



# SPECIAL SERVICES

## SUPERINTENDENT UPDATE

### JUNE 2023



## MENTAL HEALTH TEAM

The Mental Health Team supported the mental health of students throughout the system with the following activities:

- The Mental Health Action Team is a student-led mental health initiative that currently involves about 75 elementary and 25 secondary schools. Participating schools have been involved in implementing local mental health activities at their schools.
- As a celebration of this initiative, the Mental Health Action Team Symposium was held on May 24, 2023 with over 120 students from Grades 7-12 participating. Keynote speaker, Antony McLean led students to reflect upon their own mental health and how to support others, focusing on themes of empathy and courage. Toronto Public Health nurses partnered with TCDSB to deliver an interactive workshop to students. Spoken word artist, Wali Shah led students to experiment with creative writing as an art form that they can use to express their ideas and use as a coping strategy. Students also participated in a mindful movement activity.





- In collaboration with Equity and other departments, the Mental Health Team delivered several professional development sessions on 2SLGBTQ+ to educators across the system, reaching over 100 educators. These workshops provided resources and tips for educators to better support the well-being of students identifying as 2SLGBTQ+.
- Several parent information workshops were held in May including Supporting Your Child Through Anxiety with over 300 parents participating live. A recording of the session has been sent to the additional 700 families who registered for the event.
- A workshop on How to Help a Friend was facilitated for 100 elementary students (Grades 6-8) at the Safe Schools Symposium where students learnt the 5 golden rules on how to be there for their friend and respect personal boundaries and connect with caring adults. This workshop was adapted from the Mental Health Literacy lesson plans from School Mental Health Ontario.

## SPECIAL OLYMPICS

This year's Elementary City Track and Field meet was held on May 24 at Varsity Stadium. One of the highlights for the spectators was cheering on over 230 Special Olympic Athletes who participated in an 80m run.

## ASPIRE TRACK AND FIELD MEET

James Cardinal McGuigan Catholic High School is hosting the Aspire Track and Field meet on June 13 at York University. The meet is growing annually and will welcome 10 schools and their student athletes from their Intensive Support Programs. The day will feature students competing in events that they have been training for in anticipation of the meet. The meet will be supported by student leaders from the TCDSB Catholic Student Leadership Impact Team (CSLIT) and from James Cardinal McGuigan secondary school.

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# Happy Retirement

Congratulations to our two Special Services Retirees!

**Peter Stachiw, Chief of Autism and Don Reid, ECPP Principal**



St. Paul calls each of us to:

*"lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." ~Ephesians 4:1-4*

Peter and Don, thank you for your leadership and your commitment to service of our students. Thank you for your living your vocation daily in alignment with St. Paul's calling, serving students with special needs and their families with love and patience. Blessings for a wonderful retirement!

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## SPECIAL SERVICES ACTION PLAN

# 2023 TO 2026

The Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) recognizes the barriers that face students with disabilities and special education needs. Our learning communities are called to affirm the worth and dignity of every student. We recognize the powerful opportunity to create spaces where strengths are identified, and opportunities are met with a strong commitment to nurturing individual learning, growth, and success.



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# Shared Message from the DIRECTOR & CHAIR of the Board



Dear Toronto Catholic District School Board Community,

We are pleased to share our Special Services Action Plan (SSAP) for 2023-2026, which caters to the unique needs of students with disabilities and special education needs throughout the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB). Over the past few years, due to the pandemic, our students have faced even greater disparities, resulting in barriers to access and service deficits. Our commitment to addressing these challenges remains resolute, and we strive to provide every student within Toronto Catholic with opportunities and supports to excel, flourish, and thrive.

We are committed to providing a Christ-centered education to every student, and to strengthening communication, aligning our services internally, reducing waitlists, and enhancing instructional effectiveness through Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction (DI). We also prioritize the professional development of our staff to ensure these commitments are effectively implemented.

We firmly believe that every student should have equal access to the necessary supports and services they need to succeed, and we are fully dedicated to making this a reality. Our commitment to this principle is rooted in our shared Catholic Values and the teachings of the Gospel, which drive us to promote equity, accessibility and justice in all aspects of our work.

At Toronto Catholic, we are fortunate to have a talented team of educators and support staff who are committed to eliminating ableism and changing negative beliefs about people with disabilities. We strongly believe that every student has the potential to flourish, and our goal is to create a safe and inclusive learning environment that encourages and fosters their academic growth and personal development.

Together, we can make a positive impact on the academic success of students with disabilities and special education needs. By working in harmony with TCDSB families and our community members, we endeavour to foster a welcoming and supportive learning environment that accommodates and empowers all learners, not just for today, but also for the future.

