



Review of Special Education Supports and Service Delivery

Final Report - Winter 2014

Background:

Provincial Context

Special Education is an essential component of the Ontario Education system. The publicly funded education system in Ontario is responsible for the education of all students including those with special education needs as set out in the Education Act. This legislation is based on the principle of “universal access” to public education.

School boards are accountable for student achievement and well being across an increasingly diverse range of students, including those with special education needs. Closing achievement gaps for all students continues to be a priority.

The Ministry is committed to meeting the needs of a wide range of learners and has focused, in special education on a student achievement agenda, including:

- Improving the outcomes for students receiving special education programs and services;
- Increasing the capacity for schools to meet the needs of a variety of learners in settings ranging from regular to self-contained classrooms;
- Ensuring that programming in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) is linked to the Ontario curriculum and the Provincial Report Card.

(Closing the Gaps for Students with Special Education Needs in Ontario: Research Trends and Capacity Building, Ontario Education Research Symposium 2009)

Ontario’s classrooms continue to change due to advances in instruction and assessment, demographics, technology and other factors. Teachers today are required to teach in an environment that includes students with multiple learning styles, and cultural as well as varied language backgrounds. The Ministry continues to anticipate these changes and strives to build teacher capacity to enable teachers to teach all of the students in their classroom to the best of their ability. (Learning for All, 2011)

Guiding Principles:

- all children can succeed
- each child has his or her own unique patterns of learning

There are approximately 198,000 students in Ontario who are formally identified as requiring special education programs and services. About 44% of those formally identified, are diagnosed with Learning Disabilities. Of those, over 80% are in regular programs or integrated into the regular classroom for more than 50% of their school day (Barry Finlay, August, 2009).

Effective programs and services in special education are based upon the concept of “essential for some, good for all.” There are many instructional practices that are implemented for students with special education needs, but will be found to benefit all students.

Since 2002-2003, the Ministry of Education increased special education funding by \$2.5 billion (Finlay, 2009) yet many school boards continue to experience fiscal challenges. While the number of students is declining, the number of students requiring special education programs and services is increasing. (Finlay, 2009) This has led some Boards and SEACs to approach the Ministry of Education requesting a change to the way special education is funded in order to address these concerns. The current funding model consists of the Foundation Grant, the Special Education Grant, and other special purpose grants.

The Ministry of Education Requires school boards to maintain Special Education Plans, review them annually, and submit amendments to the Ministry. □It also requires school boards to establish Special Education Advisory Committees (SEACs) and meet regularly throughout the school year.

Our Context

The Near North District School Board serves approximately 2000 students who are supported with Individual Education Plans. Close to 50% of those students are identified as having Learning Disabilities.

The NNDSB is committed to improving learning opportunities for all learners. “Our mission is to educate learners to their fullest potential in preparation for life-long learning.” We strive to deliver an exemplary education experience through diverse and inclusive environments that engage learners in developing their potential.

Every effort is made to address the needs of students in a regular classroom in their community school. (Reg. 181/98) Some students will need a variety of program modifications and accommodations to support and enable them to fully demonstrate their abilities. Other students may require more specialized educational programs and services in order to assist them to reach their full potential. For some students, an alternative setting may be necessary when their needs are so great that they cannot be met in an integrated setting.

The Near North District School Board is committed to a philosophy of integration while providing a range of options to meet the needs of exceptional students. In inclusive schools, teachers assist every student to prepare for the greatest possible degree of independence.

Overview of Legislation relating to Special Education in the province of Ontario

Education Act

- responsibility of school boards subsection 170(1)
- definition of a special education program subsection 1(1)

Regulations

Regulation 181/98: Identification and Placement of Exceptional Pupils

Regulation 306: Special Education Programs and Services

Regulation 464/97: Special Education Advisory Committees

Policy/Program Memoranda (P/PM)

- P/PM No. 81 Provision of Health Support Services in School Settings
- P/PM No. 140 Incorporating Methods of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) into Programs for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)
- P/PM No.149 Protocol for Partnerships with External Agencies for Provision of Services by Regulated Health Professionals, Regulated Social Service Professionals, and Paraprofessionals

The NNDSB Special Education Review Process

The Special Education Review Committee

This Staff Committee was formed to guide the process and review input from all relevant sources, given the mandate of an internal review of special education supports and services. The Committee reviewed and analyzed the information gathered from the wide variety of stakeholders and provided input to the recommendations in this report. The recommendations in this report are provided to Executive Council, SEAC and Trustees.

