1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS – Chris Glover

Meeting called to order by Chris at 7:06 p.m.
Chris welcomed everyone to the meeting. All in attendance introduced themselves.

2. INTRODUCTION TO CENTRAL ETOBICOKE HIGH SCHOOL – Millean Kung

Central Etobicoke has approximately 200 students all with Individual Education Plans (IEPs), many of whom are identified as Mildly Intellectually Delayed (MID) or Developmentally Delayed (DD). There are currently six DD classes with a handful of students with both physical and learning disabilities. Central Etobicoke provides students with an alternative education that meets their individual learning needs and offers many cooperative education and experiential programs to allow students to participate in learning meaningful life skills. Special courses such as cooking, baking, and auto mechanics help to get students ready for the working world. Millean presented greeting cards and fused glass jewellery hand-made by the students.

3. STUDENT SPEAKER FROM CENTRAL ETOBICOKE – Naureen Agha
Naureen is a grade 10 student and mentioned the various programs she participates in at Central Etobicoke. She spoke about how she used to be bullied and how her positive attitude is the key to success.

**Question: How many classes to do you take in one day?**

I take four classes a day.

**Question: How long can a student stay at Central Etobicoke?**

A student can start in grade 9 and can stay until age 21.

4. **DISCUSSION ON THE GIFTED SCREENING PROCESS – Dr. Paul O’Connell**

There were several questions regarding the gifted screening process at the Special Education Forum held at John G. Althouse on April 9, 2013. We asked Paul to join us at this meeting to address the questions. Paul has been a psychologist at the board for 11 years and Chief Psychologist for the last four years.

The Psychology Department works closely with the Special Education Department. There are various ways to assess gifted students using cognitive testing. Some other boards administer group tests. This method takes more time and costs more money. The TDSB currently does individual testing and attempts to take a more objective measure of intelligence. The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) test is used most often at the board.

Students are recommended for assessment based on information from the teachers in the fall of a student’s grade 3 year. Parents may request to have their child assessed. Teachers and parents complete check lists, and the School Support Team (SST) decides which children will be tested. Testing is done in grade 3 because it has been found that, prior to that level, most children can be accommodated in a regular classroom and because intelligence tests are not really considered reliable until age 7. However, a child can be considered for gifted assessment in subsequent grades. Once a child is recommended by the teacher, the bulk of the testing is done during a two-week timeframe in November.

Regardless of how assessment is done, we are looking for unusually high scores as part of the criteria. In general, 2 out of 100 children are seen with unusually high scores. Students who score in the 98th percentile are designated as gifted; scores above the 90th percentile are considered “superior” intelligence; scores above the 75th percentile are high average.

It’s important to remind parents that high intelligence, alone, is no guarantee of success. There is very little correlation between having a gifted status and success later in life. Gifted assessment is not solely based on test scores. There is also input from parents and evidence that the child will benefit from being challenged or placed in a different environment. Assessment is also becoming more technologically based using DVD administration. This will ensure that the test is given to each student in the exact same way each time.

**QUESTION: How long does it take to administer tests to one child?**
This depends on each individual child, but usually, there is one session that takes 1.5 to 2 hours.

**QUESTION: Does other testing (ie. Potential LD or MID exceptionalities) get overlooked at those schools that have a lot of gifted testing?**

Some schools have many referrals while others have few. During that two-week period in November, all psychologists help out and concentrate on gifted testing. In general, schools are told how much time they will be given for psychology and the school decides how the time will be used.

**QUESTION: What is communication like between teacher and parent?**

School Support Team (SST) meetings are held every month and a parent can attend if they are interested in having their child tested. The special education consultant, administrator, psychologist, social worker, teacher and parents are all involved in the SST meetings.

**QUESTION: What if the school says it’s too late for this year?**

For efficiency’s sake, they may be reluctant to do testing at other times of the year. However, testing can easily be done the following year at the same time.

**QUESTION: Are children with a learning disability less likely to be tested?**

Parents need to explain their concerns to the school. There is often a willingness to conduct a gifted assessment even if a learning disability may be involved. The initial gifted assessment would involve the same process, but there might be follow-up assessment to query a Learning Disability.

**QUESTION: How is the School Support Team monitored?**

There are guidelines that SSTs should be following. The special education consultant attends at least four SSTs at each school every year.

**QUESTION: How is time with a psychologist allocated to each school?**

The staff in the psychology department is divided up based on the number of students in the school as well as other characteristics such as socio-economic status. Some schools will get half a day per week while a more needy school could get two days per week. This time includes writing reports and meeting with parents.

A teacher questioned the reason why some parents go ahead and get their child tested privately. Some students that are moved to a gifted program are not always successful and may be better off staying in a regular classroom. Does the child really want to go?

A comment was made that gifted IEPs are not treated in the same manner as LD IEPs. Parents know their children best so you really have to advocate for them.
Chris asked attendees: How can we better serve our students in the gifted program?

There is a real economic inequity in screening children so the board should be looking at a pre-screening tool. The Peel District School Board administers a test to every child and they are graded electronically. There should be more equitable testing across the board.

Parents should be notified about testing.

The board should look at the structure of the IEP. Inclusion should also be considered as part of the equation.

**QUESTION: How are the TDSB numbers compared to other boards?**

We have information on how different boards define and identify “giftedness”, and how they provide services to these students. For example, many GTA boards are now moving toward a universal screening method. The Toronto Catholic Board provides part-time enrichment to this group of students, rather than full-time intensive support. Unfortunately, we don’t have information as to the number of students identified in each board.

