DRAFT REVIEW OF EDUCATION ASSISTANT AND CHILD AND YOUTH WORKER EFFICIENCIES IN THE ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY PANEL

For you have been a stronghold to the poor, a stronghold to the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat; for the breath of the ruthless is like a storm against a wall.
Isaiah 25:4

Created, Draft	First Tabling	Review
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INFORMATION REPORT

Vision:
At Toronto Catholic we transform the world through witness, faith, innovation and action.

Mission:
The Toronto Catholic District School Board is an inclusive learning community uniting home, parish and school and rooted in the love of Christ.
We educate students to grow in grace and knowledge to lead lives of faith, hope and charity.

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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This final report will build on the preliminary report provided at the Student Achievement and Well Being, Catholic Education and Human Resources Committee on January 12, 2017. It will provide an analysis of the impact of Education Assistants (EA) and Child & Youth Workers (CYW) efficiencies board-wide on the organization.

Staff analysed quantitative data about students with special needs and the staff deployed to support the students, factoring the board-approved reductions to EAs and CYWs. Conclusions were made about the impact on student achievement and well-being for students receiving special education support.

Research department staff initiated a Multiple Case Study approach in elementary and secondary schools in an effort to gather qualitative and perceptual data about the impact on reductions to EA and CYW staff to a group of students with diverse learning needs.

The cumulative staff time dedicated to developing this report was 125 hours

B. PURPOSE

1. This final report will provide qualitative data from the research-based, Multiple Student Case Study to assess the impacts of Education Assistant and Child and Youth Worker efficiencies.

2. The report will respond to Board motions with respect to requests for Educational Assistants and Child and Youth Workers as well as the unit cost per students served by special education programs:

    1. That when staff comes back with their next report on the impact of EA and CYW reductions already made, that staff include details (in private or public as appropriate) on the individual requests made for EAs and CYWs being made by school staff and parents and our system response to those requests.

    2. That staff provide a dollar unit cost per special education student and, if possible, comparisons with other Boards.

C. BACKGROUND

1. **June 4, 2015** – At a Special meeting of the Board, Trustees approved reductions of FTE 30.00 EAs and FTE 7.00 CYWs

2. **June 2, 2016** – At Student Achievement and Well Being, Catholic Education and Human Resources Committee, Trustees approved reductions of FTE 56.0 Education Assistants and FTE 5.00 CYWs

3. **June 2, 2016** – At Student Achievement and Well Being, Catholic Education and Human Resources Committee, trustees approved a motion requesting a review of Education Assistants efficiencies board-wide in both elementary and secondary schools.

4. Table 1 captures the Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Reductions in support staff over the past two years in Education Assistants, Child & Youth Workers and external contracted support workers:

TABLE 1:

School Year	EA	CYW	Contract Support Workers
2015-2016	30.00 ($1.5M)	7.00 ($0.4M)	$2.3M
2016-2017	56.00 ($2.8M)	5.00 ($0.3M)	$0.2M
TOTAL	**86.00 ($4.3M)**	**12.00 ($0.7M)**	**$2.5M**

5. **January 12, 2017** – At the Student Achievement and Well Being, Catholic Education and Human Resources Committee, the Board received a preliminary report reviewing the Education Assistant and Child & Youth Workers. This report assessed quantitative data using four metrics, and laid the foundation for qualitative assessment using a Research-based, Multiple Student Case Study:

   a. Student Data and Support Staff Data 2013 – 2016

   b. Benchmark of Support Staff in Coterminous District School Boards (2016)

   c. Report Card Learning Skills for Students with an IEP

   d. Safe Schools Progressive Discipline Data for Students with an IEP

   e. Impact of Changes in Special Education: Multiple Student Case Study

6. **January 12, 2017** - the following motions were approved:
   i. That when staff comes back with their next report on the impact of EA and CYW reductions already made, that staff include details (in private or public as appropriate) on the individual requests made for EAs and CYWs being made by school staff and parents and our system response to those requests.
   ii. That staff provide a dollar unit cost per special education student and, if possible, comparisons with other Boards.

7. **January – March 2017** – Staff reviewed the number of requests made by parents or schools for EA and/or CYW support, and Research staff completed the Multiple Student Case Study to provided qualitative analysis.

