

# Section C: THE BOARD'S GENERAL MODEL FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

FEEDBACK

[We value your feedback! Please click this feedback link to leave your suggestions/comments on the 2023-2024 Special Education Plan.](#)

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## ***Purpose of the Standard***

*To provide the ministry and the public with information on the board's philosophy and service- delivery model for the provision of special education programs and services*

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## TDSB Vision for Learning

At the TDSB, we believe in [equity, inclusion, anti-ableism, anti-racism and anti-oppression.](#)

The TDSB is committed to creating an equitable school system where the achievement and well-being of every student is fostered through culturally relevant learning experiences in diverse and accepting environments where everyone is included, every voice is heard, and every experience is valued.

In the TDSB, every school determines a learning focus for each of the following areas: Indigenous Education, Well-being & Belonging, and Achievement. Schools engage in learning to support student improvement in these focus areas, determine the evidence and data to be collected, and monitor progress towards achievement of goals.

Learn more in [A Vision for Learning in the TDSB.](#)

# TDSB Mission

The TDSB's Mission is to enable all students to reach high levels of achievement and to acquire the knowledge, skills and values they need to become responsible, contributing members of a democratic and sustainable society.

## We value:

- Every student's interests, strengths, passions, intersecting identities, lived experiences and areas for growth
- A strong public education system
- A partnership of students, staff, parents/guardians/caregivers, and community
- Shared leadership that builds trust, supports effective practices, and enhances high expectations
- The diversity of students, staff and community
- The commitment and competence of staff
- Equity, innovation, accountability, and accessibility
- Learning and working spaces that are inclusive, caring, safe, respectful, and environmentally sustainable.

# Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP)

Student success drives everything we do in the TDSB. The TDSB's [Multi-Year Strategic Plan \(MYSP\)](#) sets direction and identifies system goals to support approximately 237,000 students in 584 schools.

The MYSP lays the groundwork for how we will transform student learning, create a culture of belonging and well-being, provide access to learning opportunities, strategically and equitably allocate resources, and build strong partnerships. Each student will receive equitable access to programs and resources and increased opportunities that lead to successful learning outcomes.

Measuring our success is critical to knowing we are making a difference for students. Our expectation, and our goal, is that everyone improves.

## **Multi-Year Strategic Plan Goals**

### **Transform Student Learning**

We will have high expectations for all students and provide positive, supportive learning environments. On a foundation of literacy and math, students will deal with issues such as environmental sustainability, poverty and social justice to develop compassion, empathy and problem-solving skills. Students will develop an understanding of technology and the ability to build healthy relationships.

### **Create a Culture for Student and Staff Well-Being**

We will build positive school and workplace cultures that support mental health and well-being — free of bias and full of potential. Educators will be equipped with the tools necessary to teach, assess, support and relate to students. We will create the conditions for every student in every school to experience the support of a caring adult. All staff will have access to professional learning opportunities that build healthy relationships and develop leadership capacity.

### **Provide Equity of Access to Learning Opportunities for All Students**

We will ensure that all schools offer a wide range of programming that reflects the voices, choices, abilities, identities and experiences of students. We will continually review policies, procedures and practices to ensure that they promote equity, inclusion and human rights practices and enhance learning opportunities for all students.

### **Allocate Human and Financial Resources Strategically to Support Student Needs**

We will allocate resources, renew schools, improve services and remove barriers and biases to support student achievement and accommodate the different needs of students, staff and the community.

### **Build Strong Relationships and Partnerships Within School Communities to Support Student Learning and Well-Being**

We will strengthen relationships and continue to build partnerships among students, staff, families and communities that support student needs and improve learning and well-being. We will continue to create an environment where every voice is welcomed and has influence.

The TDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan outlines three key goals for Special Education and Inclusion:

1. We will welcome all students to an open and inclusive learning environment that recognizes that most students can be served effectively within their community school, and will also continue to provide intensive support programs for students with more specialized learning needs.
2. We will continue to strengthen collaboration with parents/guardians/caregivers and engage effectively in the decision-making process regarding their child's program, placement and well-being.
3. We will increase employment opportunities and outcomes for all students with Low Incidence Exceptionalities (Intellectual Disabilities, Physical Disability, Low Vision, Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Health/Medical).

## Special Education Programs and Services

The Toronto District School Board's (TDSB's) Special Education Plan is developed with a commitment to the provision of special education programs and services for students as outlined in the Education Act and the Regulations associated with it, and in alignment with the Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP).

### Inclusion

The TDSB is committed to creating inclusive learning environments for students with intersecting identities, and to building capacity of staff to deepen their understanding of how to serve students with special education needs. The TDSB holds high expectations for students and supports their achievement and well-being by removing systemic barriers that stand in the way of their success.

Equity of outcome is supported in the TDSB through the provision of a range of special education supports and services for students. This range includes both in-school and itinerant support, short term intervention services, and placements in regular classes as well as self-contained classes.

Ontario Regulation 181/98 requires school boards to consider placing students with exceptionalities into regular classes with appropriate special education services before considering placement in special education classes. In the TDSB, we continue to be responsive to the understanding that as students learn, they develop skills and so their special education service and program needs change over time. Students being

welcomed, included and supported in well-resourced neighbourhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes are able to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of school life. This allows for valuable learning opportunities for groups which have been historically excluded, such as students with disabilities and intersecting identities.

The following TDSB research reports highlight the benefits of adopting an inclusive education model, particularly for students with special education needs: [A Case for Inclusive Education](#) and [Equity and Human Rights in Special Education: Critical Reflective Practice Guide](#).

Some students with unique strengths and needs (behaviour, communication, intellectual and physical) may require more specialized or intensive programs and supports. TDSB staff work with parents/guardians/caregivers to determine the most appropriate supports and enabling environment for their children.

The TDSB will continue to work to ensure that each student is thriving in an accessible, inclusive, and engaging program by:

- following appropriate identification, placement, and review procedures (IPRC) with full and appropriate parent/guardian/caregiver involvement
- assigning teachers with appropriate educational qualifications
- if required, developing Individual Education Plans (IEPs) which focus on improved student learning and ongoing review of expectations and services set out in the IEP
- providing equitable practices in the development of all aspects of learning for the exceptional student (i.e., academic, social, cultural, physical, intellectual, behavioural and emotional)
- recognizing all transitional processes (i.e., preschool, elementary, secondary, post-secondary, work, community, class-class, activity-activity)
- valuing student, parent/guardian/caregiver involvement and input
- planning and ongoing evaluation of special education services
- ongoing capacity building of staff in applying current teaching and learning strategies and methodologies designed to respond to the identities, lived experiences, strengths and areas of growth of students with special education needs

# The Referral Process

## Parents as Partners

Parents/guardians/caregivers know their children best. They know their children's strengths, abilities, needs, and areas for improvement. It is critical that parents provide information about their children and participate in decisions that affect their children's education.