Members of the Special Education Review Committee include:

Susan Wilson – Principal of Special Education
Roslyn Bowness – Superintendent of Special Education
Louise Maughan – Psychologist
Donna Breault – Secondary Principal
Sandra Johnson – Elementary Principal

The Committee included the following processes for the review:

1. Review the current NNDSB practices according to “best practice”
2. Review the current Special Education service delivery model, supports and services
3. Provide an opportunity for staff to identify strengths, challenges and recommendations
4. Ensure that the NNDSB Special Education Delivery model aligns with the Ministry legislation and goals
5. Ensure that recommendations from the review are brought forward to SEAC for information and any further recommendations as part of SEAC meetings
6. Ensure that the Education Committee receives updates
7. Provide Executive Council, SEAC and Trustees with recommendations that can be considered based on evidence-based practice, feedback from the review process and considering efficiencies where possible

Environmental Scan

An environmental scan was completed in order to gather information connected to staffing and service delivery models of like-size boards. The recommendations in this review are in part based on the findings of this environmental scan.

Focus Groups

Special Education central staff were divided into small groups by roles and engaged in focused conversation through structured guiding questions. The series of guiding question were focused on the following areas:

- Referral processes
- Caseload
- Professional Development
- Effectiveness
- Data Collection
- Job Description
- Collaboration

Collaborative Survey

School teams were asked to complete a survey on the effectiveness of special education programs and services in their schools (June 2013). The teams were expected to consist of: Principal, Differentiated Learning Resource Teachers, a department head, a classroom teacher, student success lead and an Education Assistant. The survey was conducted online and focused on questions in the following five categories:

1. IEP and IPRC
2. Implementing Board Model of Delivery
3. Effective Use of Human Resources to Meet Student Needs
4. Assistive Technology
5. Central Special Education Services and Support

Improving Outcomes, Capacity Building and Monitoring Efficiencies

Each component of the review is divided into three sections including, ***Improving Outcomes, Capacity Building*** and ***Monitoring Efficiencies***. Each of these sections is further subdivided into ***Recommendations*** and ***Actions***. While it is the role of the review committee to make recommendations through these lenses, Executive Council will have input in the summary of recommendations going forth to Board especially as it connects to funding and monitoring efficiencies.

Summary of Findings:

Supports for Students in the regular classroom setting:

The Differentiated Learning Resource Teacher (DLRT)

- Carries out duties as outlined in the Education Act, Regulations and Policy Program Memoranda following board policies and procedures regarding special education.
- Holds qualifications to teach special education.
- Provides instruction for identified and/or non-identified students with at least 60% of time spent supporting students within the classroom.
- Provides educational assessments for students at the school level
- Completes referrals and follow-up for further assessments and applications for central and external services.
- Coordinates the collaborative development and implementation of the Individual Education Plan (IEP), assists in communicating the student's progress to parents and coordinates the I.P.R.C. process at the school level.
- Provides resources and support to teachers and parents and coordinates the in-school team meetings regarding students with needs.

Improving Outcomes

1. Collect Baseline Data - Report Card data, EQAO data (Review of data, fall 2013)
2. Ensure IEP/Report Card Link – Board level IEP review for all schools

Recommendations:

- Review of “Modified” expectations connected to mathematics and students with learning disabilities.
- Summarize results of IEP Review to provide feedback to schools and senior administration.
- Continue to base plans for professional development on the results of the IEP review.
- Include the Board's Math Lead in delivering professional development sessions to teachers in order to ensure program alignment.
- Create an Administrative Guideline on IEPs addressing expectations for all contributors.

Actions:

- Summary of trends identified in IEP Review presented at Principals' Meeting (Feb. 2014).
- Jointly lead professional development for DLRT focusing on IEP development and implementation specifically addressing modifications in math for students with learning disabilities. (Presentation by Special Ed coordinators and Math Lead Feb. 2014)
- Administrative Guideline on IEPs created, vetted and ready for distribution (Feb. 2014).

Capacity Building

1. The special education team surveyed DLRTs in 2012 in order to plan meaningful professional development opportunities for a range of experience (Spring 2012)
2. School team survey (Fall 2013) includes sections on Implementation of Board Model of Delivery and Effective use of Human Resources to Meet Student Needs
3. Increased support and knowledge of special education needs by exceptionality for staff, students and parents.
4. New North Bay Chapter of Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario opened (Fall 2013).

Recommendations:

- Align professional development sessions with DLRT self-identified needs (2012-13)
- Plan PD Sessions aligned with the needs identified in the Special Education Staff survey (Spring 2013).
- Create information cards for staff, students and parents – summarizing categories of exceptionalities (IPRC information, Ministry definitions, accommodations, modifications and alternate programming by exceptionality).
- Encourage Principals to include all staff in School Improvement Planning in order to ensure Special Education is vital component of SIPs (supporting the collaborative work of DLRTs and Classroom teacher to optimize components of differentiated instruction).
- Provide PD on appropriate use of Assistive Technology (AT) to match student need incorporating input from LDAO.