D.   EVIDENCE/RESEARCH/ANALYSIS

ANALYSIS OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

Metric #1: Number of EA and CYW requests.

1. Senior Staff reviewed requests for EA and/or CYW support that were made from schools and from parents. Given the timeline of the request, staff retroactively estimated the number of requests that were made from September 2016 until March 1, 2017. In this timeframe, there were 121 requests for EA or CYW staffing as presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Requests for EA/CYW staff: September 2016-March 1, 2017

Region	EA or CYW requests since September 2016
West (1&2)	53
North (3&4)	27
South (5&6)	27
East (7&8)	14
Total Requests	121

2. The system response to these requests included the following criteria considered by the Area Superintendent in dialogue with the parent, principal,

Elementary Assessment & Program teachers, Secondary Program & Assessment teachers and Superintendent of Special Services:

a) Student needs and level of service required to service the student as per the IEP and placement were reviewed;

b) Dialogue with the Principal and existing school staff to provide resources/strategies to support the student;

c) EA/CYW assignments were reviewed and adjustments to those assignments within the school via rescheduling to accommodate the changing needs (student who left or entered the school);

d) EA allocations were reviewed and adjustments made between schools, leading to the movement of a support staff (EA/CYW) to another school to respond to the school's changing needs;

e) Movement of support staff between superintendent areas and/or regions to support emerging needs; and

f) Temporary assignment of agency worker support where appropriate to assist in development of skills to support the support staff at the school.

g) Through the IPRC process, appropriate placement of student in a Special Education program that is able to meet the student's needs.

Metric #2: Per Student cost for Special Education Programming

1. The aggregated data provided below has been calculated using the total number of students with an exceptionality determined through the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) process so that comparisons can be drawn with coterminous district school boards. Information is presented only on students with an exceptionality formalized through the IPRC process, and does not include information on students with an Individual Education Plan who have no formal exceptionality.

2. Information about Special Education funding and the number of exceptional students was obtained from coterminous district school boards to calculate the per pupil dollar amount spent in each board.

3. In descending order, the following table is presented to indicate the expenditures:

Table 3: Per Pupil Special Education Expenditures

Information is forthcoming.

Metric # 3: **Impact of Changes in Special Education: Multiple Student Case Study**

Case Study Research Statement:

Case studies are frequently used in social science research as a way of providing holistic, in-depth explanations of social situations. Most commonly used in the fields of education, sociology, anthropology and political science, case study design allows for exploration and understanding of complex issues not always understood well by quantitative research. Both quantitative and qualitative research generate valuable information. Case study methodology has grown to prominence in the past 50 years as a result of the recognition of limitations of quantitative methods. A Multiple-case study design allows for comparative analysis of several cases, using a variety of data sources.

Background to Case Study

1. A study was initiated in October 2016, to help identify the impact of changes in the special education model at the TCDSB, focusing on a variety of children with special education needs, in all 5 placement settings.

2. Eight schools (5 elementary, 3 secondary) were selected to participate in the study. **All schools had experienced a loss of three or more EAs over the past two years.** Within these schools, 35 students (20 Elementary, 15 Secondary) were identified centrally for participation. Students selected for inclusion in the study were drawn from a range of exceptionalities and placement options. From the original 35 students selected, 28 parents consented for their children to participate in the study.

3. Given the diversity of student needs that exist in special education programs, a multiple-case study approach was used. This method allows for the gathering of evidence to outline the uniqueness of every situation and to identify themes that emerge.   Principals were provided with an information and consent letter for all parents of students in the study. Research staff

visited each school to interview teachers, education assistants, students and parents regarding the 28 students included in the study (for whom there was consent).

4. A template was used to collect information from staff, parents, and students regarding the impact of changes to support staff on students. The following are examples of the interview questions asked:
   - Please describe the needs of the student. Have these needs changed over the past three years?
   - What supports is the student currently receiving? Include staffing, programming, materials, equipment, space etc. How has this changed in the past three years?
   - Have changes in needs and support had a significant impact on the student's behaviour, social-emotional wellbeing, achievement, adaptive functioning? Do you perceive the changes to be negative or positive or has there been no change? What is the evidence?
   - How could we improve supports for this student?
   - What Promising Practices can you identify to demonstrate innovations in the light of staff reductions? How can we build on strengths and transfer what we have learned to support students and share practices with other staff?