Sincerely,

Dr. Brendan Browne  
Director of Education

Nancy Crawford  
Chair of the Board

## Nurturing Our Catholic Community

"Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing"

1 Thessalonians 5:11

As a Catholic learning community, we are called through the gospels to be people of faith, hope, and love. The TCDSB Pastoral Plan invites us to journey with one another with eyes of faith and hope, hearts of kindness and love, and minds of justice and peace. With this in mind, we are called to seek and respond to the image of Christ in each person we meet, and to grow daily in our love of God and neighbour. Together we work to nurture our faith-filled communities to be places of acceptance and belonging for all members.

Pope Francis, in his Message for the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, December 3, 2022, invites us to, **"journey together and to listen to one another... there can be no us and them, but a single us, with Jesus Christ at the center, where each person brings his or her own gifts and limitations."**



## Purpose of the SSAP

But Jesus called for them and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs."

Luke 18:16

The TCDSB recognizes the barriers that face students with disabilities and special education needs. Our learning communities are called to affirm the worth and dignity of every student. We recognize the powerful opportunity to create spaces where strengths are identified, and opportunities are met with a strong commitment to nurturing individual learning, growth, and success.

To support students with disabilities and special education needs, the TCDSB is focussed on a commitment to continuous improvement, to create a more accessible experience of special services support. We do so with a commitment to intentional actions that will make learning more accessible for students and engage families in meaningful ways to optimize our collaborative work so that students can reach their full potential. We are committed to understanding and supporting each individual learner with special education needs, and further, to working with their families as collaborators in the process. Together, we aim to celebrate individual incremental steps toward success, honour the dignity of each individual, and acknowledge the importance and meaningful purpose of individual goals and achievements.

The Special Services Action Plan (SSAP) is grounded in equity-focussed, asset-based approaches through which each student is honoured as a unique learner, communication among stakeholders is emphasized, and a commitment to improved service excellence is a focus.

# Alignment of the SSAP

**Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP)**

**IN GOD'S IMAGE:** Growing in Knowledge, with Justice and Hope.

The Special Services Action Plan is rooted in the TCDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP) and is well-aligned with articulated goals in each of the three areas of focus, Learning, Equity, and Well-Being. These goals include:

## LEARNING

Continue to develop a Christ-centered learning organization in pursuit of knowledge, innovation and responsiveness.

## EQUITY

Apply Catholic social justice to nurture a community focussed on equity, diversity, inclusion, anti-racism, anti-oppression.

## WELL-BEING

Strengthen an environment rooted in Gospel values that nurtures hope and well-being.

**Equity Action Plan (EAP)**

**"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."  
– Matthew 10:40**

The TCDSB EAP offers a scripture-centered vision of inclusion that guides our path forward as we contemplate our commitment to every member of our community. "Scriptural accounts of Jesus provide a constant witness of his inclusiveness. Jesus welcomed all people into the Kingdom of God and sought out the marginalized. The social teachings of the Catholic Church promote a society founded on justice and love, in which all persons possess inherent dignity as children of God and are to be welcomed and treated equitably. We strive to achieve a fair and inclusive school climate where all members of the school community feel welcomed, safe, nurtured, and experience an authentic sense of belonging.

**Mental Health Action Plan (MHAP)**

**"I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me."  
– Philippians 4:13**

Our Mental Health Action Plan will guide our collective work to nurture the well-being and mental health of all students. We look to Jesus' example and guidance, in all areas of development—physical, mental, spiritual, and social. Our hope for our students is that they have every opportunity to thrive in all areas of development, flourishing with positive mental health and resilience.



## Structure of the SSAP

“As God’s chosen ones,  
holy and beloved, clothe  
yourselves with compassion,  
kindness, humility, meekness,  
and patience.”

Colossians 3:12

The SSAP is a living document that will be responsive to system needs and informed by continuous improvement and data analysis. The focus of the plan is to improve our communication with stakeholders, create more consistent alignment of services and programs across the system, and improve classroom instructional practices for students with special education needs.

Within our SSAP we state our three areas of commitment and relevant actions. The number of actions does not capture the full depth and scope of the work and focus within each area. We have provided the operational actions and indicated which departments will be accountable for carrying out the actions. Each action has its own monitoring framework tied to the expected outcome anticipated.

In some cases, the areas of commitment may be revisited over several years and annual reports will provide updates on the relevant progress. This action plan is designed to guide programs, services, and initiatives and inform us about continuous improvement. It does not provide the day-to-day details. Report back data will be provided annually and will inform next steps toward the stated commitments.

