



Special Education Superintendent Update

October 2020

OCTOBER IS AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH



In Canada, October is Autism Awareness and Acceptance Month. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that includes impairments in language, communication skills, and social interactions combined with restricted and repetitive behaviours, interests or activities.¹ Today prevalence rates of ASD in Canada are approximately 1 in 66.²

An increase in the number of students with Autism has been observed in the Toronto Catholic District School Board. Currently there are over 1,900 students with Autism in our schools, making this the second largest exceptionality in the board.

The TCDSB continues to offer a range of programs, services and resources to support students, staff and families.



Multi-disciplinary staff on the Autism Team are available on a referral basis to help support schools and students with building capacity focusing on ABA strategies and promising practices.



Connections For Students is an Ontario government initiative, intended to facilitate the transition of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders from Autism Intervention Programs (AIPs) to school. This initiative partners schools boards with AIP providers.



The Program to Assist Social Thinking (PAST) is an elementary school program for students diagnosed with Asperger's, high functioning Autism or Autism level 1 for students who meet the admission criteria.



Information about resources available through the Autism Department are available on the board's portal [Autism Programs and Services](#).

Resources and materials for board staff are available through the board's intranet [TCDSB Autism Services Team Site](#).



For preparing students to transition into secondary school, parents can visit the following Google sites for more information.

[Transition to High School for Students with ASD on the Credit Earning Pathway](#)

[Transition to High School Support for Parents of ME/DD ISP Students](#)

The following websites may be of interest for those looking to learn more about Autism.

Autism Ontario: www.autismontario.com

Autism Canada: www.autismcanada.org

Ontario Autism Program: [Ontario Autism Program](#)

For additional information, please contact Autism Programs and Services at 416-222-8282 ext. 2799

Information for World Autism Awareness Day on April 2nd will be forthcoming!

¹ American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-5 (5th ed.). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association.

² Public Health Agency of Canada. (2018). Autism Spectrum Disorder among Children and Youth in Canada 2018: A Report of the National Autism Spectrum Disorder Surveillance System. Ottawa, ON.



Every TCDSB employee views and signs that they understand the Duty to Report. Social workers will continue to provide consultation and support to the system as we prepare for October 27: Go Purple Day to highlight Child Abuse Prevention and Education



On October 9, 2020, the Social Work Department participated in a webinar training from The Canadian Centre For Child Protection in Winnipeg. The training, "Trends in Online Child Sexual Victimization" highlighted areas of concern online and red flags to look for in our work with youth and adolescents.



CANADIAN CENTRE for
CHILD PROTECTION
Helping families. Protecting children



The Student Support Response Team continues to provide consultation and staffing support to select behaviour programs in the system. They are also preparing a training webinar on "De-escalation" through the Safe Schools Department set to deliver in December.



The following Mental Health resources are shared with the system to ensure a continued mentally-healthy return to school:

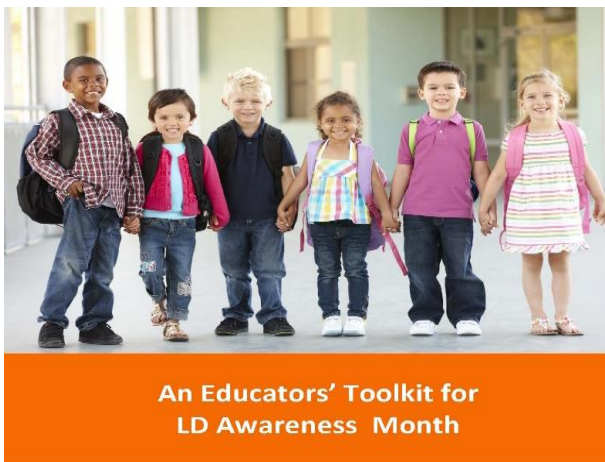
<https://www.tcdsb.org/ProgramsServices/SpecialEducation/mhs/Pages/Default.aspx>

- Faith & Wellness: brief classroom mental health activities (5-10 mins) to support students' well-being through a Catholic lens
- Supporting Students' Mental Health and Wellness During Return to School: tip sheet for parents and families
- Noticing Mental Health Concerns for Your Child: Info Sheet for parents and families
- Supporting the Mental Health & Well-Being of Students Returning Remotely to School
- First 10 Days and Beyond: lesson plans for educators to integrate mental health into the classroom
- Supporting Students' Anxiety: 30 minute webinar
- Mentally-Healthy Return to School: 60 minute webinar
- Staff Well-Being: How to Foster Our Own Well-Being During COVID: 45 minute webinar

The Mental Health team is in the process of hiring 6 Mental Health Professional workers to support all our secondary schools in a complementary role to other mental health service providers.



OCTOBER is
Learning Disabilities Awareness Month



**STAY IN TOUCH
WITH LD@SCHOOL!**

Do you want to find out about the newest resources posted on LD@school and be made aware of upcoming events, such as FREE webinars?

CLICK HERE TO SIGN UP FOR OUR MONTHLY SUBSCRIBER EMAIL!



Stay informed and ahead of the latest information and professional resources to best support students with learning disabilities in Ontario.



October is Learning Disabilities Awareness Month. Learning Disabilities (LDs) affect approximately 10% of Canadians, which means that 1 in 10 students in the classroom may have an LD. Psychology staff play an essential role in the identification and diagnosis of learning disabilities, and can assist in recommending interventions that focus on the strengths and abilities of these students. They can also assist in the development of self-advocacy, where students with learning disabilities are able to understand and speak about their needs, and advocate for learning supports.

