

Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting

October 8, 2024

Leadership Report

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Special Education and Inclusion Goals - Staff Development

Staff in departments and schools engage in several types of professional learning opportunities throughout the school year to help them better serve students with special education needs. These learning opportunities include compliance training such as the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), Supporting Children with Prevalent Medical Conditions, and mandatory learning such as the Individual Education Plan (IEP) Strategy and Chairing Identification and Placement Review Committee (IPRC) Meetings. Other professional learning opportunities are school-specific, based on the goals of the School Improvement Plan (SIP).

Over the next two years, staff will focus on the following four areas for professional learning:

1. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)
2. Inclusion (anti-ableism), Equity (anti-oppression) and Well-Being;
3. Learning Conditions; and
4. Universal Design for Learning, Differentiated Instruction and Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy.

The Special Education and Inclusion Department will continue 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 by focusing on the following areas:

- Challenging and Dismantling Oppressive Structures;
- Capacity Building;
- Changing Mindsets; and
- Communication and Engagement.

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.



Professional Learning

To support coherence, alignment and consistency of special education and inclusion practices and to build capacity, a number of professional learning opportunities have been offered to staff at all levels since the start of the 2024-2025 school year.

The following sessions, which align with the **Professional Learning** section of the TDSB Special Education Plan, were specifically designed for school and system leaders:

1. **Special Education for Newly Appointed Administrators**

Held August 20, this session provided an overview of special education and inclusion practices for newly appointed Vice Principals and Principals.

2. **Sessions for New and Experienced Administrators**

Two in-person sessions were presented in September to equip administrators with current information to support their leadership in special education and inclusion at their schools. The sessions included critical reflection and dialogue around processes, policies, and procedures. Forty four administrators explored their role in interrupting and addressing oppressive practices and ableism in.

3. **Drop-in Office Hours for Administrators**

This year, Centrally Assigned Principals continue to offer monthly drop-in sessions for administrators. These sessions provide a forum for answering questions on leading special education in schools, with a monthly micro-learning focus on a specific topic (e.g., timetabling support staff, reviewing IEPs, transitions, etc.).

4. **School-Based IPRC Principal Chair and Committee Member Training**

This annual training, which will be held on October 11 and 12, will offer principal chairs insights into their roles and responsibilities in leading school-based IPRCs.

These professional learning opportunities are critical in fostering leadership, enhancing inclusive practices, and ensuring all staff are equipped to meet the needs of students.

Learning and engagement sessions are available to both staff and families, providing valuable opportunities to explore inclusive practices and implement concrete strategies in the classroom and at home. These sessions are designed to support student achievement and well-being.

For your reference, please find embedded links to the learning sessions offered since the start of the school year:

[w Learning Sessions September 2024.docx](#)

[w Learning Sessions October 2024.docx](#)

Parent Engagement Session

On September 24, the *Let's Talk, Read, and Write!* series for parents/guardians/caregivers launched virtually. This initiative began as an in-school literacy series with sessions for parents with students in Senior Kindergarten. This school year, in continued collaboration with TDSB Parent Engagement and Community Support Worker Donna Cardoza, and with support from Troy Langevine, Centrally Assigned Principal (LC1), Special Education and Inclusion's Speech Language Pathology Services piloted the series virtually in an effort to reach more families.

Parents of Grade 1 students were invited to register for five consecutive sessions to support literacy and language in the home. In each session, parents and children have an opportunity to practice strategies together that focus on word level skills as well as language development, and walk away with activities to practice at home.

The five sessions will be held on Tuesday evenings from 6:30-7:30, from September 24 to November 12. To date, 1300 families have registered, with 646 parents logging on with their children to participate in the first of five sessions.

Removing Barriers for Students with Disabilities Ministry Grants

Special Education and Inclusion, through Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy (OT/PT) Services, was successful in being awarded four ministry grants through their "Removing Barriers for Students with Disabilities" funding opportunity for the 2024-25 school year.

Grant 1: Let's All be Friends

This pilot project is focused on supporting students with autism in both regular and ASD ISP classrooms in integrated school sites. It is well documented that one of the diagnostic criteria for autism is impairment associated with social functioning. OT/PT staff members working on the Autism Services Team have noted that some of the challenges faced by students with autism relate to challenges with developing meaningful and genuine friendships with their neurotypical peers. These concerns have most notably been observed and reported by educators in Grades 3-5 when many children start to establish and form long-lasting friendships. OT/PT Services intends to:

- Identify obstacles that preclude the development of friendships and relationships for autistic students;
- Develop a trial friendship module to guide school teams on how to establish neurodiversity-affirming friendship clubs within schools; and
- Test and trial the developed resources with a small sample group of schools.

Next year, the team will apply for additional funding to expand the breadth and impact of this project, and build sustainability for future years to come.

Grant 2: This is How I Keep on Rolling



During the 2023-24 school year, OT/PT Services embarked on a pilot project to test out a strengths-based, self-actualization, and identity-affirming disability pride project with a small group of students with physical disabilities. Anecdotal feedback received from participants include:

- “Now I am less hesitant to describe myself as disabled and I shouldn’t have to leave that out. Having a part of me identify strengths has helped me have more courage.”
- “I had a friend who said the way I talked about my disability made them uncomfortable. Having [these sessions] have been affirming. There are times I would question myself...after receiving a comment like that, so I felt this was really great and I find myself relating to the term in a positive way.”

