



# Special Education Superintendent Update

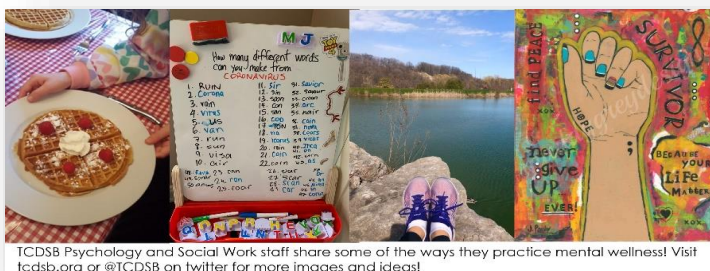
## May 2020

**May 4-8, 2020, TCDSB celebrated Children's Mental Health Awareness Week.** This year, more than ever, we need to GET LOUD about mental health. It coincides with Catholic Education Week and many of the suggested activities are complementary to each other.

**Please share this information with your educators** and encourage students to participate in this year's Mental Health Awareness Week. We invite everyone to share what mental health means to them throughout the week using the hashtag **#TCDSBMHW2020!**

This year, the mental health team has identified 5 themes with related resources for each day of the week:

- **Mindful Monday.** Mindfulness is an effective way to reduce one's reactivity to stress and increase our capacity to cope: [Mindfulness video](#) or see [other techniques](#).
- **Take a break Tuesday.** It's important to have a productive day but it is just as important to intentionally and deliberately take a real break: [50 ways to take a break!](#)
- **Wellness Wednesday.** A healthy mind and a healthy body go hand and hand: [Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth](#).
- **Thankful Thursday.** Start a [Gratitude Journal](#) by shifting your attention to the positive around you and help develop more optimism and happiness.
- **Friendly Friday.** Play a board game with your family, or reach out to a friend/loved one by phone or video chat. Social connection is essential to well-being.



TCDSB Psychology and Social Work staff share some of the ways they practice mental wellness! Visit [tcdsb.org](https://tcdsb.org) or @TCDSB on twitter for more images and ideas!

For more information or ideas visit:

[tcdsb.org/ProgramsServices/SpecialEducation/mhs/Pages/Default.aspx](https://tcdsb.org/ProgramsServices/SpecialEducation/mhs/Pages/Default.aspx) or [mentalhealthweek.ca](https://mentalhealthweek.ca)

The following newsletter was sent to all parents:

<https://t.e2ma.net/webview/p8y6bc/0124826dc31ab2c7878c45a993422ea8>



## Tip Sheet for Educators to Support Students' Mental Health During COVID-19

*"Do not be afraid for I am with you. Do not be discouraged for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand" (Isaiah 41:10)*

The teaching landscape of pre-March Break to post March Break is unrecognizable. The stress that everyone has been experiencing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented. However, as many systems try to adapt to a new and ever changing reality, so too must we adapt to address not only curriculum needs but students' mental health and safety needs as they arise. This tip sheet is meant to provide a brief summary of steps to take when there may be mental health and safety issues that you become aware of. We recognize that you are not mental health professionals, and the summary below is not new information, just condensed into a tip sheet to help you continue to support students as you have always done.

### **Signs of Distress in Students:**

- Anxiety, worry about self, the future and loved ones
- Disclosures that students are having difficulty concentrating, are experiencing sleep problems, etc.
- Physical distress such as headaches, stomach aches, crying, etc.
- Maladaptive coping mechanisms such as self-harm, drug use, etc.

### **What educators can do to support students:**

1. **Be reassuring.** Youth take their emotional cues from adults around them. Be aware of your reactions, your words and what they are communicating. Students need factual and age-appropriate information about the virus and ways to keep themselves safe. Reassure them that they are safe and that there are caring adults in their lives that care about them.
2. **Listen and observe.** Take your cues from the student to know how much information he/she needs. If the student is not focused on the spread of the disease, just let them know that you are there. Make sure to answer their questions in a developmentally appropriate way.
3. **Validate their feelings.** Make sure you validate how a student is feeling and what they may be concerned about. Let them know that it is normal to feel anxiety and be worried about the future. There may also be family situations that may be particularly distressing for them (illness of a loved one, separation from family members, social isolation from friends and family, etc.). Recognize and validate their fears and worries.
4. **Emphasize resilience.** Help students understand people's strengths in overcoming difficult situations. Focus on the student's own competencies in terms of how he/she has coped in daily life during difficult times. In age-appropriate terms, identify other situations from which people and communities have recovered.
5. **Encourage connection with a caring adult.** If a student appears distressed, encourage them to connect with a caring adult in their environment, a parent or guardian that they can reliably count on. As appropriate, you can also offer to connect with a parent or guardian in their environment to communicate the student's fears and concerns.



