



Veronica Appia/Metroland

Tammy Beattie, Jeanne Gray and Diane Vandebossche provide feedback on four of the eight special education recommendations at the SEAC meeting on April 3. Vandebossche, along with two other SEAC members, expressed their discontent with the current state of the review.

## Frustrations about special ed review arise at SEAC meeting

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Some members of Halton District School Board's special education advisory committee are expressing a strong disappointment with the current state of the special education review, which has been ongoing for the past two years.

These sentiments followed superintendent of education Mark Zonneveld's April 3 announcement of a stagnant budget for 2018-2019 and no further recommendations.

Last month, the committee was presented with eight key recommendations by Elana Gray, an external consultant for the review - suggestions that Sherry Foster, of the Association for Bright Children, says are not in line with the committee's original plans.

The special education review, initially designed following budget cuts that surfaced in 2016, was expected to address the issue as to how services can be delivered to students in more cost-effective ways, Foster added.

"I don't know how many tens of thousands of dollars we spent on a consultant that has not delivered anything, in my opinion, that was originally (decid-

ed upon)," Foster said. "I think the scope changed at some point, and so, we've had two years to think about this and now what I'm hearing tonight is that we have a flat budget and we have no recommendations."

Zonneveld responded, telling SEAC members that the HDSB has been working on a number of improvements to the special education program, including gathering extensive baseline data on students and determining their levels of performance based on different exceptionalities.

He said when it came to the prospect of providing updated services to students however, the board ran into a roadblock, as it was determined they currently do not have sufficient data to be able to track the costs of providing specialized supports to students in need.

Diane Vandebossche, of Learning Disabilities Association of Halton, says she has been hearing a fair share of concerns from parents, and her questions have yet to be answered.

"It has nothing to do with dollars and cents. It has to do with student growth. Are they making gains? That's the answer we want," she said. "I know

our students with learning disabilities are not having their needs met now, and I hear that day in and day out from parents."

Chair Jason Bartlett also expressed his concern that SEAC has made less progress than expected at this point in the review process.

"How do you not know the costs of the services when you need to prepare a budget on it, and we have not even gotten close to an answer on any of it," he asked. "I'm concerned that we're just hitting the same loop and it's been going on longer than two years."

Zonneveld says tracking the costs of providing specialized services is an idea being considered by the board, but one that if approved, will require a significant amount of time from teachers who are doing the tracking.

He says for now, SEAC should focus on mulling over the pros and cons of the recommendations presented back in March.

"The report and recommendations just came out a few weeks ago so, in fairness, we need some digestion time," he said. "We are considering where to go next and if a continuation (of the review) is appropriate, warranted and feasible."

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