

Wednesday June 1, 2016
Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting

ASSOCIATION MINORITY REPORT



Introduction

Autism Ontario – Toronto Chapter is formally submitting a Minority Report in opposition to the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) Accountability Framework for Special Education and the 2016-2017 Special Education Plan. Autism Ontario – Toronto Chapter is concerned with how the data represented in the framework does not give a true representation of the strengths and needs of students identified as Autism within the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB). The following report will provide the logic to support this statement.

Autism Ontario – Toronto Chapter requests that the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) include this Minority Report and their response to it as part of their Board's description of the Special Education Plan consultation process. Autism Ontario – Toronto Chapter also requests that this report be submitted to The Ontario Ministry of Education and that it and the Toronto Catholic District

School Board (TCDSB) response to it be included as is required according to the Ministry document *Standards for School Boards' Special Education Plans, 2000*.¹

The Accountability Framework for Special Education (AFSE)

The Accountability Framework for Special Education (AFSE)² was presented to the Board's Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)³ this year and it included Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) data for students with Autism. Part of the data presented were the exemption rates for students with Autism that were noted in the report as being high. The other data included in the AFSE identified the achievement gap between students with Autism and all students. The Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) outlined a varying goal-set in this report that addressed the achievement gap between students with Autism and all students and the high exemption rates. Historically speaking, the achievement gap and the high exemption rates among students with Autism have been ongoing over a period of several years.

According to page 92-93 of *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario's Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12* "These provincial assessments provide data about student achievement to principals, teachers, parents, the public, school district staff, and the government and are used to help educators: identify strengths and areas for improvement in individual students' learning, identify strengths and areas for improvement in the education system, develop education policies, allocate resources, and determine the success of those policies and resource allocations, identify the need for targeted interventions and supports and provide them where required, identify the need for and make decisions about capacity building and specific instructional practices, celebrate successes."⁴ If the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessment data is being used as an indicator for student success and for all of the purposes listed above; a very narrow demographic from which to measure would be created by exempting and excluding almost (and at times more than) half of the students at the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) within the specific age criteria that are identified with Autism. The high Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessment exemption rate among students with Autism essentially creates an exclusive environment for meeting all of the targets listed in the

¹ <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/iepstand/iepstand.pdf>

² <https://www.tcdsb.org/Board/TrusteesoftheBoard/Committees/AgendaDocs/2016-04-13%20SEAC%20Agenda.pdf>

³ <https://www.tcdsb.org/programsservices/specialeducation/seac/Pages/default.aspx>

⁴ <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/growSuccess.pdf>

Ministry document *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario's Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12*.

According to the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), student exemption criteria are as follows: "THE STUDENT is unable to participate in part or all of the assessment even with accommodations or special provisions. A student must be exempted from reading, if the student has to be read to by a teacher or another adult, and mathematics, if mathematics terms have to be defined."⁵ If the above criteria are the basis for the high exemption rates, given that the exemption rates are consistently high; what steps are being taken to improve student learning. What framework of programs, services and supports are being provided to students with Autism so that they are able to receive an equitable learning experience? What system SMART goals are in place to support the varying needs of students with Autism and how are these goals being measured assessed and adjusted to meet systemic learning needs and successful goals for these students?

Students identified with Autism that participate in the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) testing are provided the opportunity to receive accommodations that are outlined in their Individual Education Plan (IEP)⁶. Many students with Autism are provided extra time to complete the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessments. Although extra time to complete the assessment is not documented as permissible for the provincial assessment, it is one of the accommodations in the students' Individual Education Plan (IEP) and it is being allowed for special needs students for the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) testing in our schools. This practice of extending the time allotted for completion of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessment further reduces the integrity of the collected data.

Province-wide, or Board-wide assessment is intended to create a comparative view of student success among students of the same demographic grouping. The name Autism Spectrum Disorder in itself, describes a disorder that is characterized by variables; which would lead one to the understanding that there can be no comparative value to the results obtained because each student with Autism has a unique learning profile and unique learning and assessment needs. If you've met one person with Autism...you've met one person with Autism. It is very difficult to create a benchmark from which to derive a measurable median in test score results. Every test has been

⁵ <http://www.eqao.com/en/assessments/assessment-docs-elementary/accommodations-guide-elementary-2016.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.eqao.com/en/assessments/assessment-docs-elementary/accommodations-guide-elementary-2016.pdf>

administered according to where the student with Autism places on the spectrum and according to the individual assessment accommodations provided.