5. School visits took place in November and December, 2016. The collection of information continued in January by telephoning parents and by examining student records. Appendix A outlines the tracking process.

6. To date, 112 interviews have been conducted, including:
   - 64 teacher interviews,
   - 15 EA or CYW interviews,
   - 11 Parent interviews,
   - 13 student interviews,
   - 8 administrator interviews.

   NOTE: An effort has been made to contact all parents. Some parents did not want to be interviewed and others were unable to be contacted.

7. For each student with consent, a detailed background information file has been collected including: student IEP, Report Card Marks / Learning Skills, EQAO results, Canadian Achievement Test results, OLSAT results, credit accumulation, OSSLT achievement, and attendance.

8. Research staff have summarized background information and interview data for all cases. Summaries were shared with the Special Education Review Committee over three sessions to inform dialogue and to assist in identifying emerging themes, as outlined below.

EMERGING THEMES

9. These emerging themes, drawn from all data collected, are organized into 5 sections:
   A) Overall impact on student achievement and well-being
   B) Impact on staff
   C) Promising practices
   D) Impact of Changes: Focus on Student Exceptionality
   E) Impact of Changes: Focus on Classroom Placement

A) IMPACT ON STUDENT ACHIEVMENT AND WELL BEING

1. While schools were selected for inclusion in this study as a result of an overall reduction in the number of EAs in the school, levels of support for individual students in each school vary, depending on the students' needs and staff availability.

2. In all cases, students are meeting learning goals as stated in their IEPs. In the context of the changes in support available to schools, staff report that school teams have collaborated to continue to attempt to meet the special education needs of students in their school.

3. In several cases, students have integration listed as a program component in their IEP, but teachers and EAs report that currently the students have fewer opportunities to be integrated into regular stream classrooms due to less support available from EAs. Staff report that efforts are being made to provide as rich a program as possible within the ISP classroom environment and are trying to find ways to enable successful integration. Perceived challenges regarding reduced opportunities for integration may

be greater in secondary schools, and among students with more significant exceptionalities.

4. In several cases, where IEPs indicate that students should use SEA computers as necessary for successful learning, teachers, EAs, and parents report that the students are struggling with the use of computers in a meaningful way. Staff indicate that these students require additional support to be able to integrate computers successfully into the curriculum. Where possible, special education and classroom teachers are providing support where EAs are not available.

5. In several cases, when emergencies or extreme behavioural outbursts take place, EAs typically report being required to all work together to address the situation. With reductions in staff, teachers and EAs report that there are fewer EAs left to address the needs of the remaining students with special education needs. Staff report that this requires additional flexibility when scheduling and allocating classroom support.

6. In some Secondary schools, staff and parents report that resource rooms are no longer available on a drop-in basis, and some students report that they have reduced opportunities to receive additional remedial support and to complete classwork in a quiet space. Staff report that resource support and monitoring by special education teachers is being provided on an ongoing basis, in class with additional assistance being provided before and after school. Test and Exam accommodations are being provided to students on an appointment basis.

Summary

In most cases, school staff are adjusting to reduced levels of staffing and students continue to learn in accommodated and modified special education programs. Some students are experiencing reduced opportunities for integration into regular classrooms. Some staff are experiencing challenges supporting student use of special education technology. Some classrooms and students are now receiving reduced support compared with previous years.

B) IMPACT ON STAFF

1. Staff report using a range of strategies to continue to foster supports to meet student needs. Staff also report a general sense of frustration stemming from attempting to accomplish this goal with reduced human resources.

2. In several schools, with fewer EAs, other staff (teachers, nurses, CYWs, and principals) report that they are assuming new or expanded responsibilities and roles, including assisting with technology use, lifting and positioning students, and monitoring identified students at recess.

3. With the changes in staffing, EAs report providing support in multiple classrooms on a regular basis. EAs report that this presents challenges for EAs who may need to provide support in classes of students with whom they are not familiar (e.g., student needs, safety concerns, typical behaviours, classroom routines). Staff also report that when EAs are placed strategically to address the greatest needs in a school, other regular classrooms are receiving reduced support or none at all. While these classrooms may have fewer special education needs than others, classroom teachers report that they are being required to provide more individualized assistance that EAs would have provided previously, under teacher supervision.