Actions:

- DLRT Meeting agendas are responsive to needs as well as provincial initiatives(2012-13-14).
- PD sessions in 2013-2014 based on needs identified in Spec. Ed. Survey.
- Information cards created, vetted and ready for distribution to DLRTs in May 2014.
- Reinforced concept that School Improvement planning includes all staff
- LDAO rep. consulted as appropriate for LD students for whom AT is recommended.

Monitoring Efficiency

1. Review DLRT allocation against changing school populations using the Special Education Guideline and the corresponding categories of exceptionality
2. Review the Administrative Guideline on Special Education and consider revisions to ensure alignment with programming and appropriate staffing support allocations.

Recommendations:

- Re-allocate DLRTs to address changing needs and school population.
Maintain the model for DLRT staffing consistent with environmental scan of like-size boards and reflective of the number of students identified with special education needs across our board.
- Continue to review allocation on an annual basis to ensure continued alignment to changing student need across the board.
- Revise Administrative Guideline on Special Education to more clearly explain definitions, program delivery expectations, supports and documentation in Special Education.
- Create separate Administrative Guideline on Special Education Staffing.

Actions:

- DLRT allocation reviewed and allocations adjusted (completed in Spring Staffing 2013).
- Administrative Guideline revised and new Staffing Guideline created.

High Needs Support:

The Special Education Classroom Teacher

- provides instruction for students in Special Education Classroom setting
- Plans and implements Individual Education Plans for all students in the class (IEP)
- Coordinates services with community agencies and implements program recommendations
- Facilitates transition planning and documentation, including liaising with community workplace locations for students where necessary

The Educational Assistant (School-Based and Regional Flex)

-The educational assistant and teacher work together as a team. The teacher is responsible for planning the education program for all students in the class while the EA is assigned to help meet the needs of designated exceptional students within the school.

The educational assistant's duties will vary depending on the type of classroom and student needs. They may include:

- Assisting special needs students, such as those with intellectual or physical disabilities, with mobility, communication and/or personal hygiene, under supervision of the classroom teacher.
- Assisting the preparation, implementation and supervision of programs planned by the teacher and/or special education teacher.
- Reinforcing behavioural skills
- Translating teacher's instructions or student responses into or from Braille, Bliss, sign language and/or augmentative communication.

The Itinerant Educational Assistant for Behaviour

-Part of our board behaviour team, composed of a number of itinerant EAs for behaviour and behavior counsellors.

-Assigned on a short-term basis to support the needs of specific students within a school struggling with high needs

-The behavior EA assists school with strategies to be able to better support students without their assistance

Improving Outcomes

1. Collect baseline Data - Report Card and IEP data (review of data, fall 2013)
2. Ensure quality IEPs in alternate programs.
3. Increasing needs identified at point of school entry.

Recommendations:

- Review of IEPs for students in alternative programs (Special Education Classes) and identify areas for improvement.
- Continue and enhance practice of information gathering from pre-school sources to plan for appropriate supports as students enter school.

Actions:

- IEP “Make and Take Session” with all Special Education Classroom Teachers (Fall 2013) where each teacher brought an IEP for a student in their class and made revisions to ensure consistency, alignment to Ministry requirements and improvement in recommended areas
- Coordinators collect informative data with parent permission on students entering school and are meeting with Early Years Lead and Coordinator to implement process for collecting data. (Possible similar format to One Page Profiles)

Capacity Building

1. Professional development connected to **One Page Profiles** (personalized planning) provided for teachers in self-contained classrooms and DLRTS has provided positive feedback on the benefit of one-page profiles from teachers, parents and community.
2. A survey was conducted with EAs summarizing areas of strength and needs for training.
3. **Collaborative and Proactive Solutions** model being implemented in select schools in response to number of referrals to special education for high needs behaviours, suspension data and office referrals
PD Provided for behavior expertise team, and lead schools (2012-2013 and 2013-14)

Recommendations:

- Develop a plan to utilize **One Page Profiles** to support teachers in meeting the upcoming requirement of the Ministry for transition planning for all students with IEPs (2013-2014)
- Work with Student Success to ensure alignment of One Page Profiles and IPP practices
- Present the use of One Page Profiles to Executive Council as a “*best practice*” (Fall 2013)
- Initial data from lead schools, parents and student skill development through the use of **Collaborative and Proactive Solutions** suggests that the model become a recommended “*best practice*” for the NNDSB and that we commit to continued implementation across the system as resources allow
- Revise Administrative Guideline on Behaviour Management to reflect CPS model.