## Concerns About A Child

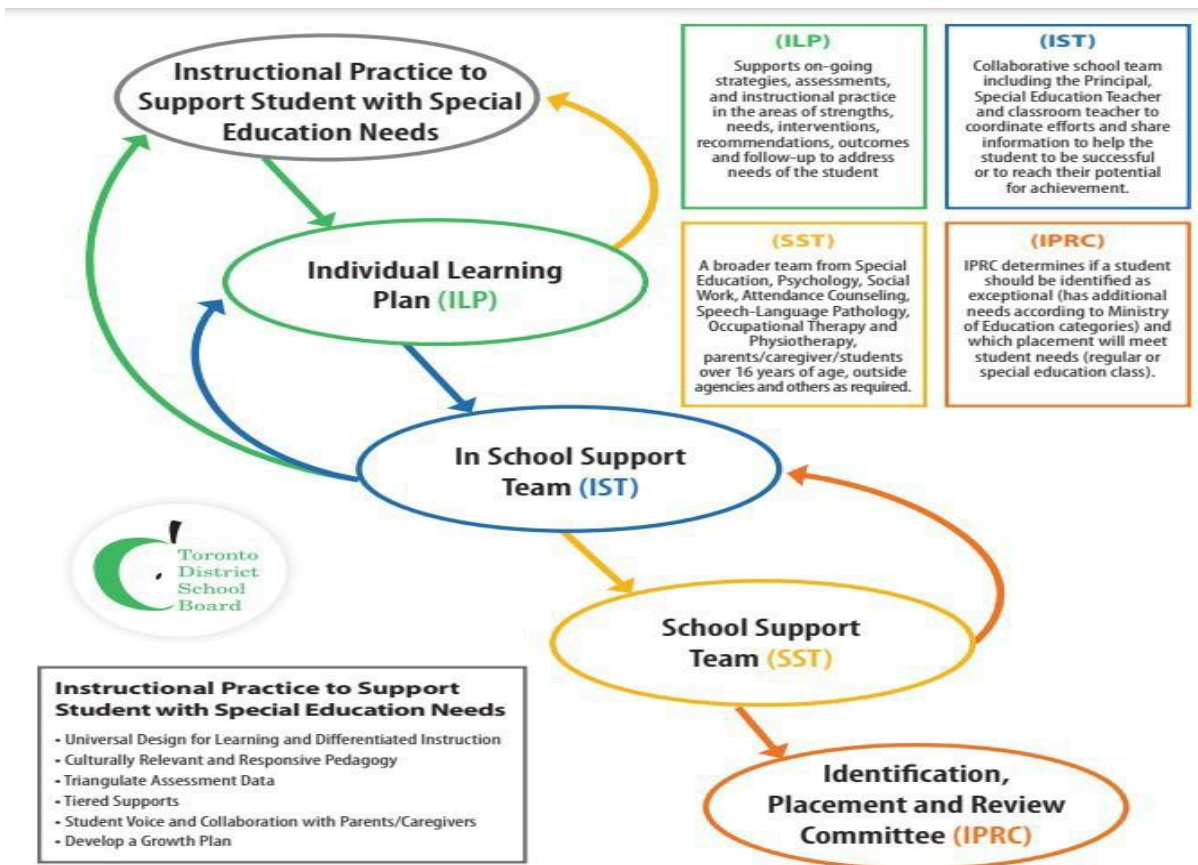
A parent/guardian/caregiver or their child's teacher may identify that a child is having difficulty learning. The teacher(s) may contact the parent/guardian/caregiver to discuss their findings, a parent may reach out to the teacher(s) and principal with concerns they may have about their child. A parent/guardian/caregiver may choose to involve a friend, family member or advocate at any time, and with permission, school staff can communicate with them as well.

## Steps in the Referral Process

The steps in the referral process include:

- Development of an Individual Learning Plan (ILP);
- In-School Team (IST) meetings with school-based staff;
- School Support Team (SST) meetings with school-based-staff, Special Education and Inclusion and/or Professional Support Services staff;
- Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC).

## The Referral Process



## Supporting Students Through an Individual Learning Plan (ILP)

An Individual Learning Plan (ILP) is the first step in supporting students who may not be meeting their achievement goals. Developing an ILP involves parents/guardians/caregivers and the student (as appropriate) as much as possible, to allow an opportunity for student voice and agency and also parent partnership.

The ILP is a tool used by the teacher to detail, track and monitor on-going assessments, instructional strategies, interventions, recommendations, and follow-up strategies to address the needs of the student. The ILP allows the teacher to compile detailed and specific information about the student's current abilities, strengths, and areas for growth in relation to their identity and lived experiences, based on the learning conditions provided by the teacher. It is implemented and assessed for 6-8 weeks to determine next steps. The teacher(s) continuously assesses student progress, adjusts the ILP as necessary, and evaluates and reports progress to parents and appropriate staff.

