



Special Education Superintendent Update

April 2021



In March the Transition Team in partnership with Surrey Place ran two parent workshops via Zoom.

The first parent workshop was held on Tuesday March 23rd from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm focusing on parents of students with Autism preparing to enter Secondary School who will be on the credit earning pathway. Parents were provided with a link to the Google site, Transition to High School for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) on the Credit Earning Pathway, which includes the resources discussed and the presentation.

<https://sites.google.com/tcdsb.ca/transitiontohighschoolasd/home>

The second parent workshop was held on Thursday March 25th from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. focusing on parents of students with Autism preparing to enter Secondary School Multiple Exceptionalities/Developmental Disability (ME/DD) ISP classes. Parents were provided with a link to the Google site, Transition to High School Support for Parents of ME/DD ISP Students, which includes the resources discussed and the presentation.

<https://sites.google.com/tcdsb.ca/meddtransitiontohighschool/home>

The Transition Team in partnership with Surrey Place ran two teacher workshops via Zoom. The workshops invited Elementary and Secondary ME/DD Teachers who have a student(s) transitioning to high school in September. The focus was transition planning for individual students, sharing practical strategies and reviewing available resources.

For April 2nd, World Autism Awareness Day, the Autism Programs and Services Department invited classes to participate in a Board wide dance recognizing this day. Beginning with a prayer from Fr. Lehman, classes both in-person and virtual participated in the dance.

[We Are Stars Video 2021](#)



Director, Dr. Brendan Browne, shared his World Autism Awareness Day message to the TCDSB community on April 2nd.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HQq-VI0-ms>



The social work department continues engaging students and families throughout a variety of individual and group counseling interventions.

Professional development and community partnerships in the area of addressing systemic inequities continues with a focus on Anti-Black Racism.

The department is actively participating in the planning for Focus On Youth Summer program as we build wellness and positive supports into the camp experience. Our focus on reaching students and families during this challenging time is strong and ongoing as we make every effort to creatively and meaningfully reach those we are called to serve.





SPECIAL SERVICES



In the month of March, the Mental Health team engaged in the following activities to support the mental health and well-being of students and staff across the system:

- During the week of March 1-5, we marked Black Mental Health Week through system messaging that outlined our continued commitment to removing systemic barriers to racism. The messaging emphasized the foundational basis of good mental health for ALL and the importance of nurturing mentally-healthy classrooms in which ALL students feel safe, welcome, and experience a sense of belonging. As such, we invited educators to reflect on how they can ensure Black children/youth feel represented, heard, seen, understood in our classrooms and schools. We shared the School Mental Health Ontario Tip Sheet on [Supporting Mentally-Healthy Conversations About Anti-Black Racism with Students](#). Collaboration in this area continues across different departments at the board.
- Suicide Intervention Training of Social Workers, Psychologists and Guidance Counselors was completed to ensure more clinicians and guidance counselors are able to intervene locally with students in cases of suicidal ideation. Also, facilitated self-directed Suicide Awareness course for our Chaplains this month.
- On March 10, a panel presentation: [Unhappy Birthday COVID](#) organized by Pope Francis Catholic School was delivered to 140 parents from across the system. Panel of experts included Melissa Hanlon, TCDSB Mental Health Lead, Dr. Birken, Pediatrician and Researcher at Sick Kids and Dr. Charach, Psychiatrist and Researcher at Sick Kids.

POPE FRANCIS CATHOLIC SCHOOL PRESENTS

UNHAPPY BIRTHDAY COVID:
Lessons Learned, Questions Unanswered

Wed March 10th 2021 6-7 pm EST
ZOOM Registration:
<https://zoom.us/j/938196178?pwd=ZS5uQk9kTGp6MjZAVkZkd0p6>

CALLING ALL PARENTS! ARE YOU LOOKING FOR:

- ✓ Ways to prevent feelings of isolation?
- ✓ Help on juggling work and school at home?
- ✓ Answers on your child's well-being from child health experts?

