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2019: B07

MEMORANDUM TO: Directors of Education
 Supervisory Officers of School Authorities

FROM: Nancy Naylor
 Deputy Minister
 Ministry of Education

DATE: March 11, 2019

SUBJECT: **Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder**

The Ministry of Education recognizes that as a result of the recently announced changes to the Ontario Autism Program (OAP), children and youth with ASD will be entering school and/or transitioning from part time to full time school, beginning in April 2019 and into the 2019-20 school year.

To support school boards in responding to the needs of these students, the ministry intends to provide additional funding for the remaining months of the 2018-19 school year. The ministry will also provide a range of new and ongoing supports for the 2019-20 school year.

Please note that hiring of staff with expertise to support newly enrolled students with ASD, or students with ASD transitioning from part time to full time school, should proceed in order to support these students.

2018-19 School Year

To address school boards' in-year needs, the ministry intends to provide for an extended count date for those students who have been receiving OAP services and are newly enrolling in the April to June 2019 school months. School boards will report enrolment as of March 31 as usual. However, an extended count date will allow school boards to receive full school year funding for eligible, newly enrolled students for the remaining months of the 2018-19 school year. This mechanism will provide an average of \$12,300 per pupil to allow boards to plan supports for the remainder of the current school year.

The ministry will propose a change to the 2018-19 GSN regulation to support this funding and will further advise school boards about the proposed regulation change.

2019-20 School Year

For the 2019-20 school year, the ministry intends to provide additional funding, and continued funding, to support school boards and students with ASD. The supporting initiatives are outlined below.

The ministry will propose a 2019-20 GSN regulation to support this funding and will further advise school boards about this proposed regulation.

Promoting Professional Learning

The ministry is committed to supporting school boards, school leaders, teachers and educational assistants (EAs) to be well prepared to support students with ASD.

Currently, over 70,000 of Ontario's teachers have additional qualifications in special education. Over 1,000 have additional qualifications for Teaching Students with Communication Needs (Autism Spectrum Disorder). The ministry will provide \$1 million in annual funding to fully subsidize teachers who wish to acquire the Teaching Students with Communication Needs (Autism Spectrum Disorder) additional qualification. The ministry anticipates that this support would allow up to 4,000 teachers to acquire this qualification over the next three years.

The ministry will also increase training opportunities available to school boards by doubling annual funding for the Geneva Centre for Autism to \$2 million to provide training opportunities for educators, including teachers and EAs. Training will include access to the Registered Behaviour Technician (RBT) course. The ministry anticipates that up to 4,400 educators could be trained annually through this new investment.

In 2019-20, the ministry will request that school boards focus the special education topic on the list of Professional Activity Day permitted topics on supporting students with ASD. Policy/Program Memorandum 151 will be amended to include this direction.

In 2020-21, the ministry will mandate that school boards support learning opportunities for all educators in supporting students with ASD, within a professional activity day.

The ministry will support new teachers by revising the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) Induction Elements Manual to include increased ABA-based training opportunities.

Funding for Student Supports

The ministry will continue all aspects of Grants for Student Needs (GSN) special education funding in 2019-20, including key allocations that are intended for students who require significant supports. Special education funding is projected to be \$3.01 billion in 2018-19, which will continue in 2019-20.

A number of components of special education funding are claims based and responsive to changes in enrolment of students with high needs. School boards are encouraged to access these allocations and to engage the ministry if additional flexibility is required to ensure this funding is fully available for students with ASD.

In particular, school boards are reminded of existing components of special education funding, which may be particularly relevant in supporting newly enrolled students with ASD:

- The Behaviour Expertise Amount Allocation (BEA) provides funding for school boards to hire board-level ABA expertise professionals. These professionals support principals, teachers, educators and other school staff by providing and coordinating ABA coaching, training and resources. They are also intended to support transitions, collaboration and information sharing between community-based autism service providers, school staff and families. This funding also provides for training opportunities to build school board capacity in ABA. The BEA allocation will be \$15.2 million in 2018-19 and will be continued in 2019-20.
- The Special Incidence Portion (SIP) provides up to \$27,405 for students who require more than two full-time staff to address the health and safety needs of both the high-need student and others at their school. School boards may submit SIP claims to the Ministry of Education regional offices for approval. The SIP allocation is projected to be \$105.3 million in 2018-19 and will be continued in 2019-20. Administrative dates for SIP claims will be extended in 2018-19 for eligible students.
- The Special Equipment Amount (SEA) provides enrolment-based and claims-based funding for school boards to support high need students. This funding can be used for computers and communication technology, and non-computer based equipment including sensory equipment. The SEA allocation is projected to be \$106.6 million in 2018-19 and will be continued in 2019-20. Administrative dates for SEA claims will be extended in 2018-19 for eligible students.
- Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) funding was introduced in 2018-19 to support high need students, including students with ASD. School boards are continuing to recruit staff with appropriate credentials to fully benefit from this funding. The ministry will work with MCCSS and school boards to facilitate the recruitment of staff with appropriate expertise. The MDT funding allocation will be \$50.8 million in 2018-19 and will be continued in 2019-20.

Expanding After School Skills Development Programs

The ministry has been supporting a pilot program in many boards to allow the provision of the After School Skills Development Program. The ministry will make an investment of \$6.1 million to allow this successful pilot to be extended to all school boards across the province in the 2019-20 school year.

Supporting Transitions

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services will continue supporting transitions of children with ASD to school through the *Connections for Students* model, during the transition to the redesigned OAP.

The ministry will also host a series of virtual sessions about exclusions and modified days to engage parents, educators, administrators and others in a dialogue about these complex issues. The details will be communicated at a later date.

The ministry will survey school boards regularly to assess the impact of increased school enrolment and attendance by children and youth with ASD as they transition into the school system. The ministry will also ask boards to provide information on their websites for families seeking to enrol their children and youth.

If you have any additional questions, please reach out to your local EDU regional offices. A list of regional offices can be found by visiting www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/offices.html

We want to thank school boards for their ongoing dedication to providing programs and supports to all students, including those with ASD. We remain committed to safe and healthy learning environments for all students and staff.

Original signed by

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister

C: Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE)
School Business Officials