

# Special Education



OTTAWA-CARLETON  
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD



## THE ISSUE

Schools are struggling to support an increasing number of students with complex learning needs.

Every child has the right to an education. However, the ability to deliver on this is being impacted as school boards are strained to support more students with complex safety, behavioral, and medical needs. This includes those with diverse learning challenges like deaf and hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired, and rapid rise of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Limited funding for special education means that schools do not have enough staff to support these students with the care and attention they deserve. This adds further pressure on teachers and ultimately impacts the learning of all students.

These children learn in different ways and the system needs to adapt to meet their needs. At the same time, parents/caregivers may not fully understand how they can best advocate for their child through the process and need to be supported to ensure they are fully informed.

# \$4M

*The estimated provincial funding shortfall the OCDSB is facing to support special education. This money must be found from elsewhere in the school board budget.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To address urgent special education needs, the OCDSB recommends:

- 1 Increase funding:** Significant increases in special education funding are required to hire more educational assistants. Bridge funding would also be recommended to shift from a model based on fully self contained classrooms to a more inclusive, community school-based approach. Further targeted investments into reading interventions are also imperative to support students with learning differences.
- 2 Recruitment action plan and professional development:** A provincial action plan is needed to hire more staff to assist students with specialized learning needs. This should be coupled with more opportunities for all educators to have access to time to focus on professional development and training (for example, meeting the needs of students with ASD).
- 3 Province-wide coordination:** While school boards need the flexibility to support their local communities, more coordination across the province would help to ensure standards of practice are encouraged. This includes materials to better inform parents/caregivers about their child's rights, special education, and how to best support their child.



## MORE INFORMATION

Recent updates to the Ontario Curriculum highlight the importance of Social Emotional Learning and its connections to students' feelings of safety, welcoming and belonging. Educational Assistants (EAs) are key para-professionals to help support students in being prepared for learning from a social-emotional and self-regulation perspective.

The OCDSB has used additional funding beyond the special education envelope in order to support students with special education needs, including increasing the number of EAs available to support students. The district is currently serving more students with complex needs, including those with complex mental health profiles, in the regular classroom. Students have had their educational experiences disrupted by the pandemic and unprecedented levels of dysregulation are being noticed.

The lack of EA support in schools results in some students not receiving the support they require which can impact trajectories and life outcomes for students.

*Equal access to education is a fundamental human right guaranteed under the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and international law. The Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) has affirmed that all students must have meaningful access to education, which includes being provided the supports needed to learn to read. In *Eaton v Brant County Board of Education* (Eaton), the SCC also emphasized the importance of inclusive education as an equality right, finding that "... integration should be recognized as the norm of general application because of the benefits it generally provides."*

*Source: OHRC, Right to Read Report, 2022*