In collaboration with staff at the George Hull Centre for Children and Families, Psychology staff will begin delivering *Feelings Explorers* to primary classrooms across the board this Fall. This 10-week program was developed by the Department and George Hull, and is designed as a social emotional learning program with a uniquely Canadian perspective.



Our Speech-Language Pathologists (SLP) have developed a flexible model of service delivery for speech and language assessment and treatment that includes both in-person and virtual support for students and educators.

SLPs have developed a new parent/guardian consent form that clearly outlines the risks and benefits of in-person and virtual assessments and therapy so that parents/guardians can make informed decisions.



Over the past month, our SLPs have:

- Connected with administrators and school teams (SBSLT) to prioritize outstanding assessments. They are addressing any existing backlog from school closures.
- Completed professional development on how to use Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN) for secure and confidential virtual meetings with parents, teachers and students.
- Participated in additional department-wide Anti-Bias training through Speech Pathology and Audiology Canada.
- Worked with other disciplines to provide Professional Development for kindergarten teachers and DECEs about encouraging oral language in virtual and in-person classrooms.



The Department developed new one-page Tip Sheets about communicating effectively while wearing a mask and about taking care of your voice/vocal cords while wearing a mask. These have been widely distributed to TCDSB staff. A short workshop for teachers about preserving vocal health while wearing a mask launched on October 9 and repeated at later dates was also recorded for asynchronous viewing.

In addition, Professional Development (PD) module addressing how to teach literacy and phonological awareness skills in virtual settings was developed. This will be shared with educators through our connection with the Early Years Department.



The launch of our Google Site to house our newly-developed digital resources in an organized fashion, so that these can be easily shared with parents and educators via email or as hard copies. Digital resources include both tip sheets and videos.

In addition, an internal *Frequently Asked Questions* site to streamline communications to allow SLPs to stay abreast of changes in service delivery, health and safety recommendations, and links to professional development.





Kindergarten Language Program – KLP
early intervention program for Year 2 Kindergarten children with communication and related early literacy needs

Typically, KLP students complete exit assessments at the end of the school year. These were deferred for 2019-2020 KLP students due to school closures.

KLP staff have started the process demission assessment process for the students who attended KLP last year. Demission testing is in-person for in-person students and will be virtual for virtual students.

Students have been referred for the KLP program for the 2020-2021 school year. These students will be screened either in-person or virtually for this year's program, which will combine in-person and virtual support for Year 2 Kindergarten students.



AACcess Team

Team of Speech-Language Pathologists who provide students with “AACcess” to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC).



AACcess Team designed and delivered 4 **AACcess** Assessment Kits (one to each SLP area office). These bins contain a variety of low-tech Augmentative and Alternative Communication tools including communication boards and communication books for effective assessment of students with no or limited verbal communication.

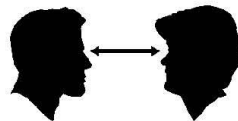
We are in the process of expanding the AACcess Team CORE BOARD Initiative in Multiple Exceptionality classrooms at St. Kevin and Blessed Trinity. These classrooms will have large boards with Core Vocabulary pictures to use with the class during gathering times.



Masks and Communication: Getting your message across while wearing a mask

Adapted from: <https://www.sac-oac.ca/professional-resources/resource-library/communication-and-masks-info-sheet>

To reduce the spread of COVID-19, many people are wearing masks and physically distancing, which may impact the ability to communicate effectively or understand speech. Masks and increased distance may reduce the volume of speech, impact our ability to focus on speech and reduce our ability to read lips and notice facial expressions, which help us understand someone's message. The following tips can facilitate effective communication while wearing a mask and physical distancing.



1. **Make sure the listener(s) can see you. Position yourself to face the person you are speaking to with nothing blocking the way.**

2. **Ensure you have the other person's attention – say their name and establish eye contact.**

3. **Speak clearly and a bit slower to facilitate understanding.**



4. **Use gestures and visuals to support your message (e.g., photographs, drawings, pointing).**



5. **Check that your listener has understood you. If not, try saying your message a different way, or write it down.**

6. **Move to a quieter location if possible.**



7. **Ask your communication partner if there is anything you can do to make communication easier.**

For more information on effective communication during these challenging times, especially related to specific students or settings, contact your school Speech-Language Pathologist.



Masks and Vocal Hygiene: Protecting Your Voice While Wearing a Mask



Masks are great barriers against airborne infectious germs. However, they also create barriers for our voice. When wearing a mask, the intensity of our voice diminishes. Consequently, we strain our vocal cords so that our voice can reach the same intensity as when we are not wearing a mask. ***Teachers are already at a high risk for developing voice problems due to the fact that they speak considerably more than the average person on a daily basis.*** The following tips can help protect your voice while wearing a mask.

1. ***Frequently drink water:*** Hydration reduces harmful effects of straining on the vocal cords. Ideally, it is recommended that a sip of water is taken *every 30 minutes*.



2. ***Reduce or eliminate background noise:*** This prevents teachers from having to speak louder to be heard. For example, instead of using your voice to request that students be quiet, establish a *non-verbal code* with them, such as *shutting the lights*, or *ringing a bell*.

3. ***Take pauses from speaking:*** Plan for quiet work at different times throughout the day and take advantage of that time to rest your voice. Ideally, it is recommended that you plan a few quiet voice periods of at least *15 minutes throughout the day*, such as during recess, lunchtime, etc.



4. ***Do not whisper:*** Whispering results in a greater strain on the vocal cords. Choose a *soft voice*, over a whispering voice.

5. ***Try to not clear your throat:*** This irritates the vocal cords. Instead, *take a sip of water*, or *swallow your saliva*.



For more information on effective communication during these challenging times, especially related to specific students or settings, contact your school Speech-Language Pathologist.