4. Teachers and administrators report that reduction in the number of EAs, frequently places additional demands on other school staff and is particularly challenging when supply coverage is not provided for absent EAs. With reductions in support staff, principals report that principals and vice principals, classroom teachers, CYWs, and special education teachers are stepping in to fill the role of absent EAs.

5. All staff report that as a result of the perceived changes in focus in roles and responsibilities, teachers, EAs, CYWs, and Administrators require training and professional learning to address the unique special education needs of students with different exceptionalities. For example, EAs reported needing safety training specific to the needs of students with an identification of Autism.

Summary
Staff report a general sense of frustration stemming from attempts to meet student needs with reduced human resources. Most schools report that staff are adjusting and taking on changing responsibilities. This may result in a need for additional professional learning for EAs, teachers, and administrators.

PROMISING PRACTICES

1. There is evidence that all schools are working towards managing staff as efficiently as possible to offer the best possible service to their students with special education needs. With each school context being different in terms of student needs, staffing, and leadership, there are differences in the approaches taken, and there is value in documenting and sharing practices that have been effective.

2. Reductions in staffing have placed demands on all schools to learn to work within the new context of students with high needs combined with fewer staff members. Staff report that there is a need for increased flexibility and high levels of organization and logistics.

3. To meet the special education needs of students, school teams report practicing a high degree of organization. Staff report that this is required to support flexible scheduling of EAs who may have multiple responsibilities throughout the day and may have changes in responsibilities on a weekly or monthly basis. Some staff have reported that it has been helpful to conduct regular meetings to identify changing needs, schedule assignments, and to focus the work of EAs where it is most needed.

4. All school staff, including EAs, CYWs, classroom teachers, special education teachers, and administrators report practicing a high degree of flexibility in their responsibilities, to address the special education needs of the students in their schools.

5. Schools report that a shared vision and a common set of core beliefs is essential to help them in supporting their students. For example, some

schools report stressing the idea of shared responsibility – the belief that addressing the achievement and well-being of all students with special education needs is the responsibility of all staff in the school, not just special education staff.

6. Staff report that engaging in practices that demonstrate a strong commitment to special education are effective in communicating a shared vision. For example, some schools report that, regardless of staffing limitations, special education teachers are not be asked to step in and offer supply coverage when a classroom teachers are absent. Staff report that this practice clearly sends a message that addressing the learning and well-being of students with special education needs is a priority.

7. Regular and ongoing communication is reported as key to supporting success. Collaboration and strong communication between teachers and special education teachers are reported to be very helpful in addressing the special education needs of students (e.g., reminders of IEP requirements for individual students).

8. To facilitate and support the teaching environment with reduced EAs, some school staff report that they have implemented the practice of single-age/grade withdrawal classrooms. The rationale for this practice is that with one group of students in a single-grade, the demands placed on the teacher responsible are lower than in a multi-grade withdrawal setting. This practice is more feasible in schools with a larger population of students.

9. Staff report that as schools have been adapting to an environment with reduced EAs, APTs/PATs, autism support teachers, Autism Support Teams, and the Behaviour Team have provided additional support to classroom teachers and special education teachers, who are taking on new and additional responsibilities.

10. Staff identified strong leadership as a critical factor contributing towards the effectiveness of their school in meeting the learning and well-being of their students with special education needs. They identified effective administrators as those who are very aware of student needs,

knowledgeable about special education, and highly engaged with staff and students – supporting a shared vision and committed to creating a culture of collaboration and high expectations.

Summary
Staff identified several practices contributing to successful special education program delivery, including: a high degree of organization within the school, flexibility in deploying staffing, maintaining a shared vision and common set of core beliefs about special education, shared responsibility for students with special education needs, strong collaboration and communication between teachers, and strong leadership.

C) IMPACT OF CHANGES: FOCUS ON EXCEPTIONALITY

1. In terms of <u>student exceptionality</u>, a review of impact data revealed a variety of patterns: staff and parents report that students with an identification of *Autism* or *Multiple Exceptionality/Developmental Disability*, are frequently the students for whom integration into the regular classroom is the greatest challenge. Staff working with these students also report that they have experienced greater demands trying to balance the needs of several individual students at the same time, often focusing on safety, rather than supporting learning.

