



REPORT TO

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND WELL BEING, CATHOLIC EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

SPECIAL SERVICES ACTION PLAN REPORT BACK 2023-2024

Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing. ~1 Thessalonians 5:11

Drafted

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Maria Meehan, Superintendent of Education-Special Services

INFORMATION REPORT

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

Mission: *Nurturing the faith development and academic excellence of our Catholic learning community through the love of God, neighbour, and self.*



MULTI-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN
2022 - 2025

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



Brendan Browne
Director of Education

Adrian Della Mora
Associate Director of Academic Affairs & Chief Operating Officer

Derek Boyce
Associate Director of Corporate Services and Chief Commercial Officer

Ryan Putnam
Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides information on the implementation of the Special Services Action Plan (SSAP) launched in 2023. The plan outlines three commitments:

- We will enhance and strengthen special services communications to continue to support all stakeholders.
- We will refine internal alignment of programs and services while reducing waitlists.
- 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.

The Special Services Action Plan will further inform the reporting of the Multi Year Strategic Plan (MYSP).

The cumulative staff time required to prepare this report was 40 hours

B. PURPOSE

This report explains how the TCDSB has addressed the first year of the Special Services Action Plan's three identified commitments. The report outlines steps taken to address the three commitments and the next steps to be taken for the second year of the strategic plan's actions and monitoring.

C. BACKGROUND

1. The Special Services Action Plan draft was shared with the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) on June 7, 2023.
2. The 2023-2026 Special Services Action Plan (SSAP) was presented to the Board of Trustees on June 15, 2023, in anticipation of the 2023-2024 academic year.
3. This report provides the board with a report back on the 2023-2024 academic year and a look ahead at the second year of the plan implementation during the 2024-2025 academic year.

D. EVIDENCE/RESEARCH/ANALYSIS

Commitment #1 – We will enhance and strengthen Special Services communications.

Looking Back 2023-2024

Digital Case Management System

- To streamline services and enhance communication, the department has undertaken a review of all forms that document special services processes. In collaboration with the Information Technology (IT) Department and the Business Services Department, the Special Services Department reviewed all workflows, processes, and forms associated with the work of the department. This included a review of all forms that document special services meetings, reports, referrals, student plans, and letters that are shared with parents. This review was for the purpose of ensuring that the digital case management system to be selected would support the department with the fulfillment of all responsibilities and accountability and would support department responsiveness to stakeholder feedback. Further, this review informed the Request for Proposal (RFP) procurement process and informed scenarios and guidelines that prospective vendors were required to demonstrate.
- Team members from the Special Services department participated in the procurement process, actively engaging potential vendors in dialogue related to the board's clearly articulated needs with respect to departmental documentation that fulfilled privacy, professional college, and Ministry of Education requirements.

Orientation Centre

- The TCDSB Orientation Centre provides school registration and placement services for newcomer families and their children between the ages of 14 and 20 years old. A direct referral process from the Orientation Centre to the Chief of Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) and Assessment has been solidified as a consistent practice, ensuring that families of secondary students with significant special education needs requiring specialized programming are connected with a secondary Programming and Assessment Teacher (PAT). The PAT then supports the family through a detailed intake meeting to inform next steps for placement and any required referrals to Psychological Services, Speech and Language, or Social Work staff.

Special Education Plan

- The TCDSB Special Education Plan is shared with the Ministry of Education annually. The department has received significant feedback from the Special Education Advisory Committee that has been considered in the updating of the plan. The plan is now posted on the website in a consistent format, bookmarked for easy access to each section, and branded with TCDSB templating. The plan is linked to the TCDSB landing page and easily accessed by all stakeholders.

Collaboration with Community Agencies to Support Families

- The TCDSB is dedicated to supporting parents through community agency engagement through a variety of programs and departmental collaborations and referral paths.
- The Ministry of Education supports TCDSB in cases where students cannot attend local schools because of their need for care, treatment, and/or rehabilitation. Suitable educational programs that recognize the primacy of their care, treatment, and/or rehabilitation are provided by the TCDSB through our Education Community Partnership Programs (ECPP) facilities. The TCDSB supports our ECPP students through our partnerships with the following community agencies and hospitals: Covenant House, Rosalie Hall, North York General Hospital - Child and Adolescent Mental Health and Eating Disorders programs, Michael Garron Hospital - Mental Health program, Strides Toronto, Surrey Place, George Hall Centre for Children and Families, St. Joseph's Health Centre - Child and Adolescent Mental Health, and Sunnybrook Health and Science Centre. The department has refined the admission of students to the ECPP program and their return to local school programming to support a successful transition for students and families.
- The social work team has deepened its community connection with the Child Development Institute to run school programs that assist with self-regulation. Staff also support families with priority access to counseling at Lumenus, Strides, and Central Toronto Youth Services (CTYS). Community agencies are engaged both at the individual and larger class/school level to meet local needs, with consideration for unique conditions and working in an evidence-informed, identity-affirming way.
- Members of Surrey Place have been meaningfully engaged as members of our TCDSB Transition Committee. The department has worked in collaboration

with Surrey Place to present workshops and develop documents and resources to support parents with their children, whether with transitioning to school for kindergarten, from elementary to secondary, or from secondary to their chosen post-secondary pathway.

