

SEAC Inquiry – October 17, 2018

Early identification and intervention for students with special education needs

Autism Ontario’s mission is “to ensure that each individual with ASD is provided the means to achieve quality of life as a respected member of society”. “Autism Ontario is dedicated to increasing public awareness about autism and the day-to-day issues faced by individuals with autism, their families, and the professionals with whom they interact. The association and its chapters share common goals of providing information and education, supporting research, and advocating for programs and services for the autism community”¹.

In alignment with Autism Ontario’s provincial mission and priorities, the Toronto chapter strives to bring the local voice and concerns of TCDSB parents to the forefront in the form of formal inquiries (item 13, *Inquiries and Miscellaneous*) at TCDSB Special Education Advisory Committee meetings with the intent of receiving Board staff clarification and information.

Society as a whole recognizes the long-term benefits of early identification and intervention in supporting children with special education needs. An environment where student needs are identified early; either through parent disclosure or teacher assessment and/or identification creates opportunities for the application of a skill-set learning framework that will follow the child into their adolescent years and into adulthood thus creating a higher probability of long-term success. Although the TCDSB, according to its website has an early identification strategy which is limited to students from JK to grade one; student needs often present further along the developmental continuum and should be treated with the same level of priority to ensure uninterrupted equity based growth in student achievement.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission recently released its *Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities* and the report states that, “while the Ministry of Education has devised its own framework for identifying “exceptional pupils,” it is the Ontario Human Rights Code and human rights case law that establishes that education providers have a legal duty to accommodate the disability-related needs of students to the point of undue hardship. This legal duty exists whether or not a student with a disability falls within the Ministry’s definition of “exceptional pupil,” and whether or not the student has gone through a formal IPRC process, or has an IEP”². According to the list of examples of accommodations from this document which are dependent on a student’s individual needs, it includes assistance from specialized professionals and in-class supports which includes tutors.

It is understood that curriculum demands in a classroom with students with varying needs may prove to be a challenge for educators however, when the curriculum is delivered in a manner that does not allow a student with special education needs to receive, process and apply the curriculum in an equitable manner, this places that student at a disadvantage and creates a negative trajectory that then excludes the student from benefitting from the many opportunities for success that a stable and enriched education provides.

¹ <http://www.autismontario.com/client/aso/ao.nsf/web/About+Us>

²

http://www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/Policy%20on%20accessible%20education%20for%20students%20with%20disabilities_FINAL_EN.pdf#overlay-context=en/users/aspeller

Autism Ontario – Toronto Chapter would like to know:

- 1) What identification strategy is in place for students who present with learning needs after grade one and what interventions are included in this strategy?**
- 2) What do school board policies, teacher federations and provincial and local legislation and policy dictate in regard to teachers identifying student needs and providing extra help to struggling students in class or before/after school?**
- 3) Since fee for service tutors are being recommended to students and parents by local school and Board staff to fill in gaps that are not being filled in the classroom/school, what is the obstacle/barrier that local schools and the Board feel they cannot overcome in providing equity in curriculum delivery in support of student achievement for students with special education needs in the classroom?**

The Toronto chapter of Autism Ontario asks that your written response be included as part of the November 2018 SEAC agenda.

Supplementary information:

http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/os/onschools_2017e.pdf

<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/guidelines-accessible-education/appropriate-accommodation>

<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/opportunity-succeed-achieving-barrier-free-education-students-disabilities/elementary-and-secondary-education#fn73>

http://www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/Policy%20on%20accessible%20education%20for%20students%20with%20disabilities_FINAL_EN.pdf#overlay-context=en/users/aspeller

<https://www.tcdsb.org/ProgramsServices/SpecialEducation/EarlyIdentification/Pages/default.aspx>