**5. PRINCIPAL SURVEY ON ACCESSIBLE BUSSING FOR FIELD TRIPS**

Chris explained the situation with accessible busses and why the survey was developed. Superintendents discussed the issue with their 600 principals at their April Leadership Team Meetings where the survey was distributed. Principals who have students and/or staff requiring accessible bussing completed the survey. In total, 53 schools have at least one student, and 7 schools have at least one staff member, that require accessible bussing. Susan presented the results of the survey. Highlights are as follows:

- Between 1-55 students per school require an accessible bus for field trips.
- On average, about 6 field trips are booked per year requiring an accessible bus.
- 24 schools have tried to book an accessible bus; 29 have not. Several schools reported using Wheel Trans instead.
- 18 schools reported being told that no accessible busses were available; 5 schools responded that they were available.

Survey results will be taken to Sandy Spyropoulos, Chief Academic Officer, Special Education, Section Programs and Student Support Services, to discuss ways to improve bussing.

**6. SPECIAL GUEST PRESENTATION – Jay Mandarino**

Jay spoke about the difficulties of growing up with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia. He had very low self-esteem and even attempted suicide. He was thankful for having very supportive parents who made him undergo several tests. They were told to forget any hope of post-graduate schooling. In grade 9, he was at a grade 3 reading level. His parents sold their home so that he could attend the Gow School in Buffalo. That school changed Jay’s life. He was in an environment where everyone had the same challenges and was supported by an amazing group of teachers and staff. He went on to graduate with honours and later attended university in Toronto and has since started several successful companies.
As a child, Jay wasn't very good at any sports, but he was able to learn how to skateboard. The challenge with team sports is that there is pressure to be as good as everyone else. Skateboarding allows children, regardless of ability, to feel empowered and feel good about themselves. In 1976, Jay gained some attention when he performed an incredible skateboard jump over a Ferrari.

Jay opened C.J. Skateboard Park as his way of giving back. It is a non-profit company that offers unique skateboarding programs to children with and without disabilities. He also has an auctioneering company and works with charitable organizations worldwide.

**QUESTION: A book I’ve heard of recently talks about different types of testing and intelligence. Have you heard much about that?**

I’m not a big reader. What I can tell you is that the challenge is if you tell a kid that they’re stupid, they’ll believe it. I do much better when a question is asked and I can just answer orally. In the penal system, almost 90 percent have a learning disability. We need people, especially men, to admit that they have a learning disability. Then we can do something to help them. There are so many demands today. The work force is much more challenging.

**QUESTION: With today's technology, would you advocate for that or go back to phonics?**

Memorization and consistency is what really helped me. There are some amazing tools available today.

Comment made that many dyslexic people turn to sports and entertainment and excel.

**QUESTION: Would dyslexia show up in the broader testing done at the board?**

No one really knew if this was the case.

A student from Scarlett Heights spoke about his own experience with dyslexia. He could relate to Jay, always getting into trouble, and now also looking at opening his own skateboard park. He was given an opportunity to be a custodian through a program with the TDSB. He was given a chance and now wants to help other kids like him.

7. **SEAC (Special Education Advisory Committee) UPDATE – Phillip Sargent**

**Bullying:** Caring and Safe Schools team is doing a lot of work on bullying. The board is taking an active and proactive role in schools. Exceptional children tend to be the most vulnerable. It is not a hidden problem anymore and parents are being notified of any issues. A comment was made that Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI) training would be very helpful to staff and parent volunteers.

Within the board, there has been an increase in self-contained gifted classes.

**Summer School:** There are six DD summer programs with 140 students at Sunny View Public School. They are all currently full with waiting lists. It was suggested that more summer school programs should be available for DD children.
ACTION: Find out when parents will be notified if they have been accepted into the summer school program.

CEC Awards: On May 1, the Council for Exceptional Children presented their Yes I Can Awards. Recipients include: Grade 12 Martingrove student and regular speaker at our Special Education Forum, Terrence Bishundayal; Laurie Green, Ward 3 PIAC Representative and regular attendee of our meetings; and Phil Sargent, our SEAC Representative.

A parent spoke about the additional costs associated with a recent school trip to Washington for a student with special needs. Costs of $2800 were necessary to accommodate the student. Everyone greatly benefitted from including the student on the trip and there is concern that cuts to special education would greatly affect the ability for high needs students to take part in excursions such as this one.

8. TRUSTEE UPDATE – Chris Glover

Chris mentioned the recent budget meeting and the discussion of possible cuts to Itinerant Music Instructors (IMI). The recorder, orff and vocal programs will all be cut. Band and steel programs will be cut by 25% and music teachers will be phased in to replace IMIs. The model in Etobicoke and Scarborough goes back for 60 years with instrumental music being taught exclusively by IMIs but this model is very difficult to maintain. Other schools are taught by a regular teacher that also teaches music. With the board facing another $27 million in additional cuts, trustees are now in a position to either vote for the cuts or risk being put under supervision by the provincial government. Chris said he would not be supporting these cuts. Parents must get the message out to as many people as possible. Next board meeting is scheduled on Wednesday, June 19. Parents interested in getting involved were asked to email Nancy.Trendoff@tdsb.on.ca.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:27 pm.

Thank you to all the parents, students and staff members who came. Your time and commitment to improving Special Education in Etobicoke Centre is greatly appreciated.

A special thank you to our guest speakers and to Millean for hosting the meeting and introducing us to the programs at Central Etobicoke High School.

Trustee Chris Glover