



COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE BUDGET (PUBLIC)
Report No. 24-041

20 February 2024

**Specialized Program Class Referral Information 2023-2024 and
Planning for Special Education Supports and Services 2024- 2025**

Key Contact: **Peter Symmonds, Superintendent of Learning
Support Services, 613 596 8211 ext 8254
Stacey Kay, General Manager, Learning Support
Services, 613 596 8257**

PURPOSE:

1. This report provides information regarding the specialized program class (SPC) referral and placement process for the 2023-2024 school year and represents an important source of data to inform planning and decision making regarding supports and services for students with complex special needs for the 2024-2025 school year.

STRATEGIC LINKS:

2. The presented information directly contributes to the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) Strategic Plan Learning goal to improve program quality and accessibility for all students.

CONTEXT:

3. Learning Support Services (LSS) collects and analyzes data regarding the SPC referral and placement process to inform academic staffing and budget decisions. Reviewing resourcing and program delivery is part of our ongoing effort to improve equity of access, opportunity and outcomes for students.

At the same time, understanding disability related needs of students from a human rights perspective has steered LSS to better understand inclusive education practices. Based on current academic research and inclusive education practice developed provincially, nationally and internationally, LSS has prototyped inclusive education support structures at a small number of elementary and secondary sites across the District.

Previous communications to the Committee have outlined the increasing awareness of challenges associated with the SPC related to human rights, equity, staffing, pupil accommodation, transportation and financial sustainability.

Balancing the interconnected work described above is hoped to provide the committee with information to support decision making regarding academic staffing and the budget needs analysis.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

4. SPC Referral Information

Table 1 and Table 2 presented as Appendix A and B provide a summary of SPC referral information available for the 2023-2024 school year for elementary and secondary panels respectively. The data collected annually for each type of SPC includes:

- the total pupil capacity;
- the number of referrals (i.e., applications) received in the spring referral review process;
- the number of placement recommendations offered by the review committee;
- referrals passed to another committee for review;
- number of students placed in a particular SPC through the IPRC process (e.g., this includes new and returning students to a particular SPC); and
- the number of students waiting for a particular type of SPC.

In any given school year, SPC referrals received after March generally inform placement recommendations for the following school year. While referrals are reviewed throughout the school year, operationally, this represents a much smaller number than those reviewed each spring.

The data provided in this report reflects information available to LSS as of 30 October 2023 (i.e., 'snapshot' data). It is important to note that the exact numbers fluctuate over the course of the school year as new referrals are received and as students enter and exit SPCs.

For the 2023-2024 school year, 591 referrals for SPCs were reviewed by referral review committees as part of the spring process in order to provide recommendations. Overall referral trends have continued to remain consistent (i.e., >5 year trend).

5. SPC Data Review for 2023-2024

Elementary

Elementary SPC waitlists are well managed with the exception of classes for Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and, to a lesser extent, Developmental Disabilities (DD). For both classes the number of referrals continues to be high and the size of the waitlist has continued to increase from 2022-2023.

Vacancies in General Learning Program (GLP) classes were slightly higher over the previous year with an excess capacity of 39 pupil places. Last year's reduction of 3 Primary Special Needs (PSN) resolved the higher vacancies seen in 2022-2023 and did not result in a waitlist for the current year.

Secondary

Similarly, secondary SPC waitlists are well managed. The opening of 2 additional secondary ASD SPCs for the 2023-2024 was approved and implemented to provide placements for all students that transitioned from elementary ASD classes the previous year.

6. Inclusive Education Initiatives

LSS has been involved in ongoing work to better understand alternatives to the OCDSB's current SPC model of support. This work has been grounded in a commitment to a human rights approach to meeting the disability related needs of students through inclusive education practices. Funding for these initiatives has been available from the Ministry through Priorities and Partnership Funds (PPF). The Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) has been provided with regular updates on the following initiatives:

- itinerant teacher model for ASD, DD and Learning Disabilities (LD);
- GLP Review¹ and Inclusion Project;
- Supported Section Inclusion Model at Community Secondary Schools (two sites);
- LSS Inclusion team (grade 7 to 10 focus) (10 sites);
- elementary Inclusion teacher pilot (3 sites); and
- continued implementation of a structured approach to literacy instruction and intervention.

Evidence and learning from the above work has also contributed to recommendations to inform planning for special education supports moving forward for trustee consideration.

7. Planning for Special Education Supports for 2024-2025

Specific details regarding proposed staffing changes will be provided through the academic staffing and budget process; however, rationale and more fulsome descriptions of the proposal approach are provided below:

ASD

Responding to the needs of students with Autism continues to be complex. The District currently offers 36 elementary and 22 secondary ASD classes. Each class is supported by 1 teacher (1.19 FTE elementary; 1.33 FTE secondary) and 2.0 FTE Educational Assistants (EAs). The elementary waitlist for ASD classes grew from 47 students in 2022-2023 to 64 students in 2023-2024.

Under the current model, most students that are placed in an elementary ASD class transition to a secondary ASD class. Every new ASD class at elementary schools then necessitates the opening of additional secondary ASD classes. This model of support is no longer operationally sustainable (i.e., pupil accommodation, financial, staffing, transportation pressures etc.) and there is increasing evidence it may not be maximizing opportunities for students across personal, social and academic domains.

