

## **Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting**

**June 10, 2024**

### **Leadership Report**

Louise Sirisko, Associate Director, Instructional Innovation and Equitable Outcomes  
Nandy Palmer, System Superintendent, Special Education and Inclusion

#### **PA Day Professional Learning Sessions for Support Staff**

On June 7, 2024, Special Education and Inclusion staff from the Special Equipment Amount (SEA), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and Behaviour, Prevention and Intervention (BPI) Teams presented a variety of interactive professional learning sessions for support staff on a number of topics such as *Connecting Threads: Cultivating Strong Student - Teacher Relationships*; *Calming Toolbox: Good for Staff and Good for Students*; *ABC Logs*; *ABCs of ABA: Using Basic ABA Strategies in the Classroom*; *Behaviour Prevention and Supporting De-escalation*; *Positive Reinforcement*; *Transition Planning for Elementary and Secondary Students (STAR Autism Support)*; *WeVideo Guest Teacher Preview*; *Book Creator Guest Teacher Preview*; *Read&Write Guest Teacher Preview*.

These hands-on learning sessions provided an opportunity for support staff to learn, further develop their skill set and explore effective inclusionary practices to implement accommodations in classrooms that incorporate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction (DI). Participants deepened their understanding of the intersection of anti-ableism, anti-oppression and anti-racism and discussed ways in which students can effectively be integrated and supported.

#### **BE THE CHANGE Project Showcase**

Students and educators came together to celebrate their work in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion and effecting positive change in school communities. The Be The Change project, led by TDSB's Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy Services, involved 16 TDSB schools this year. There were 3 virtual learning modules teaching students about neurodiversity, inclusion, equity, allyship and activism. Each module encouraged students to deepen their understanding and inspired them to "Be The Change" in their schools and communities by launching an inclusive initiative. Phase 1 schools embarked on their first year of the project while phase 2 schools continued their work from the previous school year and worked to embed sustainability with their initiatives. The showcase highlighted an incredible display of student voice, engagement, and amplification of neurodiverse, identity-affirming, and culturally relevant lived experiences. Some examples of student-led initiatives to raise awareness of neurodiversities and disabilities included the establishment of intentional connections between students in regular classes and ISPs (e.g., reading groups, best buddies, collaborative performances, gardening, creating social stories and resources for students in ISPs), fundraisers for various social justice causes, liaising with community partners (e.g., Holland Bloorview Kids' Rehabilitation Hospital) for learning opportunities, developing and establishing school-operated food banks to support food security in their communities, fundraising and development of multi-sensory environments, character education assemblies, and so much more. This project continues to amplify student voice,

inclusion, compassion, identity-affirmation, and pride within schools and has been greatly successful in bolstering cohesiveness in school communities.

### **This is How I Roll Pilot Project**

“This is How I Roll” was a ministry-funded pilot project led by TDSB’s Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy (OT/PT) Services that focused on supporting adolescents with disabilities in feeling a sense of empowerment, discovering individual strengths, and learning how to use this knowledge to navigate real life situations. A small group of 6 high school students with physical disabilities met with OT/PT staff on a weekly basis for 5 sessions where topics were discussed including disability pride, ableism and its impact on individuals and society, strengths-focused exploration and identification, and student empowerment (i.e. reclaiming and redefining disability). The discussed topics were ones that are personal and sensitive in nature and the small group forum enabled open discussion, connection, and camaraderie.

Although the group was small, the impact of these sessions was meaningful and undeniable in bolstering identity affirmation, a sense of self and belonging, and mental health and well-being. A subsequent application for ministry funding was submitted for the 2024-25 school year in hopes of expanding the project and building sustainability into this work.

### **Virtual Drop-in Office Hours for Parents/Guardians/Caregivers**

Professional Support Services (PSS) team members hosted monthly virtual drop-in sessions for parents/guardians/caregivers with students in the TDSB, including students with special education needs.

These monthly virtual drop-in times provided an opportunity to connect directly with a healthcare professionals (i.e., Psychologist/Social Worker/Speech and Language Therapist/Occupational Therapist and Physiotherapist) to help answer questions, explore ideas and provide support related to children’s mental health and well-being.

