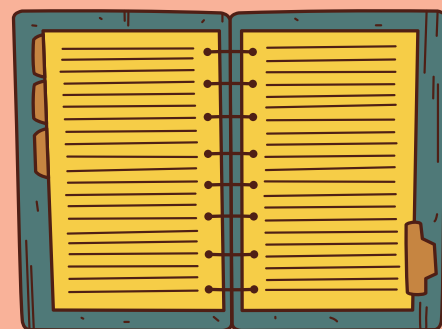
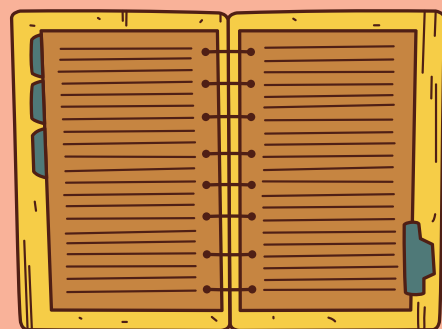
- Members express that they have been asking for 6 years if a statement can be added to TDSB's spec-ed plan indicating that parents can request IEP meetings.
- Highlight what has been achieved in terms of inclusion thus far and assess what is being achieved currently.
- Consider having acronyms throughout presentations to promote clarity.

Committee Notes

- Difficult to be hired by TDSB – Many people want to work in the field of special education, but the process of being hired is very extensive and challenging.
- Full-day exclusions (modified days) were a big issue last meeting - Needed to follow up on this issue.
 - Parents are not shown any transparency surrounding the rights of their children.
- Large discussion on modified days..
 - Reported that principals are calling parents and sending children home frequently, as opposed to offering support within the classroom.
- Often connecting conversations to discriminatory acts and how treatment would be altered if it came to minority groups
 - If a child was treated differently due to their gender and race conversations would remain with different responses.

Personal Reflection

- Evident lack of communication and delivery of ideas potentially due to a lack of time
 - Members feeling unheard

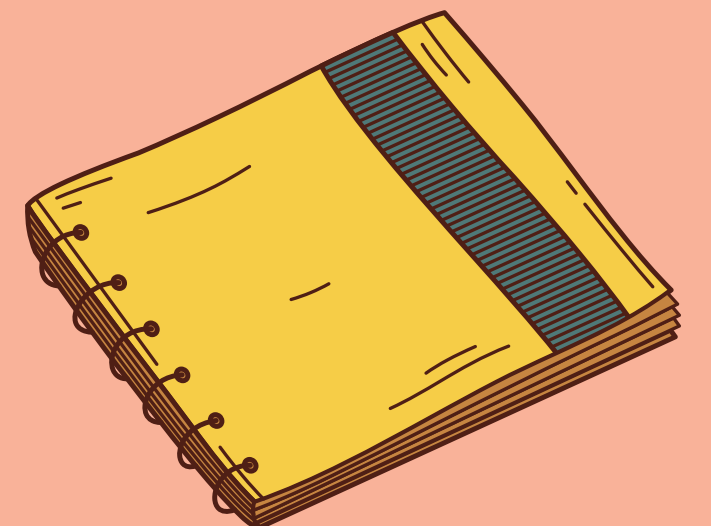
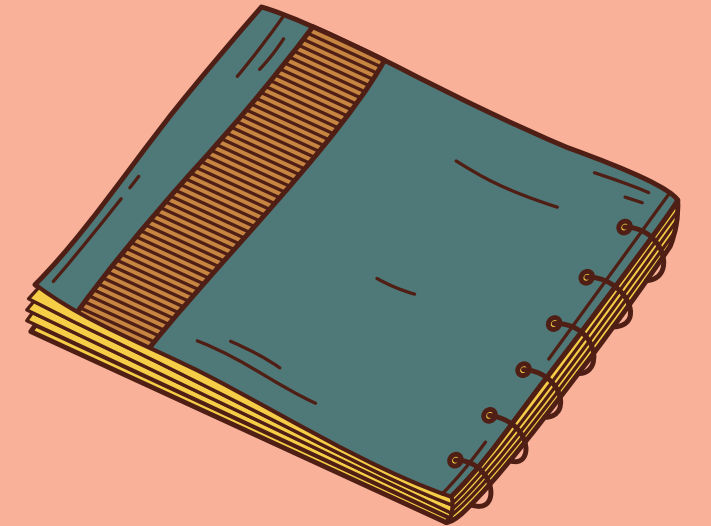
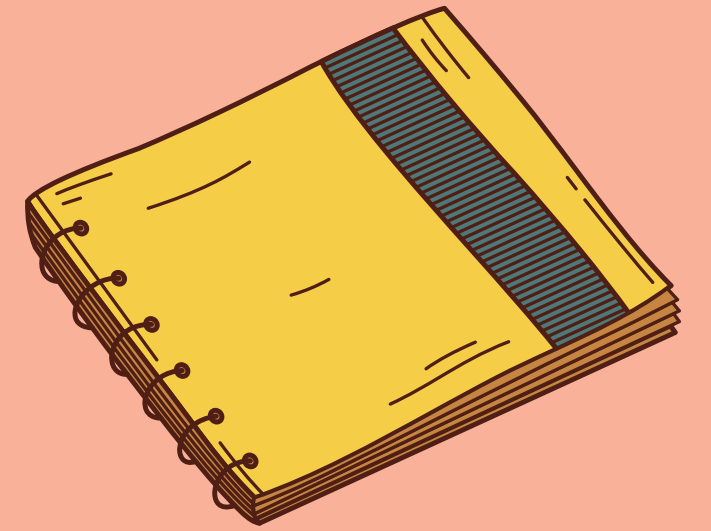