THE WAIT IS OVER!
Sign up for this free session and submit your questions in advance. Listen to our panel of experts answer your questions and provide you with tools to help improve the well-being of your kids & family!

COVID-19 School Response Team
Toronto Public Health

Melissa Hanlon MSW, RSW,
Mental Health Lead
Toronto Catholic District School Board

Alice Charach, MD, MSc, FRCPC
Medical Director, Child & Youth Acute Care Collaborative
Psychiatrist & Project Investigator, SickKids
Associate Professor, University of Toronto

Catherine Birken, MD, M.Sc., FRCPC
Paediatrician & Senior Scientist, SickKids
Professor, University of Toronto
Co-Principal Investigator, TARGeT Kids!

Ontario Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care | CIHR IRSC | SickKids | UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO | TARGeT Kids!

- On March 11, for COVID's anniversary, messaging sent to the system around [tips for parents to support children and youth through COVID-19 anniversary period](#) and [for educators to support the mental health of students during a pandemic](#).
- Monthly system-wide email on Staff Well-Being around Resilience with embedded videos and activities including classroom activities for educators to help foster resiliency among students.
- Parent presentation to Area 1 secondary school parent communities: [Building Resilience in Youth During Pandemic](#) organized by Monsignor Percy Johnson Catholic School attended by 22 parents and staff members.



SPECIAL SERVICES

- Lunch & Learn session on Staff Well-Being delivered to staff members at Bishop Marrocco-Thomas Merton Catholic School.
- The Mental Health Professionals who support our secondary schools continued facilitating student mental health workshops for students. In March, they delivered 8 workshops to over 900 students across 5 secondary schools on Tips for Stress Management.
- Informed all school administrators of new Virtual Field Trips, a series of lessons plans to support the development of stress management and healthy coping skills from School Mental Health Ontario in an effort to encourage use of these Social-Emotional Learning tools in the classroom. So far, there are lesson plans for Breathing, Muscle Relaxation, Visualization and Distraction Strategies.
- The virtual Stop The Stigma Symposium this year took place on March 24 for elementary students (Grades 7-9) with over 60 classrooms and 1 400 students participating and on March 25 for secondary students with over 20 secondary teams participating. Our theme was *We Become COMPASSIONATE*. Three keynote speakers at each panel empowered students with positive messages of resiliency, self-compassion and empathy for others.



Wonderful news! The 2021-22 Kindergarten Language Program (KLP) referral process began the week of March 29th. KLP staff remains committed to supporting Kindergarten teams (especially those new to Kindergarten) throughout the referral process.

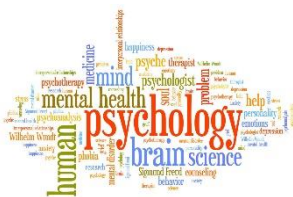
Kindergarten Language Program teachers and Speech-Language Pathologists (SLP) offered a professional development (PD) session for Kindergarten educators in virtual and brick-and-mortar schools on April 8th. In this PD session, Kindergarten teams learned about how KLP supports kindergarten students with significant oral language and related early literacy needs. They also learned how to identify appropriate program candidates as well as how to complete and submit the referral paperwork.

This PD session was truly a team effort. KLP staff worked collaboratively with department SLPs and the Early Years Resource Lead teacher to develop the webinar.

The KLP Referrals PD was well received by all educators who attended the session. It is estimated that 42% of attendees are new to kindergarten and 23% of attendees have only been in the kindergarten classrooms for up to 3 years.

A recorded version of this PD is available to Kindergarten teachers and DECEs who were unable to attend the live session.

KLP teachers and Speech-Language Pathologists look forward to providing intense oral language intervention programming to a new student cohort in the 2021-22 academic year.



Psychology staff continue to offer *Positive Parenting*, the popular weekly webinar series presented virtually for parents in our school community. Specific topics vary from week to week, but all have a focus on supporting the education and wellness needs of students, and their families, while at home during the pandemic.

The Psychology Department continues to serve students with psychoeducational assessments, counselling and mental health supports, providing consultation with parents and school staff, and psychology education for school staff and the community.