



REPORT TO

REGULAR BOARD

AUTISM RESEARCH REQUEST/SUPPORTS

God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. Hebrews 6:10

Drafted

April 22, 2025

Meeting Date

June 12, 2025

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RECOMMENDATION 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



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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of autism prevalence and service delivery within the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) from 2021-2022 to 2023-2024. It responds to a Board motion requesting system-wide data on the number of students with autism, central human resource allocations, and geographic distribution.

The report highlights a 24.5% increase in the number of students formally identified with autism over the three-year period.

Additionally, the report outlines the structure of the centrally coordinated, Special Services multi-disciplinary Autism Team and its role in supporting students, families, and staff across all schools.

The cumulative staff time required to prepare this report was 20 hours.

B. PURPOSE

This report responds to the motion requesting an overview of autism prevalence, resourcing, and demographic distribution across the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB). It includes three years of historical data and insights into support services for students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Motion: WHEREAS: There appears to be an increase in the prevalence of autism in our schools; and

WHEREAS: Trustees have limited visibility into relevant data on this topic.

BE IT RESOLVED THAT: Staff bring a report outlining three years of historical data, system wide capturing:

- Number of students at the elementary and secondary levels and corresponding growth rates;
- Central Human Resources allocated to Autism support (and any corresponding growth or decline in these resources); and
- Insights into the geographical distribution of relevant students with an emphasis on ward demographics including socio economic data

C. BACKGROUND

This report provides an overview of autism prevalence and service delivery within the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) from 2021-2022 to 2023-2024.

It highlights a 24.5% increase in the number of students formally identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

1. It is essential to recognize that no two students diagnosed with autism are alike. Each individual has a unique profile of strengths and needs that must be considered when interpreting system-wide data. Understanding this diversity is critical to designing effective supports.
2. The TCDSB's Special Services Autism Programs and Services Team provides system-wide support for students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) through a centralized, multi-disciplinary Autism Team. This team is composed of Autism Support Teachers, Speech-Language Pathologists, Psychologists, Social Workers, Educational Assistants, and Behaviour Analysts. Each member of the team is assigned to a specific group of schools, ensuring that support is timely, consistent, and responsive to the unique needs of individual school communities.
3. Support for autistic students begins at the school level, with collaboration among the principal/vice principal, classroom educators, support staff, and members of the School Based Support Learning Team assigned to each school. The allocation of this staffing is reviewed annually. The centrally coordinated Autism Team supplements these efforts by providing specialized expertise and guidance to strengthen in-school practices. The Autism Team enhances these foundational supports by offering consultation, intervention, contributions to the development of Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and transition planning, in partnership with schools, families, and outside agencies, such as Surrey Place.
4. It is critical to acknowledge that each autistic student has individualized needs. A one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate; rather, personalized support plans and strategies are essential to foster student success and well-being.
5. While the Board acknowledges the value of analysing the distribution of students with autism across wards and socio-economic contexts, publishing data disaggregated by school or ward could inadvertently compromise student confidentiality. This would violate ethical standards and privacy regulations.
6. Caution is warranted when interpreting aggregate figures, as they do not capture the complexity and diversity of student needs. The number of students with autism in a particular school or area offers limited insight into the individualized supports required. Each student's educational experience is

distinct and must be addressed through personalized strategies that reflect their unique strengths and needs.

D. EVIDENCE/RESEARCH/ANALYSIS

1. It is important to recognize that students with autism are not a homogeneous group; each student presents a unique combination of strengths and areas of need. This diversity must be thoughtfully considered when interpreting system-wide data and planning appropriate supports.

2. Student Enrolment- Three-Year Historical Trends

Between 2021-22 and 2023-24, the number of students formally identified with Autism increased from 2,451 to 3,052, marking a 24.5% increase system-wide.

3. The number of students identified with autism increased across both the elementary and secondary panels between 2021–2022 and 2023–2024.

- Elementary Panel:

The number of students increased steadily from 1,819 in 2021–2022 to 2,334 in 2023-2024. This represents total growth of 28.3% over the three-year period.

- Secondary Panel:

Although the secondary panel exhibited some fluctuation, the number of students increased from 632 in 2021-2022 to 718 in 2023-2024, despite a decline to 583 in 2022-2023. This represents a net increase of 13.6% over the three-year period.

4. Human Resource Allocation to Autism Support (Central Team)

Between 2021 and 2024, there has been a notable increase in Behaviour Analyst staffing, growing from 2.0 positions in 2021–2022 to 10.0 in both 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. The number of Autism Support Teachers and multi-disciplinary team members has remained stable over the same three-year period.

5. The table below provides a current snapshot of the number of students with the exceptionality of Autism across the eight area superintendencies.

Number of Students with the Exceptionality of Autism, by Area Superintendency, as of June 2, 2025			
Area	Total Number of Students	Number of Students with Autism Exceptionality	Percentage of the Total Number of Students with Autism Exceptionality
1	13619	417	3.1%
2	14787	426	2.9%
3	12915	446	3.5%
4	10969	420	3.8%
5	7072	320	4.5%
6	7969	291	3.7%
7	7473	386	5.2%
8	10347	383	3.7%

E. METRICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

1. There has been a continued increase in the number of students identified with autism across the TCDSB. Special Services, in collaboration with departments such as Research and Human Resources, will continue to monitor emerging needs and implement appropriate supports and strategies to ensure responsive service delivery.
2. In addition to providing direct consultation to students and families, members of the multi-disciplinary Autism Team play a critical role in building the capacity of school staff. Through consultation, professional learning, and collaborative planning, team members equip educators with the tools and strategies necessary to support autistic students.

F. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

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