PAAC on SEAC

- The Provincial Parent Associations Advisory Committee on Special Education Advisory Committees
- PAAC on SEAC serves as a forum in which parent representatives from provincial associations can share ideas, provide feedback and suggestions, and assist in the implementation of strategies to support SEAC problem-solving practices.
- Inclusion Action Ontario acts as a member.
- PAAC members regularly gather and disseminate information that is of relevance to SEAC.
- This is often done through the conduction of PAAC surveys in which a recommendation for an action is directly stated.

“SEAC seats should be used to bring to the committee the perspective of parents of children with a wide range of exceptionalities”.

“Before making a decision on a recommendation of the committee, the board shall provide an opportunity for the committee to be heard before the board and before any other committee of the board to which the recommendation is referred.”



Feedback from Families

- 34 participants
- Participants included 5 parents from Upper Canada District School Board, 4 parents from Toronto District School Board, and 25 parents outside of these two boards.
- General feedback from participants is that they are aware their board has a Special Education Plan and a SEAC committee.
- A majority of participants have reviewed their board's Special Education Plan, however more than half report it as being unhelpful to them.
- More than half of the participants have observed a SEAC meeting and interacted with members of the SEAC.
- However, more than half of participants report having no knowledge of the Parent Guide for Special Education or ever having reviewed it.
- Greater than 88% of participants report experiencing difficulties acquiring educational access for their children with exceptionalities.



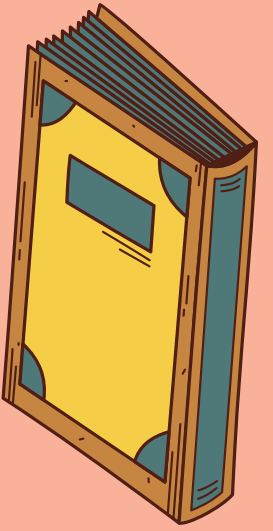
Common Barriers to Educational Access - Reported by Participants



- EAs within the classroom are having trouble being integrated into classroom programming and are feeling obligated to justify why they need to be present.
- Lack of communication from the school - Parents are not feeling apart of the team and feeling like outsiders when it comes to their child's successes.
- Lack of funding for EAs resulting in little support for students and families.
- Teachers of the board being denied participation in SEACs?
- Parents reported feeling as if their children are being pushed to new grades without adequate knowledge learnt. When requesting access to resources regarding what is learned in class, it is often excused and neglected.
- Subjection to exclusion is a common theme that arises, due to parents being told to have their children re-assessed prior to being accepted into schools, neglecting the fact that it is their human right.
- Accommodations are either not present or are not followed up upon.
- The supports listed on the board website under the Special Education Policy are not accurately reflected or accessible in reality.

Our Personal Takeaways + Learning to Inform Practice/Wonderings

- Each plan outlines many standards and requirements of how to facilitate inclusive learning that remains equitable and rich in nature, however, we pose the question of how/if these supports are being put into place
 - Are there enough resources?
 - Reflecting on SEAC meetings -
 - What are participants saying?
 - Do they feel safe and heard in their meetings?
 - Are there other ways to structure meetings to ensure each member's voice is included?
 - Are the voices of parents and family members truly reflected in these meetings? How do we promote family engagement in a more successful manner?
 - What support do educational staff need to ensure families feel safe and included?
 - Why aren't the supports put in place enough for educational staff to utilize in order to create inclusive environments?
 - Why aren't parents feeling a part of the team when collaborating in IEPs and learning strategies contributing to their child's success?





Thank you for your
time and engagement!

Questions for discussion?