Furthermore, looking at the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) Board Learning Improvement Plan (BLIP) for 2014-2018, achievement is relatively summed up by Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessment score data, although it is noted on page 16 of the plan that "Important as the EQAO target is, however, it does not stand alone."⁷ Students with Autism are not accurately represented in provincial standardized testing results; due to the discrepancies mentioned in this report thus far, and the survey results are also a poor indicator of student success since Autism Spectrum Disorder is primarily categorized by social skill deficits. Surveys, even under the strictest guidance will provide subjective answers based on opinion at that moment in time rather than on fact. In the case of a student on the spectrum, this opinion driven result will be further tainted by any stimuli that the student has been or is being exposed to on the particular day and time that the survey is completed. Report Card data is also not an accurate indicator of systemic success as each student is assessed according to the teacher's personal teaching/assessment style and student level of accommodation, modification or alternative curriculum implementation.

The Special Education Plan

Autism Ontario – Toronto Chapter is also rejecting the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) Special Education Plan on the basis that there has not been clear consultation with the Toronto Catholic District School Board Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) as is required by section 12(1) of Ontario Regulation 464/97⁸ or as was outlined at the Ministry of Education SEAC Conference on May 2nd 2015⁹.

The Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) Multi-Year Recovery Plan (MYRP), as voted on by the Toronto Catholic District School Board Trustees has caused changes that directly and indirectly impact the programs, services and supports outlined in the Special Education Plan that is currently posted on the Toronto Catholic District School Board's website.

⁷ <https://www.tcdsb.org/Board/BoardLearningImprovementPlan/Documents/Board%20Learning%20Improvement%20Plan%202014-2018.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/970464>

⁹ <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/seac/conference.html>

Autism Ontario – Toronto Chapter is of the opinion that the Toronto Catholic District School Board Special Education Plan is not current, complete and therefore does not comply with section (6) of Ontario Regulation 306¹⁰. The Special Education Plan as posted does not provide Toronto Catholic District School Board parents and stakeholders clear or accurate information that would facilitate an understanding of special education programs and services that are provided by the board in accordance with legislation and ministry policy on special education. The Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) Special Education Plan¹¹, in its current state does not encourage or enable families with the knowledge or ability to support their child's education and well-being in a positive or meaningful way.

Conclusion

Autism Ontario – Toronto Chapter is of the opinion that the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) must re-examine its Accountability Framework for Special Education, by taking into consideration the unique and varying strengths and needs of students with Autism. A collaborative approach including parents, community and organization partners including the Ministry of Education in consultation with the Toronto Catholic District School Board with the express purpose of analyzing what next steps and goals have worked, are working and which ones are not working and should be changed. Staff professional development and the development and or implementation of programs and service supports must be sustained or expanded to meet the learning needs of all students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

¹⁰ <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/900306>

¹¹ <https://www.tcdsb.org/ProgramsServices/SpecialEducation/SpecialEducationPlan/Pages/default.aspx>

Autism Ontario's vision is one of acceptance and opportunities for all individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Our Mission is to ensure that each individual with ASD is provided the means to achieve quality of life as a respected member of society.

Our 6 Key Areas of Focus are:

- Advocacy and Support
- Research
- Best Practices
- Government Relations
- Public Awareness
- Governance

"**Autism Ontario** (formerly Autism Society Ontario) is the leading source of information and referral on autism and one of the largest collective voices representing the autism community. Members are connected through a volunteer network of Chapters throughout the Province of Ontario.

We are guided by a Board of Directors composed primarily of parents of individuals with autism, plus a host of volunteers and respected professionals who provide expertise and guidance to the organization on a volunteer basis.

Autism Ontario is dedicated to increasing public awareness about autism and the day-to-day issues faced by individuals with autism, their families, and the professionals with whom they interact. The association and its chapters share common goals of providing information and education, supporting research, and advocating for programs and services for the autism community."¹²

¹² <http://www.autismontario.com/client/aso/ao.nsf/web/About+Us>