In support of the SSAP, the Special Services staff provides services for students through a multi-disciplinary approach. Implementation and system processes are guided by teams of support staff, teachers, social workers, speech and language pathologists, psychology services providers, social workers, and Board-Certified Behaviour Analysts (BCBA), and audiologists. These teams support our special education teachers, classroom teachers, school administrators, system leaders, and work directly with families and community agencies to support student learning and well-being.



# Commitments and Monitoring

1

We will enhance and strengthen special services communications to continue to support all stakeholders.

2

We will refine internal alignment of programs and services while reducing waitlists.

3

We will increase the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction (DI) in order to increase instructional effectiveness to support students with accommodations and IEPs.



## COMMITMENT #1

We will enhance and strengthen special services communications.

### Actions & Monitoring

#### ACTIONS:

- A. Refine resources and communications to parents to accompany forms and invitations to explain the process for special services meetings (e.g., Case Conference, SBST, SBSLT, IPRC)
- B. Where special needs have been identified, we will further support newcomer families in collaboration with the Orientation Centre.
- C. Increase collaborations with community agencies to support TCDSB families with the exchange of information and resources. For example, continue to foster our partnership agreement with TAIBU, a community organization that specializes in black mental health supports, and other identity-affirming and disability-focussed agencies and organizations.
- D. Continue to develop and provide meaningful and informative presentations for parents/guardians as part of our Special Services Parent Information Series.
- E. Review the Special Education Plan website and redesign it to become more user-friendly and AODA compliant.

#### MONITORING:

- Creation of an IPRC infographic that is AODA compliant, featuring accessible language, demonstrating what families can expect at a meeting, by end of 2023 - 2024.
- IPRC infographic will be available in different languages appropriate to school communities, to support newcomer families by the end of 2023-2024. Other relevant communications identified by special services will also be translated into various languages by the end of 2024-2025.
- Within one week of arrival to TCDSB, newly registered families with identified needs for special services supports will be contacted by a member of the special services staff.
- Continue to collect feedback from parents/guardians who attend the Special Services Parent Information Series about their experiences of the utility of the presentations.
- Work with communications to redesign the Special Education Plan website, to be completed no later than August 31, 2024.

### Expected Outcomes

By the end of the Academic Year 2023-2024

By creating better communication methods in terms of information exchange, accessibility, and language supports for families who attend Case Conferences, SBSTs, SBSLTs, or IPRCs, we expect to provide TCDSB families with an efficient and improved experience via metrics associated with timelines between registration and contact, and perceptions of quality of service via ongoing survey collection at IPRC meetings throughout the board.

**Accountability:** Special Services, Communications, Orientation Center

## COMMITMENT #2

We will refine internal alignment of programs and services while reducing waitlists.

### Actions & Monitoring

#### ACTIONS:

- A. In collaboration with IT, select and implement a special services case management system.
- B. We will centralize waitlists and centralize triaging by introducing a holistic screening tool designed to address student need priorities while waiting for other formalized assessments. The screening tool will also include Early Reading screening to align with the Right to Read and TCDSB's Early Reading Strategy.

#### MONITORING:

- The case management system will be live and training plans for users are implemented by September 2024 with project completion no later than August 31, 2025.
- By October 2023, all students on the waitlist will have been centrally screened. Beginning November 2023, any who are being considered for referral (e.g., Social Work, Psychology or Speech and Language) will be screened. In collaboration with the Research Department, we will monitor the screening process by selecting two samples of families to share their experiences with the screening service. One random sample of families who were on the waitlist prior to September 2023 and a second, later random sample of families who have been waitlisted after October 2023 but before February 2024. Feedback gathered from these two groups will inform us quickly about how effective the centralized screening process is working.



### Expected Outcomes

By the end of the Academic Year 2023-2024

We expect to have qualitatively improved waitlist experiences for our TCDSB families to ensure triaged services are being instituted rapidly. By the end of the Academic year 2025, we will have instituted a Case Management System that will enhance the alignment of special services.

**Accountability:** Special Services, Information Technology (IT), Research

## COMMITMENT #3

We will increase the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Differentiated Instruction (DI) in order to increase instructional effectiveness to support students with accommodations and IEPs.