If the planned interventions are successful, staff and the student will continue with those interventions. If the student is still experiencing challenges, the steps below are followed.



## Referral to the In-School Team (IST)

If focused interventions have been implemented but the student continues to experience challenges, the teacher(s) would present the student to the In-School Support Team (IST) where additional interventions or assistance required to support the teacher(s) and student are explored.

IST meetings are a proactive problem-solving opportunity to support programming and success for the academic, physical, social and emotional strengths and needs of the student. The school team works together to support the student, the parent, and the teacher(s) through planning and implementing supports and strategies, with regular monitoring of progress.

### Members of the In-School Team

The members of the IST consists of a core group of individuals, including:

- the student's teacher(s);
- the principal or vice-principal;
- the school special education teacher (if available);
- a guidance teacher/counsellor (especially at the secondary level);
- the student success teacher (especially at the secondary level).

### In-School Team Process

The teacher(s) will have gathered information and reviewed assessment material (e.g., diagnostic assessments, recent work samples, direct observation), and recorded strategies implemented on the Individual Learning Profile (ILP) and share this information at the IST meeting. The IST will review the ILP, on-going strategies, assessments and instructional practice in the areas of strengths, needs, interventions, recommendations, outcomes and follow-up to support the student.

After the IST meeting, the teacher will work with the student to ensure any additional strategies suggested by the IST are implemented. The teacher will reach out to additional staff for support as needed, including the Special Education and Inclusion Consultant for support.

Most students' needs can be addressed by the IST. However, if the strategies recommended by the IST have been implemented with little success, the IST can refer the student to the School Support Team (SST).



## Referral to the School Support Team (SST)

Only if it has been determined after careful deliberation with the In-School Support Team, the teacher and the principal that the strategies are all being implemented with limited success, the student may be presented to the School Support Team (SST).

### Members of the School Support Team

In addition to the school staff listed above, this team offers additional knowledge by including:

- psychologists;
- social workers;
- attendance counsellors;
- speech-language pathologists;
- occupational therapists;
- physiotherapists; and
- parents or caregivers and students over 16 years of age.

Parents are the most valuable partner in a child's education. Although parental attendance at the IST and SST meetings is not mandatory, parents are strongly encouraged to attend. Parents who cannot attend will be informed about any plan of action recommended at the meeting to address their child's needs. Students over 16 years of age are also encouraged to participate and must be consulted. Students 18 years of age or older must be invited to attend the SST and give permission for their personal information to be shared with their parents.

When a member of the TDSB's Professional Support Services (PSS) such as a psychologist or social worker attends the meeting, parental permission is required if the student is to be discussed by name.

The SST may recommend PSS support, a return to the IST or a referral to the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC).

### Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC)

If further assessment is completed and results indicate a need for identification, an IPRC meeting is held to determine whether the student should be identified as exceptional and to determine appropriate placement. For more information on IPRCs, please refer to [Section H - The Identification Placement and Review Committee \(IPRC\) Process and Appeals](#)

# Teaching and Learning

The use of evidence-based teaching and learning strategies are essential to supporting all learners, including those with special education needs. Within the Tiered Approach, staff focus on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Differentiated Instruction (DI), and Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP).

## The Tiered Approach

A tiered approach to prevention and intervention supports inclusion. It is based on the understanding that effective assessment, instruction, and appropriate intervention strategies are essential to ensuring all students will succeed.

The tiered approach ensures appropriate and timely interventions that leverage the student's strengths and reduce, as much as possible, additional areas for growth. The approach also facilitates early identification of students who may be at risk so that prevention strategies can be implemented.