### **Summer Transition Program for Students with High Special Education Needs**

Students with high special education needs have a range of physical, emotional, social, health, safety, and academic needs that should be considered as they transition back to school. For these students, structure and routine are often critical components to learning. Through ministry funding, elementary and secondary schools were invited to participate in the Summer Transition Program to support a smooth transition back to school for students with high special education needs. Programs will focus on establishing relationships, encouraging familiarity with schools and reviewing/practicing routines. In the Fall, we will provide a synopsis of the various programs offered.

### **Supporting Transition to High School: Secondary Congregated Sites**

Professional Support Services (PSS) received mental health and well being funds which were used to support transitions for students with disabilities. These funds were offered to secondary congregated school sites and high schools with DD/PD ISPs, and 18 schools expressed interest in participating. School staff, with the support of their PSS team (i.e. Child and Youth Services, Occupational Therapists/Physiotherapists, Psychology Services, Social Work Services,



Speech-Language Services) arranged transition events for incoming Grade 9 students and their parents/guardians/caregivers to visit future school sites.

During these visits, students and families were able to familiarize themselves with the school space, meet with future educators and PSS teams, enjoy food and refreshments, receive valuable transition resources (e.g., visual social stories, sensory/motor transition items, etc.), and most importantly, initiate connections and relationships to foster smooth transitions with school staff. Currently enrolled high school students also provided school tours for their incoming peers and received honorariums for their participation and efforts. In future years, it is hoped that additional Ministry funds will be provided so that more programs, students, and schools may benefit from these opportunities to promote caring, a sense of belonging, and centering mental health and well-being to support significant school transitions.

### **Special Education and Inclusion Annual Report**

The 2023-2024 Annual Report was shared with the Program and School Services Committee (PSSC) on May 8, 2024 for receipt and was presented to the Board for approval on May 22, 2024. The report was also shared with SEAC.

In an effort to create coherence and alignment of special education and inclusion practices, programs and structures across the TDSB to foster more inclusive environments for students with special education needs, the Special Education and Inclusion Department has been focusing on the following areas:

- Changing Mindsets
  - *Ableism in Education* Book Study
  - Professional Learning for Senior Team
  - Early Years
  - Modified Days
- Challenging and Dismantling Oppressive Structures
  - The Referral Process, including the Individual Learning Plan (ILP)
  - Special Education Program Recommendation Committee (SEPRC) Review
  - Employability Skills for Students with Special Education Needs
- Capacity Building
  - Focus on Teaching and Learning (Tier 1 and 2 Strategies)
  - Mathematics
  - Drop-In Learning Sessions
  - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
  - Additional Qualification (AQ) Subsidy
  - Partnership with Apple Canada
- Communication and Engagement
  - Fact Sheets
  - Parent/Guardian/Caregiver Webinar Sessions
  - Parents and Caregivers as Partners Conference
  - Grade 8-9 Transition Information Session
  - Guides for Parents/Guardians/Caregivers
  - Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) After School Skills Development Program

- Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) K-12 Working Group

These focus areas are interconnected and reflect the need for shared responsibility and shared accountability in serving students with special education needs, and indeed all students.

**National Deafblind Awareness Month in Canada**

The month of June serves as a platform for raising awareness about the distinctive challenges encountered by individuals with an identified dual sensory loss. Deafblindness, a combination of sight and hearing loss to varying degrees, profoundly impacts communication, mobility, learning, and access to information. Those who are deafblind often rely on alternative communication methods, such as tactile sign language, braille, or assistive technology.

In Ontario, students are identified as deafblind when neither sense can fully compensate for the loss of the other, meaning that neither can be used as a primary means of learning. They have unique and complex needs, requiring services and supports which are different from those designed exclusively for individuals who are blind or have low vision, are Deaf or hard of hearing, or have multiple exceptionalities. When both vision and hearing challenges exist, attention and consideration must be given to both senses simultaneously. Environmental adaptations, positioning adjustments, and modifications in information delivery are needed.

To learn more about the local deafblind community, please visit [Deafblind Awareness Month | DBCS \(deafblindservices.ca\)](https://deafblindservices.ca)

**IPRC Data - May 2024**

<b>May IPRCs</b>	
<b>Learning Centre 1</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>Learning Centre 2</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>Learning Centre 3</b>	<b>223</b>
<b>Learning Centre 4</b>	<b>241</b>
<b>IPRCs Completed</b>	<b>756</b>
<b>IPRC Cumulative since August 2023</b>	
<b>IPRC Cumulative since August 2023</b>	<b>3949</b>