Actions:

● **One Page Profiles**

- Plan for Transition Plans on each IEP to refer directly to One Page Profile as exemplary practice
- One Page Profiles presented to all Coordinators as example of vehicle for knowing your students, differentiation and providing student voice (January 2014)
- One Page Profiles presented to Executive Council as a “best practice” (January 2014)
- One Page Profile Survey completed by EAs (December 2013)

● **Collaborative and Proactive Solutions**

- Additional school administrators participated in 3-day extended training (July 2013)
- DLRTs and new administrators participated in 1-day training along with community partners (June 2013)
- Two Behaviour Counsellors (BEA) completed required training to support Implementation (June 2013)
- Two day extended training for principals of anchor schools per region (Spring 2014)
- Additional one day training for same principals with Behaviour Counsellor re implementation. (Spring 2014)
- Administrative Guideline revised to reflect CPS. (Fall 2014)

Monitoring Efficiency

1. Review of Special Education Classroom settings and student needs requiring additional staff support.
2. Review the Administrative Guideline on Special Education and consider revisions to ensure alignment with programming and appropriate staffing support allocations.
3. Review EA allocation against changing school populations using the Special Education Guideline and the corresponding categories of exceptionality.

Recommendations:

- Make changes to Special Education Classroom settings to ensure appropriate pathways based on student needs (Spring 2013).
- Continue to work with parents, schools and community around appropriate pathway options.
- Special education team to continue to adopt a more flexible model based on changing student needs through a model using flexible system EAs.
- Continue and potentially expand role of Itinerant EAs for behavior as resources allow.
- Special education team continue to “start from scratch” for EA staffing each year as part of the spring staffing process to ensure new and changing student needs of the whole system are considered when allocating support.
- Continue to reinforce the role of the EA to support highest needs students who play an essential role in maintaining a safe and positive learning environment.

Actions:

- Alignment adjustment to Special Education Classroom pathways (September 2013) resulted in change of type of senior class option for students with Autism.
- Staff Survey – A collaborative review of special education models, implementation and delivery completed by staff teams (June and September 2013) and results shared with the Education Committee and SEAC.
- Environmental Scan for special education supports and services conducted and brought forward to Executive Council (Fall 2013). The information presented in the comparative framework illustrates that the staffing levels for Special Education in the NNDSB are comparable to that in like-size boards as described in the corresponding Special Education Plans. (Renfrew County, Algoma DSB, Nipissing Parry Sound Catholic DSB, Rainbow DSB)
- Regional Flex EAs – Because of the changing needs across the system the special education team has increased the number of flexible EAs to be assigned for 4-8 weeks in schools with new high needs. This model was applied effectively in the current school year allowing for the system to be more responsive to changing needs, and for schools to build the capacity to work with a variety of needs. Due to the success of this model, we have grown the model for the 2013-2104 year

Central Supports:

The Specialist Teacher

-Holds specialist qualifications related to deaf, blind or deaf-blind student instruction

- Coordinates the development of IEPs for the above students
- Provides programming and learning materials for integrated deaf, blind or deaf-blind students in their home school
- Facilitates acquisition and maintenance of specialized equipment
- Provides consultation and educational assistance, intervention and training at the school level including providing in-service for teachers, collaborating with school teams and community partners and liaising with provincial schools

The Psychological Associate / Psychometrist

- Provides intellectual assessments for referred pupils.
- Consultative services for schools and parents regarding pupils with learning social, emotional or developmental problems.
- Participate in Board level teams to provide expertise(Example: Pre Referral for services)
- *While they don't work with a consistent group of students, it is their expertise that is relied upon for programming suited to the individual student needs

The Speech Language Pathologist

- Provides assessment and treatment of students with communication disorders
- Supervises communicative disorders assistants/ resource persons in the delivery of programs.
- Consults collaboratively with school teams and parents through team meetings.
- Participate on Board teams to provide expertise(Example: Pre Referral for services)

The Communicative Disorders Assistant

- Provides speech/language intervention for school-age children as directed by the speech language pathologist and special education coordinator.
- Collaborates with the Speech Language Pathologist regarding the child's progress, readiness for discharge and required follow-up.