## May is Speech, Language and Hearing Awareness Month

Did you know that speech and language delays are the most frequently reported problem in children?

Early speech and language development has a major impact on future academic success. For example, research shows that a child's vocabulary when starting school is a prime predictor of school success or failure. We also know that early language skills are directly related to later reading skills, and that children with poor language development have difficulty using language to learn math and science.

If you have a concern about your child's speech or language, your school Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) can help! Speak to your child's teacher or school principal to find out more, or contact the Speech and Language Department at 416-222-8282, extension 2261.

More information here:

<https://www.tcdsb.org/ProgramsServices/SpecialEducation/Speech/Pages/Welcome.aspx>



## Parents Reaching Out (PRO) Grant - Update

In late fall, the Board received a Ministry PRO grant of \$51,000 with a mandate to “*work with parent stakeholder groups, school councils and/or Parent Involvement Committees to lead projects with a focus on the identification and removal of barriers that prevent parents and families from participating and engaging fully in their children's learning.*”

The SEAC committee received \$5,000.00 to utilize for parent engagement activities according to the PRO Grant Guidelines.

Resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic and board closure, this process has been interrupted. Therefore, the board is awaiting an update regarding any possible future use of these allocated funds. All Board budgetary decisions will be informed by Ministry of Education funding updates.



## **Autism Team**

### **Distance Learning Tips for Students with ASD and Parents**

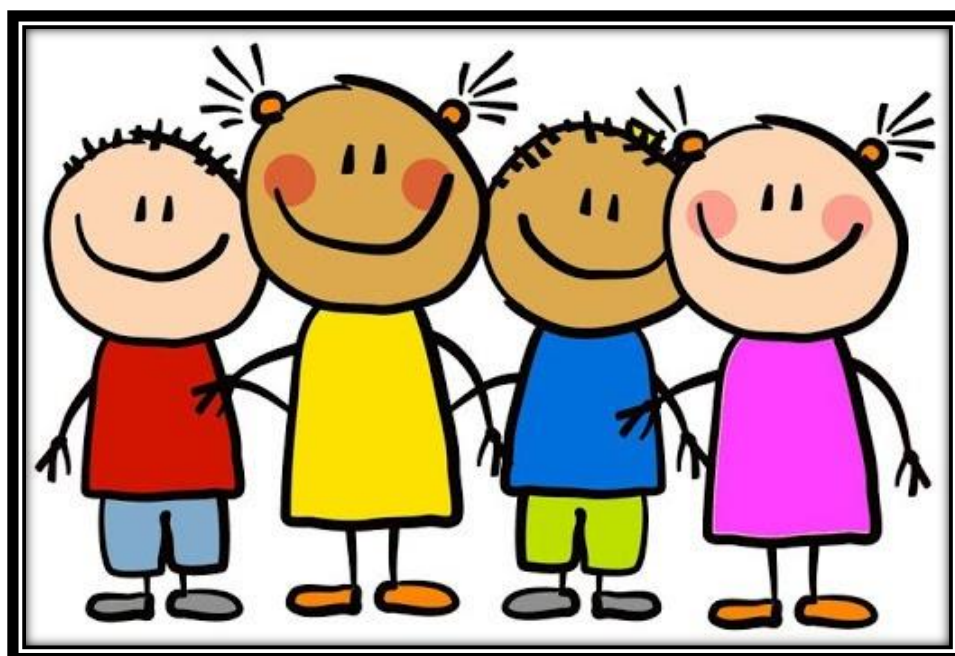
The TCDSB Special Services Autism Team has created a number of tip sheets focusing on secondary students in non-Special Education, mainstream classes, parents of secondary students, as well as elementary and secondary students with Multiple Exceptionalities.