¹ Full findings to be released in the spring of 2024

A multi-layered approach is recommended to balance the needs of students currently supported through existing structures while creating new structures that align with evidence informed practice. For 2024-2025 the following is proposed:

- opening up to 2 additional secondary ASD classes to accommodate students in elementary ASD classes transitioning to grade 9;
- a revised criteria for ASD SPCs that reflects the patterns of placements that have occurred over the past 3 years. This would include:
 - adjustment to the cognitive and adaptive criteria thresholds; and
 - placement opportunities beginning for grade 1 students.additional information for committee consideration will be brought forward in the spring of 2024 with an aim to implement in September 2024 to inform new placements as of September 2025;
- the continued focus of elementary Itinerant teachers for ASD/DD would be to develop programming and support structures to meaningfully include students with more complex presentations of ASD and/or DD in regular classrooms;
- an increase to the overall EA allocation to support the inclusion work in regular classrooms will be brought forward for consideration through the budget process.

General Learning Program (GLP)

Review of support structures and the investment of resources to better understand how to best support the academic, personal and social learning domains of students with Mild Intellectual Disabilities (MID) has been supported by PPF the last 18 months.

Of note, at two community secondary schools additional sections were provided to support a small group of students to access their community secondary school following a transition from an intermediate GLP SPC. Initial feedback from students, families and staff is positive and significant learning with respect to secondary pathway planning has been realized.

The District currently offers 13 elementary GLP classes for junior and intermediate students. 15 secondary GLP SPCs are available at 3 secondary sites. Based on anticipated student enrolment in SPCs and staffing to support inclusive education practices for students with MID, the following is proposed:

- close one elementary GLP class and begin a phase out of one intermediate GLP SPC;
- close 1 secondary GLP SPC; and
- expand the supported section approach at secondary sites to provide additional options for students transitioning from intermediate GLP SPC to attend their community secondary school (# total of new sites will be determined based on the needs of the cohort transitioning to secondary to a maximum of 3 sites).

New Stittsville Secondary School

New Stittsville Secondary School will open with an inclusive education model responding to the disability related needs of students that live within the boundary. The goal is to create a culture and support structures that maximize

opportunity for students across personal, social and academic domains addressing the barriers faced by students with disabilities that are inherently built into models that are more segregated.

The allocation of special education staffing will be determined by the disability related needs of students to access their learning goals. Based on the current work with Program and Learning Innovation (P&LI) and LSS, there is a broader understanding of how a student can access the variety of pathways in their community schools. This values the diversity of student profiles and learning pathways while having students stay in their community school with their peers who are modeling and supporting each other.

In addition, the flexibility for teachers to work together has shown a tremendous shift in teacher mindset when it comes to supporting all students within a regular class. When teachers' co-plan and co-teach, they have the opportunity to share their observations and reflections on how to create learning environments where all identities are valued and accommodated in a supportive way. This model embeds learning for the educator and builds teacher capacity and efficacy for ongoing development of their inclusionary practice.

- a contingency allocation of 1 elementary and 1 secondary inclusion teacher has been included through academic staffing for consideration. The final staffing allocation will be determined following an assessment of student needs this spring. While not confirmed, it is anticipated that a continuation of PPF funding will allow the District to provide this allocation.

8. Professional Assessments

Appendix C (Table 3) outlines the professional assessment waitlist data which was collected in June 2023. The data reflects students waiting for assessment at the end of the 2022-2023 school year. Overall trends have remained consistent across the last 3 years.

Students waiting for formal standardized assessments are supported through multidisciplinary team consultation and the provision of strategies and programming recommendations to educators, as appropriate.

District School Boards were again provided with PPF for the purpose of conducting additional professional assessments. Using the allocation provided for the 2023-2024 school year, 57 additional speech-language pathology and 75 additional psychoeducational assessments have been assigned to OCDSB professional support staff to be completed outside of the regular school day.

LSS continues to consider how to maximize professional support services for students. Particularly for disciplines like psychology and speech-language pathology, a large proportion of this valuable resource is skewed to support decisions to move students out of their community school setting to a SPCs (i.e., assessment for placement vs assessment for accommodation/support). A move to structures that allow for greater inclusion are also anticipated to offer students more impactful services from multidisciplinary team staff.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

9. The overall academic staffing costs associated with the plan detailed above will be provided through the documentation to support the academic staffing and budget process.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

10. The 2022-2023 SPC referral data was reviewed with SEAC in order to inform the planning for special education services for 2024-2025. A rich discussion offered perspectives that were incorporated in the plan presented above.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

11. The following questions are provided to support the discussion of the information presented to the Committee:
 - Does the data and information as presented assist the committee when considering planning for special education support for the 2024-2025 school year?
 - Are there additional considerations to inform the planning process for special education supports for the 2024-2025 school year?
 - In shifting special education service delivery models, what are the key considerations that should guide subsequent steps?

Peter Symmonds, Superintendent
Learning Support Services
(ext. 8254)

Pino Buffone
Director of Education and
Secretary of the Board

APPENDICES

Appendix A Elementary Specialized Program Class Referrals
Appendix B Secondary Specialized Program Class Referrals
Appendix C Professional Assessment Waitlist Data