- Collaboration with Ontario Autism Program (OAP), Developmental Services Ontario (DSO) Passport Program, and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) has provided families supportive information during workshops and at secondary transition meetings.
- TCDSB staff has collaborated with the senior team at Ernest C. Drury School for the Deaf, to establish clear guidelines to better support D/HH students transferring to the Provincial Demonstration School. Collaboration with Surrey Place's Intake Team has refined the process for DHH Preschool students and families joining TCDSB from the Infant Hearing Program.

Parent Workshops

- The Special Services Parent Engagement Series has included several workshops both in-person and virtual. Presentations were advertised through local school communications to parents, on the board's website, and through the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) agenda package. Presentations reached approximately 1500 families and included the following topics: Preparing for Life after High School for families of students in secondary Intensive Support Programs, Transition to Secondary School for families of students in grade seven and eight in elementary Intensive Support Programs, Supporting Communication through Play, Supporting your Child through Anxiety, Fostering Emotional Resilience, Tackling Transitions.
- After each session, parents completed a short feedback form, with three of the forms containing common questions, and one tailored to a specific webinar topic. A total of 86 parents provided feedback, with the highest number of responses from the "Supporting Your Child through Anxiety" webinar. Overall, the feedback was highly positive. Key findings from the common questions showed that 98% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that they gained practical strategies to implement at home and 97% of parents agreed or strongly agreed that the strategies would help improve their relationship with their child.

Looking Ahead 2024-2025

- Configuration of the Case Management system and the focused training of staff who will be using the system in a variety of ways is engaging the Special Services Department in collaboration with IT, in work to ensure that the system is ready for the full implementation goal of September 2025. The configuration of the digital case management system will be informed by the staff review of past practices, feedback received from parents and the Special Education Advisory Committee, and opportunities to improve and refine practices.
- Opportunities to include a digital feedback link for parents within the Case Management system that can be completed following a special services meeting will be explored with the vendor and the TCDSB Research department.
- Parent webinars will continue to be made available, informed by parent survey feedback. A collaboration with the Rick Hansen Foundation for professional development will extend to include a parent webinar focused on addressing attitudinal barriers that impact students with disabilities.
- Special Education Advisory Committee meetings will include five staff presentations on topics that demonstrate the board's commitment to creating inclusive and supportive learning environments for students with special education needs.

Commitment #2 - We will refine internal alignment of programs and services while reducing waitlists.

Looking Back 2023-2024

- Across multiple departments, all Special Services Chiefs were involved in the departmental review of referral, waitlist, and reporting process as part of the procurement process. This involved collaboration with IT to create internal workflows that document the processes and informed the RFP digital Special Services Case Management vendor presentation scenarios.
- A digital Special Services Case Management system procurement process was completed in collaboration with IT and Business Services.
- Referrals for psychological services from four regional offices were centralized and the development of an electronic documentation process began.

- All psychological services staff were engaged in a screening process of students for whom a central referral had been received. The screening of over 600 students was actioned by the psychological services team and included connecting with parents to receive informed consent, an academic screening of mathematics and language skills, and a parent feedback survey to screen for mental health concerns. Strategies to support each of the students were shared with school staff. Approximately ten percent of referrals of students who no longer required psychological services were removed from the referral list.
- The comprehensive academic screening process has informed the prioritizing of the referrals for psychological services. For those students who require further assessment, the screening results provide the assessor with up-to-date academic and mental health data that will inform the future psychological assessments.
- During the 2023-2024 academic year, over 1400 referrals for psychological services were addressed and the referral process was completed. The services provided may have included a review of student medical reports, external psychological reports, and Ontario Student Record (OSR) documentation to inform Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) meetings; consultation with staff to support student learning and engagement; counselling sessions to support student well-being and mental health; and psychological assessments to inform programming and student placement.
- Information gathered through the screening process, the centralization of the regional files, and the procurement and implementation of the digital case management system are all significant steps toward the internal alignment of services that will contribute to the reduction of waitlists. The department is on target to reach the three-year implementation goal. As of the end of the 2023-2024 academic year, there were approximately 900 student referrals for psychological assessments. The digital case management system, once implemented, will, over time, improve the monitoring of student referral status, standardize the format for professional assessment reporting, and inform a more efficient process for prioritizing and addressing student referrals.
- The procurement process for the Early Reading Screening Tool led by the Curriculum Department and in collaboration with the Special Services Department resulted in the selection of the EasyCBM digital reading screening tool. This tool assesses early reading skills and is aligned with the Ministry requirements to screen all students from second year kindergarten through to grade two. Learning from this screening tool data will support understanding student needs and next steps for intervention.