### Actions & Monitoring

#### ACTIONS:

- A. In collaboration with the Curriculum department, we will provide educators with professional development for both elementary and secondary panels on UDL and DI. Within this training, we will provide evidence-based practices to inform the better use of accommodations and to support student learning supporting a variety of initiatives and programs such as (but not limited to) de-streaming (grades 7-12) and integration of assistive technology tools and strategies.
- B. Provide professional learning to leverage the use of applied behaviour analysis (ABA) strategies to support classroom management, self-regulation, differentiated learning, and accommodations in the classroom.
- C. Contribute to the AODA plan to support students with disabilities and accommodations.

#### MONITORING:

- Every academic year this commitment is employed, we will continuously track the number of educators, support staff and

administrators who take the professional learning sessions provided, to assess uptake, application, and improvement. In partnership with the research department, we will collect feedback from those who participate in the professional learning provided to ascertain the efficacy of the training.

- In collaboration with the research department, we will conduct focus groups with students from a random sample of teachers who have taken and applied the UDL/DI training to understand how UDL/DI pedagogy is applied and how it helped them with their learning.
- AODA progress will be measured via monitoring mechanisms within the AODA plan.

### Expected Outcomes

By the end of the Academic Year 2023-2024

We expect to increase our understanding of the relationship between increasing educator capacity with UDL/DI and the deployment of accommodations and Individual Education Plans (IEPs). With an understanding of this non-linear relationship between educator capacity and student experience, long-term we expect to see (beyond 2025) less streaming and a heightened use of strategies in the classroom that positively affect all learners. Where strategies are being utilized effectively, we also expect to witness a heightened perception of student well-being and learning as evidenced through climate surveys and longitudinal models of achievement.

**Accountability:** Special Services, Curriculum, Environmental Support Services (ESS), AODA Department, Capital Development, Asset Management and Renewal (CDAMR), Research Department, Information Technology (IT)

# Glossary

ABA	Applied Behaviour Analysis
Accommodations	Special teaching and assessment strategies, human supports, and/or individualized equipment required to enable a student to learn and to demonstrate learning. The provincial curriculum expectations for the grade are not altered for a student receiving accommodations.
AODA	Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act
BCBA	Board-Certified Behaviour Analyst
Case Conference	A meeting of school staff, led by the principal that may include a member of the School Based Support Team to discuss and document student needs and next steps.
Case management system	An electronic database to document special services processes and services for students.
Differentiated Instruction (DI)	An approach to instruction designed to maximize growth by considering the needs of each student at the current stage of development and offering that student a learning experience that responds to individual needs. Differentiated instruction recognizes that equity of opportunity is not achieved through equal treatment and takes into account factors such as the student's readiness, interest, and learning preferences.
Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC)	A committee that decides whether or not a child should be identified as exceptional, identifies the areas of a student's exceptionality according to the categories and definitions of exceptionalities provided by the ministry, decides an appropriate placement for a student, and reviews the identification and placement at least once in each school year.
Individual Education Plan (IEP)	A written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student, including a record of the accommodations needed to help the student achieve their learning expectations. An IEP must be developed for a student who has been identified as exceptional by an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC), and may also be developed for a student who has special education needs but has not been identified as exceptional. An IEP is a working document that identifies learning expectations that may be modified from or alternative to the expectations given in the curriculum policy document for the appropriate grade and subject or course.

Infographic	A representation of information in a graphic format designed to make the data easily understandable at a glance.
Orientation Centre	TCDSB site that welcomes and supports newcomer families registering their children in secondary schools in our board for the first time.
Right to Read	The Ontario Human Rights Commission Right to Read inquiry report highlights how learning to read is not a privilege but a basic and essential human right. The report includes 157 recommendations to the Ministry of Education, school boards and faculties of education on how to address systemic issues that affect the right to learn to read.
School Based Support Learning Team (SBSLT)	A multi-disciplinary team comprised of school staff and special services staff including Assessment and Programming (APT) teachers, Programming and Assessment Teachers (PAT), social workers, psychologists, speech and language pathologists, and parents/guardians.
School Based Learning Team (SBLT)	A local school staff team who meet to support individual student learning and well-being and determine next steps. The team may include classroom teachers, special education teachers, school principal/vice-principal, and parents/guardians.
Special Education Plan	Regulation 306, made under the authority of the Education Act, requires every school board to maintain a Special Education Plan. As set out in the standards set by the Ministry of Education, the Special Education Plan shall be made available to the ministry for review and be publicly accessible.
Students with special education needs	Students who have been formally identified as requiring special education supports and services by an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC), as well as students who are not identified but who have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and are receiving special education programs and services.
Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	The aim of UDL is to provide access to the curriculum for all students, and to assist educators in designing products and environments to make them accessible to everyone, regardless of age, skills, or situation.

“

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.”

1 Corinthians 12:4-6





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