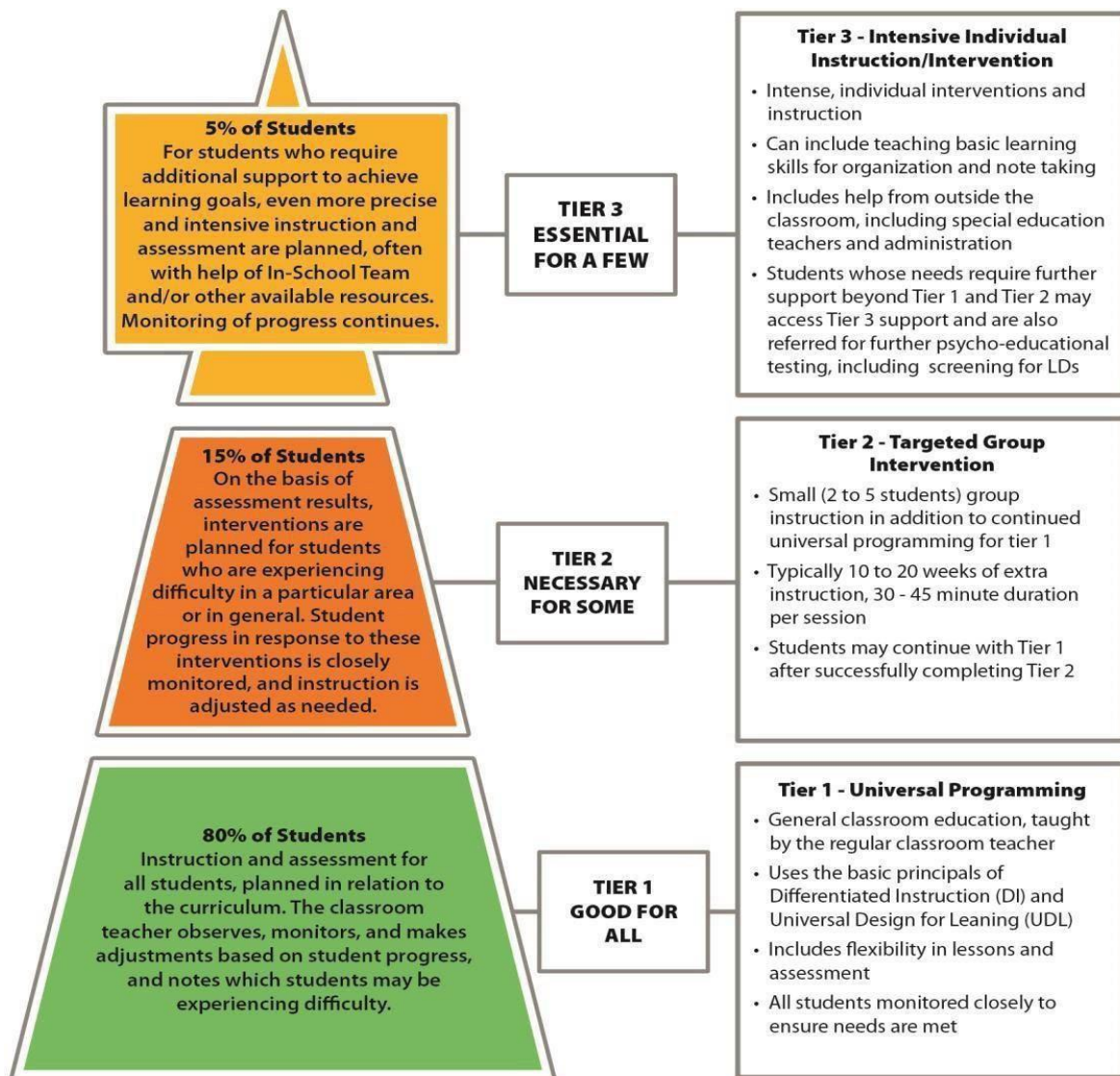
**Tier 1** consists of evidence-based classroom instruction based on the Ontario curriculum. The principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction (DI) are used to ensure a variety of ways students participate in and demonstrate their learning. Teachers choose effective, culturally safe and trauma-informed instructional strategies for all students in a classroom setting. Assessment in this tier is classroom-based and involves the teacher monitoring the progress of the class and flagging any student with areas for growth.