2. Staff and parents report that students with an Identification of *Learning Disability* or *Language Impaired*, frequently require less support from education assistants and therefore considered to be impacted less than other students by the reductions in education assistants. However, staff and parents report that often the assistance provided by EAs is primarily supporting the use of technology or scribing for the student. Staff and parents report these students, along with students with no formal identification, often experienced the reduction of education assistants in terms of less support for the use of technology.

Summary
Students with an identification of Autism or Multiple Exceptionality/Developmental Disability, appear to be the students for whom integration into the regular classroom is often the greatest challenge. Students with an Identification of Learning Disability or Language Impaired along with students with no formal identification

> *require less support and therefore appear to be impacted less than other students by the reductions in education assistants, other than to support independence in the use of technology*.

D) IMPACT OF CHANGES: FOCUS ON PLACEMENT

1. A review of impact data, in terms of <u>classroom placement</u>, revealed a variety of patterns: EAs working in *Special Education Classes with Partial Integration* or *Special Education Classes Full-Time* report that they are frequently required to be focused primarily on addressing student emergencies and behaviour outbursts. In many cases, there has been a reduction of education assistants in these classrooms and teachers and EAs report being 'stretched' to support all students – including those who are not having behavioural outbursts. Staff supporting students with this placement, also expressed concerns regarding limited opportunities to support student integration into regular classrooms, owing to reduced numbers of education assistants.

2. Staff supporting students with a placement of *Regular Class with Indirect Support* report frequently to be providing much more than indirect support – on occasion, staff report that these students require direct support from both education assistants and special education teachers.

3. EAs supporting students with a placement of *Regular Class with Resource Support* and *Regular Class with Withdrawal Support* report that they are working in more classrooms than in the past. This model distributes support throughout the school – staff report that this may lead to greater inconsistency in support for some students.

> <u>Summary</u>
> *Staff working in Special Education Classes with Partial Integration or Special Education Classes Full-Time report that they are frequently required to focus their attention primarily on individual students who are experiencing behaviour outbursts. Students in this placement may also experience reduced opportunities for integration into regular classrooms. EAs supporting students with a placement of Regular Class with Resource Support and Regular Class with Withdrawal Support report that they are working in a greater number of classrooms than in the past.*

Emerging Trends and Observations: What have we learned?

1. Based on the multiple-case studies focusing on 28 students and 112 interviews, the evidence suggests that, at this time, while some students experience reduced support, overall, the changes may not have had a significant impact student learning and well-being.

2. Continuous monitoring of the achievement and well-being of the population of students with special education needs within the TCDSB will be required to continue to track the impact of changes on an ongoing basis and in the long term. This level of accountability will, in part, take place through the work of the Special Education Accountability Frameworks.

3. The evidence from the various case studies reveals that school staff are impacted by the changes. Staff in these schools are using a range of strategies to continue supporting student needs. They have identified concerns, needs, as well as strengths upon which to build. A key area of need appears to be increased professional learning for all staff including EAs, teachers, and administrators, as well as greater flexibility in deploying staff.

E.   METRICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

1. Staff will continue to monitor the quantitative data as presented in the preliminary report with respect to the following:
   - Student Data and Support Staff Data 2013 – 2016
   - Benchmark of Support Staff in Coterminous District School Boards (2016)
   - Report Card Learning Skills for Students with an IEP
   - Safe Schools Progressive Discipline Data for Students with an IEP

2. EQAO Standardized Assessment data in 2016-2017 will be incorporated into the ongoing data assessment.

3. The Multiple case study was based on schools whose allocation of EAs was reduced by 3 or more EAs over two years, thus the information is specific to schools who had a considerable reduction to support staff. As a result, it was

expected that the changes would have an evident and considerable impact on student programming and achievement.

4. The Multiple Case Study indicated that students were all meeting the expectations that were outlined for them on their Individual Education Plan as reported by staff.

5. Staff also indicated that the work processes had changed, where support staff were strategically placed to support the highest needs students. A shift towards a shared understanding of the need to work together collaboratively is essential to supporting students in the various placements. Schools continue work strategically to meet the needs of students.

6. The ongoing work of the Special Education Review Committee has contributed to ongoing review of the changes to Special Education policies, procedures and the service delivery model.

7. Staff will present the analyses of this report to SEAC.

F.   CONCLUDING STATEMENT

This report is for the consideration of the Board.