

Key Issues for Students with Physical Disabilities and Learning At Home

The following issues have been identified by families of students with physical disabilities:

- **Attitudes** – Any media or public discussion that devalues the life of people with disabilities and their right to health care in the Covid crisis.
- **Loss of Health and Personal Care supports** – Many families are electing to decline personal care supports because of the risk from workers entering multiple homes. Agency providers are using best practices for safety and hygiene, but the children are very vulnerable.
- **Health and physical care of students** – Parents are providing the majority of care to their child and this requires significant time and energy. It impacts the capacity of the parents to support learning. Single parent led families are even more impacted without additional help in the home.
- **Loss of therapy as it has been deemed a non-essential service** – Children's Treatment Centers who provide rehabilitation services at school are currently closed. Parents are trying to follow therapy recommendations and work with their child at home, but it is challenging.
- **Access to Equipment at school** – Special Equipment Amount (SEA) funded equipment that supports learning as well as health and safety, such as walkers, standers, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices, were not taken home at the start of March break. Families need this equipment for the health, safety and learning of students.
- **Accessibility features for on-line learning** – Students with disabilities require a wide range of accessibility features for learning, and some of the recommended learning website do not provide these features.
- **Graduation Planning** – Students with disabilities who are hoping to graduate in June, are concerned about marks and requirements to graduate or for admission to post secondary. Families and students are concerned about how planning for graduation be supported.
- **Transition Planning** – Students who are transitioning in the fall to a new grade, school or placement need to know how planning will occur while learning at home.
- **Social isolation** – Many children with disabilities have few friends and rely on school for all of their social connections. The absence of school leads to further isolation.

- **Family feelings of isolation and stress** – Families face the additional stress of caring for a student with disabilities at home to ensure their health and safety, while trying to work from home, or if employment and income has been impacted with limited resources, creates an incredibly difficult situation for families.

Solutions:

Access to equipment at school – Arrangements to have equipment delivered to the student's home.

Accessibility features for on-line learning – All recommended websites should be reviewed to ensure that they have the accessibility features that may be required. The available accessibility features for each site should be clearly identified.

Access to Therapists – Many CTCs are setting up on-line platforms and reaching out to individual families with suggestions for therapeutic exercises and activities that can be carried out at home. This should be required for all students on the School Health Support Program. Exercises and activities should be individualized to the student needs and family capacity.

Social Isolation – Peer support programs and the development of new initiatives to connect students with disabilities could use a variety of methods to reach out to the students using, mail, phone and video. Students with severe physical disabilities or communication impairments may need creative approaches to connect socially with school friends and peers.

Issues related to other Ministries

- **Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services** - Children's Treatment Centers who provide rehabilitation services at school are currently closed.
- **Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services** – Direct funding programs such as Special Services at Home (SSAH) and Passport rely on support workers and in many cases the family or workers are not comfortable entering the home or interacting directly with the child. This vital support provided on a daily or weekly basis has been an additional loss of respite, support and socialization for students with disabilities.
- **Ministry of Health Assistive Devices Program (ADP) is closed and not accepting any more applications** – This is a barrier for families who need additional mobility or accessibility equipment in their homes.
- **Ministry of Health Local Health Integration Networks (LHIN)** who provide health care and personal supports in homes, have not been flexible in allowing family members to be hired to provide personal care support.