**Tier 2** provides more intentional instruction and short-term interventions for individual students or for small groups of students, in addition to Tier 1 programming. Tier 2 requires teachers to identify students who are progressing with difficulty when using Tier 1 instruction and to closely monitor the students through ongoing assessment.

Teachers will gather student information to be presented to the In-School Team (IST) to discuss strategies to better meet the needs of the student.

**Tier 3** uses intentional and focused interventions that provide increased support for students to achieve learning goals. To ensure precise interventions, teams will engage from a holistic perspective utilizing quantitative and qualitative data. Through collaboration with school staff, parents/guardians/caregivers, the student, and any additional agency resources, the team will develop a plan in support of the student's pathway.

The graphic that follows summarizes the Tiered Approach to prevention and intervention.



## Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

The core concept of UDL is that of “necessary for some and good for all.” UDL comprises instructional and assessment strategies, materials, and tools that respond to the needs of a specific student or group of students.

UDL allows access to the curriculum for all students. In this model, teachers design learning opportunities and create learning environments that are inclusive, flexible, and accessible for all students, regardless of achievement level. The learning principles of UDL are Universality and Equity, Appropriately Designed Spaces, Flexibility and Inclusion, Simplicity, Safety, and Different Modes of Perception.

## Differentiated Instruction (DI)

Unlike UDL, which applies broad-based principles for planning, Differentiated Instruction (DI) focuses on specific strengths, interests, learning styles and needs of the individual student. The instruction is adapted to meet high expectations of achievement and engagement in learning since the planning considers the identity, lived experiences, strengths and areas for growth of the student.

The areas of learning that are differentiated when planning instruction are:

- the *content* of learning (what students are going to learn, and when)
- the *process* of learning (the types of tasks and activities)
- the *products* of learning (the ways in which students demonstrate their learning)
- the *environment* of learning (the context and environment in which students learn and demonstrate learning)

## Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP)

“Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy (CRRP) recognizes that all students learn in ways that are connected to background, language, family structure, and social or cultural identity. By knowing ‘who their students are’, educators can tailor programs and practices to better meet the needs of their diverse student populations and ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed” ([Ministry of Education, Human Rights, Equity, and Inclusive Education](#)).

Culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy involves recognizing that “culture” encompasses various aspects of social and personal identity. It also means acknowledging students’ multiple social and personal identities and the social issues that arise where identities intersect.

Teachers consider the student’s intersecting identities and lived experiences in programming for the student. Some considerations when incorporating CRRP are:

- How have you used a variety of resources, including community partners (as applicable), to ensure the learning environment and pedagogical materials are accessible to the student and that the life of the student is reflected in the daily workings of the classroom?
- Is the classroom environment and are the resources reflective of the student’s intersecting identities (i.e., classroom as the third teacher)?

- In what ways have you presented resources, materials and books from both local and global perspectives?
- How is the student actively engaged and how does the student have voice in their learning?

## **Culture of Shared Responsibility**

The majority of students' needs can be met in the regular classroom in their neighbourhood school. Strategies such as the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Differentiated Instruction (DI), Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP), appropriate accommodations and a tiered approach to intervention can support students when working toward their learning goals. School Improvement Coaches, Early Literacy Coaches, Guidance Coaches, and Special Education and Inclusion staff collaborate with the school to support professional learning for administrators, teachers and support staff so that educators can meet students' unique needs.

Parents/guardians/caregivers' voices and perspectives inform our planning. As teachers are directly responsible for educational program planning, we continue to create a culture of shared responsibility that supports all students and leads to improved learning and well-being that includes practices from the following documents:

- [Growing Success \(2010\)](#)
- [Knowing and Responding to Learners-A Differentiated Instruction Educators Guide \(2016\)](#)