These tip sheets can be found on the TCDSB public-facing website. Autism Support Teachers have been in contact with parents of secondary students with ASD in mainstream classes and have shared with them the various available tip sheets.

Below is a link to these tip sheets and newsletters.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1lXw4sCSxRwT5lmZjnaP5JPVrIY-flKk2yE-q38iOsMo/edit?usp=sharing>

Secondary Autism Support Teachers have also created a Google Classroom for students to engage with in an effort to combat social isolation.







## Concerns and Considerations for Supporting Students with Physical Disabilities During Distance Learning

### Concern

#### **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.

### Consideration

Families are encouraged to reach out through the school principal to access school Social Work supports especially for families who may be in distress.

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### Concern

#### **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.

### Consideration

Teachers delivering distance learning are cognizant of student workload when providing curriculum to students and endeavor to follow Ministry and board guidelines. Professional learning opportunities have been made available to staff to ensure curriculum resources are tailored to student needs and can be delivered in a digital environment. Accommodations and modifications that are applicable for the distance learning environment are outlined in the student's IEP.

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### Concern

#### **Loss of therapy as it has been deemed a non-essential service**

Children's Treatment Centers (CTNs) 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.

### Consideration

Children's Treatment Centers have continued to offer video conferencing for families with that capability since the school closure. They are part of the recent Ministry announcement that will allow face-to-face sessions to resume.

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## **Concern**

### **Access to SEAC 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.

## **Consideration**

A Controlled Access to Schools Initiative was established on multiple occasions following the school closure. At those times parents were afforded opportunities to retrieve from their child's school assigned SEA devices and other technology. The Board has also facilitated access to technology devices for non-SEA students in need through the delivery of thousands of Chromebooks and iPads. Focus: Equity of access to Distance Learning opportunities for all TCDSB students.

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## **Concern**

### **Accessibility features for on-line learning**

Students with disabilities require a wide range of accessibility features for learning and some of the recommended learning websites do not provide these features.

## **Consideration**

The Board's 21C and Assistive Technology (AT) team members provide daily professional learning sessions to all teaching staff on how to incorporate curriculum to reach all learners including those with disabilities and/or other special needs.

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## **Concern**

### **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 will be supported.

## **Consideration**

Principals were requested to work with school teams and families to develop virtual graduation options and find other ways to make the milestone significant for students. Planning is ongoing.



## **Concern**

### **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.

## **Consideration**

TCDSB Special Services has developed a protocol to support the transition of students to new learning environments. This has been shared with school administrators and staff. Principals will work with students and parents to address individual circumstances.

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## **Concern**

### **Social isolation**

Many children with disabilities have few friends and rely on school for all of their social connections. The absence of face-to-face learning at school leads to further isolation.

## **Consideration**

The TCDSB Video Guidelines have recently been released. These guidelines provide important information regarding to the potential use of synchronous online learning opportunities by students and staff, as well as the engagement of parents in video conferencing/meeting situations. Teachers can utilize this tool, among many, to support students during the Distance Learning phase. Professional and parent learning sessions regarding the use of video in Distance Learning and conferencing platforms are available on a regular basis. Parents are encouraged to maintain ongoing communication with their child's teachers and school staff regarding their child's unique needs.





## Considerations for Supporting Students with Giftedness During Distance Learning

### Online Resources



Please note when determining which online resources to engage:

- ✚ Focus on tools that are free to use
- ✚ personal costs or commitments to subscriptions are not recommended.

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Access (other) on-line links that teachers can use to access activities for their students with Giftedness.

<https://www.exquisite-minds.com/gifted-resources-lessons-and-curriculum>

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A “one-stop-mega-shop” for all things STEM

- ✚ organized by grade, discipline, area of focus
- ✚ easily accessible with iPhone or Mac devices

<https://www.actua.ca/en/resources/>

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Access other links to free resources teachers can use for their classes

[www.eds-resources.com/edgifted.html](http://www.eds-resources.com/edgifted.html)

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Check out the “Mensa for Kids” tab

<https://www.us.mensa.org/play/>

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This website is focused on parents, however there are some good ideas teachers can use under the “Resources and Support” tab

<http://abcontario.ca/>