

To: Special Education Advisory Committee

From: Jennifer Di Francesco

Date: May 21, 2025

Subject: Consideration of Motion - ADHD is a “Superpower,” not a Disability

MOVED BY: Jennifer Di Francesco, SECONDED BY: Trustee D’Amico

WHEREAS: Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) should no longer be categorized as a "disorder" or "disability" but instead recognized as a cognitive difference within the framework of neurodiversity. By shifting this label, we aim to reduce stigma, highlight strengths, and promote supportive environments that empower individuals with ADHD to thrive;

WHEREAS: Scientific research increasingly identifies ADHD as a variation in cognitive functioning rather than a pathological condition. Studies highlight that ADHD traits such as impulsivity, hyperfocus, and risk-taking have evolutionary roots, which may have been advantageous in dynamic environments. Viewing ADHD as a difference rather than a deficit aligns with the growing neurodiversity movement, which recognizes diverse cognitive profiles as part of human variation;

WHEREAS: ADHD individuals frequently exhibit traits that can be powerful assets, including creativity, spontaneity, and innovation. Research shows that individuals with ADHD excel in fields requiring dynamic thinking, adaptability, and unconventional problem-solving. Labeling ADHD as a "disorder" focuses disproportionately on weaknesses rather than fostering environments where ADHD traits can be leveraged for success;

WHEREAS: Challenges associated with ADHD often stem from traditional education and work systems that prioritize prolonged focus, rigid routines, and low-stimulation settings. ADHD individuals may thrive when provided with flexible structures, engaging tasks, and creative outlets. By framing ADHD as a cognitive difference, institutions can shift from imposing conformity to nurturing strengths;

WHEREAS: The "disorder" and "disability" labels contribute to stigma, reducing self-esteem and reinforcing negative stereotypes. Reframing ADHD as a cognitive

difference encourages individuals to embrace their unique abilities and seek environments where they can excel; and

WHEREAS: ADHD should be categorized as a Cognitive Difference under the broader umbrella of Neurodiversity. This terminology acknowledges the unique cognitive profile of ADHD individuals without pathologizing their experiences. ADHD is a Superpower!

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees that by recognizing ADHD as a cognitive difference rather than a disorder or disability, we can foster inclusive environments that highlight strengths, reduce stigma, and promote positive outcomes for individuals with ADHD. This motion calls for the TCDSB to adopt this revised perspective, ensuring students with ADHD are valued, respected, heard, and supported in their growth and achievements;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees to write a letter to the Ministry of Education from the TCDSB Board of Trustees asking the Ministry of Education to recognize ADHD under the neurodiversity framework in the Education Act. Research shows that ADHD individuals have unique strengths—such as creativity, problem-solving, and adaptability—that can thrive in the right learning environments. By reframing ADHD, implementing inclusive educational strategies, and training teachers, staff, and administration on the research, development, and evolution in thought on ADHD, we can better support students to reach their full potential; and

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: SEAC recommend to the Board of Trustees that the TCDSB provide targeted support and professional development for educators to deliver curriculum using strength-based, neurodiverse-informed approaches. This includes strategies that engage creativity, problem-solving, adaptability, and other executive functioning skills, while also offering flexible accommodations that empower students with ADHD to thrive academically and socially.

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