- The Speech and Language staff continued to support students' communication needs across the system, focusing on oral language and early literacy for our youngest learners. Services were tailored to meet a range of communication needs, ensuring a consistent system-wide approach to supporting students at all grade levels and all tiers.
- Special Services Central staff provided various professional development opportunities to teachers and support staff during the 2023-2024 school year. After each session, parents completed a short feedback form, with three of the forms containing common questions, and one tailored to a specific webinar topic. receiving positive feedback from 1,421 responses.
 - Key findings include:
 - *Overall PD Feedback (n = 1,264)*
 - 95% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they learned new strategies from the PD to implement in their professional practice.
 - 99% strongly agreed or agreed that they will integrate knowledge and strategies into their planning and instruction.

Looking Ahead 2024-2025

- The Special Services department will continue to be engaged in the configuration process for the digital Case Management system. Staff will be partnering with the vendor's team to inform the development of customized workflows and forms that will document service delivery to students and families.
- All Special Services documents will be managed within the new system. The Case Manager for each discipline will manage the referral process and assignment of student cases to staff to begin the provision of services.
- Special Services staff will work in collaboration with the vendor to support training of all central staff in the use of the case management system.
- Special Services staff will work in collaboration with the vendor to support system-wide training in the use of the case management system.
- Special education teachers will be trained in the use of the digital early reading screening tool. Screening results will be incorporated into the special services meeting notes as appropriate and relevant, and will inform tier three interventions including Empower Reading, Corrective Reading, and Lexia.

- The Special Services department will be collaborating with the Mathematics Department to consider tools for mathematics screening that may inform Special Services student meetings, resources to support student programming, and strategies to support student instruction in mathematics.

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.

Looking Back 2023-2024

Professional Development with a Focus on UDL strategies

- Professional development was provided system-wide to all principals, teaching, and support staff to ensure a foundational understanding of Universal Design for Learning strategies.
- The curriculum department incorporated Universal Design for Learning principles and strategies into professional development sessions for both elementary and secondary teachers.
- The Mental Health Team facilitated a workshop on Creating and Maintaining a Mentally-Health Classroom for our new educators through our New Teacher Induction Program.
- Geneva/Sonderly online Autism courses offered to all staff to support a deeper understanding of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) and UDL strategies effective in supporting students with autism.
- Professional Development for support staff included the following topics to help staff create class spaces where all students have supportive access to programming and instruction.
- Hands-On Social Skills Program led by the Autism Support Teacher and Education Assistant on Autism Team for teachers and support staff.
- Emotional and Behavioural Regulation - Strategies and Resources and Helping Students Regulate and Supporting Independence in the Classroom - led by Board Certified Behaviour Analysts for support staff.

- Understanding and Addressing Challenging Behaviour of Students with Autism, led by Psychology service providers for support staff.

Targeted Support, Resources, and Actions Supporting UDL

- The Building and Nurturing Capacity in Kindergarten (BANCK) team provided tier one support to 31 classrooms across 12 different schools in the 2023-2024 school year. UDL strategies informed the foundation of the intervention.
- The Deaf and Hard of Hearing department purchased Hearing Assistive Technology equipment to ensure team meetings and workshops are accessible.
- The Primary Hands-On Social Skills program was introduced system wide. There were 160 kits distributed, 135 Schools visited, 85 Lunch and Learns sessions delivered, 120 Modelling Lessons/Direct Instruction for the kits, 4 Webinars and 5 Workshops provided where 150 schools were represented. This program supports inclusive social skills strategies.
- The Rick Hansen Ambassador Series workshop was presented to 600 support staff training to deepen their understanding of attitudinal barriers for students with disabilities.
- Assistive Technology workshops provided system capacity building among staff to support the integration of digital tools to enhance student learning and achievement.
- Regular meetings were attended to support the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) to support TCDSB commitment to supporting students with disabilities.
- Catholic Student Leadership Impact Team members engaged in retreats and guest speaker sessions focused on raising awareness among students regarding individuals with disabilities and how to address attitudinal barriers. The students integrated their learning into their goals for the following academic year.

Looking Ahead 2024-2025

- Provide teachers with professional development of UDL, through the Removing Barriers Grant funding.

- Provide UDL professional development workshops for support staff.
- Collaborating with the Research Department to inform student surveys to include gathering data regarding UDL and attitudinal barriers.
- Continued contribution to the AODA working group.
- Providing professional development workshops to all central School Based Support Learning Team members on the topics of Assistive Technology, Mentally Healthy Classrooms, Mathematics, Early Reading, Building and Nurturing Capacity in Kindergarten (BANCK), and Primary Social Skills program to support system-wide capacity building around UDL strategies.

E. CONCLUSION

This report is for the information of the Board of Trustees.