

Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting

April 8, 2024

Leadership Report

Louise Sirisko, Associate Director
Nandy Palmer, System Superintendent for Special Education and Inclusion

Professional Learning for Superintendents

In March, Special Education and Inclusion led a professional learning session for Senior Team on Changing Mindsets. This session made connections to the goals in the TDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan and the areas of Equity, Anti-Oppression and Anti-Ableism. Superintendents were asked to reflect on and challenge the following beliefs:

- Mindset 1: Early years students who demonstrate learning challenges have special education needs.
- Mindset 2: Students are better served elsewhere (ISP - Integrated or Congregated Site).
- Mindset 3: Students with Special Education Needs are better served by Special Education Teachers.

At the end of the session, superintendents determined next steps for working with school-based staff to welcome and foster inclusion for students with special education needs by challenging mindsets about ability and beliefs about students with special education needs. 93% of superintendents reported that they felt more confident and competent in their ability to support school administrators in changing mindsets for desired outcomes for students with special education needs.

Principal/Vice Principal Drop-In Sessions

In addition to monthly professional learning at Family of Schools meetings, the Special Education and Inclusion Centrally Assigned Principals (CAPs) have established monthly online drop-in sessions for all administrators. During these sessions, time is set aside for both structured professional learning and the opportunity for administrators to ask specific questions about Special Education topics, including writing effective Individual Education Plans (IEPs), addressing safety concerns, managing in a unionized environment, and creating support staff timetables. This has built a collaborative and supportive community among administrators, allowing them to share best practices, discuss challenges, and exchange ideas to enhance their overall effectiveness in promoting inclusive education within their schools.

Diagnostic Kindergarten (DK) Professional Learning

In collaboration with the Early Years Department, Special Education and Inclusion provided release time for Diagnostic Kindergarten (DK) staff to engage in learning with kindergarten educators in the regular program to explore strategies for creating rich play-based experiences that spark a sense of wonder and joy in young learners, based on the Four Frames of Belonging and Contributing, Self-Regulation and Well-Being, Demonstrating Literacy and Mathematics Behaviors, and Problem Solving and Innovating, as outlined in the Kindergarten Curriculum. Learning alongside colleagues from the regular kindergarten classes emphasizes the importance of creating high expectations for students in Diagnostic Kindergarten (DK) programs by using the same principles of the kindergarten program, but differentiating as needed for individual learners. This approach also provides for a smoother transition back to the regular classroom for some students. Future sessions will focus on writing effective Individual Education Plans (IEPs), including how to modify curriculum expectations within the 4-Frames.

Special Education and Inclusion Summer School

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) will be offering summer school for students who are currently enrolled in a Developmental Disability, Physical Disability, and Deaf and Hard of Hearing Intensive Support Program (ISP). These half-day programs will be held at various locations throughout the TDSB.

The programs will support students to continue to develop their independence in the areas of functional literacy and numeracy skills, activities of daily living, and communication and social skills through a creative curriculum that can include technology, physical fitness, art, music and drama. The information below will give you a brief outline of the programs.

Programs are offered in-person to students in Kindergarten to Grade 12, from July 2 to July 26, 2024. Applications must be submitted by May 3, 2024.

Education Community Partnership Program (ECP) Summer Program

The ECP Program will be providing summer school secondary credit programs for students in partnership with Humber River Hospital, SickKids Hospital, Springboard, Turning Point, Fernie Youth Services, The Jessie and June Calwood Centre, Abiona Centre, Central Toronto Youth Services, Youthdale Treatment Centres and Lumenus Community Services.

The programs provide students the opportunity to earn a credit in the summer while receiving the support they need from the community agency.



Toward Independence: Blind/Low Vision Program Newsletter

The Toward Independence Newsletter is a cherished tradition within the TDSB Blind/Low Vision Program, providing a platform for students with visual impairments to share their voices and perspectives with their peers. Available in various accessible formats such as braille, large print, AODA-compliant formatting for screen readers and audio formats, the newsletter ensures inclusion and accessibility for all readers.

The front cover of the newsletter features a visual celebration of braille using SimBraille, a format that visually represents the raised dot formation of braille. Unlike typical newspapers, this one avoids blocks of print or columns, making it easier for text-to-speech screen reading software and individuals learning to read braille to access and understand the content. This inclusive design ensures that all readers, regardless of their level of visual impairment or literacy, can engage with the newsletter effectively.

Deaf Hard of Hearing (D/HH) Field Trip

On March 18th, 163 Deaf and Hard of Hearing students from JK to age 12, who receive Tier 2 and 3 supports from the D/HH Itinerant team, participated in a full day of hands-on learning at Forest Valley Outdoor Educational Centre. For many students, this was the first Deaf and Hard of Hearing field trip they had attended and for some, the first time they had the opportunity to meet other students with hearing differences. Seeing others who have hearing aids and/or cochlear implants as well as use Remote Microphone (RM) systems, fosters a sense of community and shared identity. The Forest Valley staff and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Itinerant team ensured that technology and learning accommodations were supported for all students throughout the day.

At Forest Valley, the students “officially” learned about the maple syrup production process, with programming geared towards their grade and learning level but the incidental learning was, for many, even more powerful. Students left at the end of the day having been able to explore, investigate and participate in a uniquely Canadian experience and with a feeling of connection with other students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. In the days following, the D/HH team received many positive comments from students and their parents/guardians/caregivers about how special this opportunity was.

Raising Awareness on World Down Syndrome Day

On World Down Syndrome Day, Oriole Park Junior Public School parent and student David and Matteo share their film “How I can Learn” as a way to raise awareness and educate people about Down Syndrome. The Global News segment can be viewed [here](#).



IPRC Data - March 2024

March IPRCs	
Learning Centre 1	131
Learning Centre 2	109
Learning Centre 3	48
Learning Centre 4	127
IPRCs Completed	415
IPRC Cumulative since August 2023	
IPRC Cumulative since August 2023	1667