This year, the project will establish more formalized resources and deliver and train educators so that more students may benefit from the learning from this project. It also intends to scaffold the information and seamlessly integrate these concepts within pedagogy and programming.

Grant 3: An exploratory assessment of vocational skills programming, its applicability to job experiences, and how it accommodates students with disabilities

This initiative is intended to support secondary students with disabilities who are enrolled in Intensive Support Programs (ISPs) with Mild Intellectual Disabilities (MID) and/or Autism (ASD) in integrated school sites. There have been challenges noted by vocational skills program educators that impede the seamless, successful, and safe integration of students with disabilities. This two-year project (contingent on approved funding for the second year) will start by meeting with school teams, external identity-affirming community partners, and relevant community agencies to explore the following:

- Understanding and compiling the specific noted challenges in supporting students with disabilities and their success in vocational skills programming;
- Understanding and compiling the explicit skills required by employers that optimize a student’s employability; and
- Completing a review of vocational programming curricula and the modifications required to ensure differentiated vocational skills’ instruction that promotes safe and effective student inclusion.

The learnings from this project will inform the second year of this plan to develop resources and deliver education to the system on how to modify vocational skills curricula to increase employability for students with MID and/or autism.

Grant 4: Hire this Kid - Developing a Job Opportunities Outreach Support Package

This project can be viewed as a complementary support for the project highlighted in *Grant 3*. It is well documented that individuals with disabilities encounter more barriers to employment and exhibit lower employment rates as compared to enabled individuals. Consistent with reduced job opportunities, there are also reduced cooperative education opportunities for students with disabilities and thus limited chances of engaging in contextual real life work experience while supported through the school experience. This project aims to bridge relationships, build



understanding, and bolster cooperative educational employment opportunities for students with disabilities by generating a sustainable package of resources that serves to support and recruit new employers to participate in offering cooperative education experiences for future years to come.

TDSB Transition Navigators

The K-12 and Post-secondary Education Standards Development Committees (SDC) identified transitions as a potential organizational barrier for students with special education needs and/or disabilities, which included transitions into school, between schools, and out of secondary school to postsecondary education, workplace or community. Some key areas related to transitions for these students, identified by the SDC, include a lack of:

- consistency of planning for entry to school
- integration in transition planning between elementary and secondary schools
- coordination between secondary schools and postsecondary institutions.

TDSB has received \$646,007.98 to support work in this area. We have hired four Transitions Navigators and are required to utilize the funds to:

- improve the educational outcomes for students with special education needs and/or disabilities by supporting their transition into school, between schools and out of secondary school to work, the community or post-secondary education (PSE)
- develop and share best practices/resources/tools that lead to successful transition into school and between schools, and that lead to successful post-secondary school destinations, including work and the community
- create and implement a plan for sustainability of best practices, processes and procedures regarding the transition of students with special education needs and/or disabilities into school, between schools/panels and out of secondary school to work, the community or PSE.

The newly hired Transitions Navigators are building out an action plan, and updates will be shared as the year progresses.

ONSIS Data (Attachments)

ONSIS data from the 2023-2024 school year for elementary and secondary students has been included in the attachments to this report.

October is Learning Disabilities Awareness Month (#LDmonth)

October is Learning Disabilities Awareness Month. The focus this month is to stop the stigma and realize students have ABILITIES! For more information, please visit the [LD@School website](#).



October is ADHD Awareness Month

October is ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) Awareness Month. This October, the Center for ADHD Awareness, Canada (CADDAC) is raising awareness about the additional mental health conditions that often come with an ADHD diagnosis. Did you know:

- 80% of adults and 44% of children with ADHD have at least one additional mental health condition
- 46% of women are misdiagnosed with another mental health condition disorder before being diagnosed with ADHD
- Up to 40% of children and 50% of adults with ADHD also have an anxiety disorder.
- 40% of individuals with ADHD also have a mood disorder
- As many as 50% of individuals with substance use disorder also have ADHD
- Early intervention is shown to prevent further mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, and substance use disorders

Please find information on ADHD in this [ADHD Fact Sheet](#) created by members of TDSB SEAC and staff. For more information, visit the [CADDAC website](#).

Mark it Read for Dyslexia Awareness Month 2024

The theme for Mark it Read 2024 is **Breaking the Silence**. Mark it Read is the official Canadian celebration for Dyslexia Awareness Month. October 1st, 2024 marks the start of the 7th annual national awareness-raising campaign. Each year across Canada, monuments and buildings are lit up red, schools and workplaces wear red, and cities and towns sign proclamations to officially declare the month of October as Dyslexia Awareness Month.

IPRC Data - September 2024

September IPRCs	
Learning Centre 1	9
Learning Centre 2	20
IPRCs Completed	29
IPRC Cumulative since August 2024	
IPRC Cumulative since August 2024	29





**Psychological Services
Assessment Statistics**

September 2024

Month-By-Month	LC1 (West)	LC2 (East)	Total
Completed	34	48	82
Total Referrals	626	504	1130
Cumulative (since September 2024)			
Completed	34	48	82
In Progress	176	204	380
Waiting*	365	225	590
Removed	51	27	78
Total Referrals**	626	504	1130

**98.6% of total waitlist are comprehensive/DK assessments, and 1.4% are gifted assessments*

***98.6% of total referrals are for comprehensive/DK assessments, and 1.4% are gifted assessments*

Summer 2024	Comp. Assessments	SEPRC/IPRCs
Completed	21	(See previous slide)