The Child Development Counsellor

- Provides counselling support for students in individual or group settings for 6-8 week sessions
- Provides strategies for principals and teachers in dealing with social, emotional and behavioural concerns
- Works with school team to flag students who need more intensive support for mental health needs.
- Acts as a liaison between community agencies, home and school.
- Some are part of the Crisis Response Team for the NNDSB supporting schools during emergency situations and crisis as needed.*

The Behaviour Counsellor

- Provides programs and strategies for school staff in dealing with students with behavioural concerns and/or students with Autism Spectrum Disorders who are in transition.
- Works collaboratively with central and school teams in a facilitator role to develop behaviour management plans, transition plans and safety plans for students with behavioural difficulties and/or students with ASD.

-Models intervention strategies for school staff involved with students displaying disruptive and oppositional behaviours.

-Develop resources and supports required to implement positive behavioural strategies.

-currently leading the Board in developing strategies for the implementation of a collaborative model for solving behavioural problems.

Improving Outcomes

1. Data collection re: Waitlists and numbers of students serviced by each department
2. Pre-Referral process in place to ensure appropriate students are recommended for appropriate services
3. Special Education Survey for School Staff includes a section on Central Special Education Services and Support.
4. Central staff meeting focusing on Guiding Questions re: Referral Process, Caseload Management, Professional Development needs, Effectiveness, Data Collection, Roles and Collaboration (June 2013).

Recommendations:

- Continue implementation of a “block system” grouping students for support whenever possible.
- Continue the practice of conducting Pre-Referral meetings at each school at least once annually, and consider adding members as appropriate (All include Speech and Psych.; some may include counseling services or outside agency reps. as well).
- Consider input from Survey for School Staff (Central Special Education Services), including: making it standard practice for all Speech Language Pathology reports recommending identifications to be debriefed verbally with appropriate staff and parents.
- Coordinate IEP revisions with IT department to ensure Ministry guideline compliance.
- Implement Central Staff suggestions regarding data collection.

Actions:

- Block system for service delivery is in place and will continue.
- Pre-Referral meetings are continuing at each school and additional members will be invited as appropriate (Sept. 2014).
- Recommendation that all Speech Language Pathology reports recommending identifications to be debriefed verbally with appropriate staff and parents discussed with all Speech Language staff (Fall 2013).
- IEP Revisions implemented according to Ministry guidelines (Spring 2014).
- Data collection suggestions implemented (June 2013).

Capacity Building

1. Joint PD session for Principals and DLRTs to review supports available for students (both internal and external) as response to need identified in Spec. Ed. Survey (October 2013)
2. Mental Health Lead is now in place (hired with Ministry funds).
3. Elementary Child Development Counsellors (CDCs) provide itinerant services to schools and are supervised by Principal of Special Education while Secondary Child Development Counsellors (CDCs) are school-based and are supervised by individual School Principals.

Recommendations:

- Introduce the practice of sending an email to all school principals at beginning of each school year providing an overall summary of supports available.
- Continue practice of inviting Principals to the first DLRT meeting each year.
- School Mental Health Lead to provide clinical support to all CDCs.
- Provide PD on Classroom connections with Speech-Language recommendations with a focus on primary division strategies for the classroom teacher as was suggested in School Staff Survey results.
- Provide PD as appropriate based on suggestions from Central Staff.

Actions:

- Plan to send out review of services from central spec. ed. fall of each year (Fall 2014).
- Plan to invite Principals to first DLRT meeting annually (Fall each year – starting 2013).
- School Mental Health Lead is providing supports to CDCs, starting with Elementary (Fall 2013)
- Plan to have Speech Language Department representative meet with Early Learning Lead to co-plan PD appropriate for Primary Division staff.
- Suggested PD topics are offered to staff as appropriate.

Monitoring Efficiency

1. Data shows that waitlists for service are increasing.
2. Recommendations for Specialized Equipment are increasing significantly.
3. Travel costs to provide services on an itinerant basis are high.
4. Consistency in service delivery to all regions of the board must be ensured.

Recommendations:

- Department Meetings – Spring Meetings with each department included completion of discussions based on a questionnaire of guiding questions (including suggestions for waitlist management) (June 2013).
- Consider contracting additional support through Ministry SEA funds to assist with training on Specialized Equipment at key times of the year.
- Consider allocating all CDCs centrally by families of schools to improve efficiency and increase alignment.
- Ensure process consistency, forms and role clarifications are included in Spec. Ed. Handbook.

Actions:

- Department Meetings – Spring Meetings with each department included completion of discussions based on a questionnaire of guiding questions (June 2013).
- Process to contract additional support for training on specialized equipment has been initiated. (Feb. 2014).
Plan to have allocation of CDCs considered centrally by families of schools (for Fall 2014).
- Spec. Ed. Handbook is revised annually to ensure consistency of process, documentation (electronic referral forms) and role descriptions.