



**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (PUBLIC)
SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**21 May 2024
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Report No. 24-078

**Developmental Disabilities Program (DDP) Review of Crystal Bay and
Clifford Bowey Report**

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PURPOSE:

1. To present the Crystal Bay Centre for Special Education and Clifford Bowey Public School Developmental Disabilities Program (DDP) Review report, including recommendations for consideration.

STRATEGIC LINKS:

2. The DDP Review report aligns with two of the priority areas in the current Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) 2023-2027 Strategic Plan. Specifically, it connects to the areas of Learning, and Well-Being, with a focus on the following objectives:
 - a. Improved program quality and accessibility for all students;
 - b. Improved student literacy;
 - c. Improved student achievement in mathematics;
 - d. Enhanced safety to support the cultural, emotional, and physical well-being of all students and staff.

The DDP Review report and the findings described therein also reflect links to the OCDSB's values of Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility, Community Building, Leadership Development, and Responsible Resource Use.

CONTEXT:

3. In accordance with the District's process for cyclical review of programs, the DDP Review falls under the category of 'Program Monitoring' by the Learning Support Services (LSS) department. The purpose of the review is to ensure that special education programming, services, supports, and resources continue to meet the needs of students at Crystal Bay and Clifford Bowey. The findings in the report are intended to inform educational programming and practices at both schools and may serve as a reference for future policy and decision making.

The current OCDSB special education service delivery model is based on a continuum of programs and services with placement ranging from regular class

with support to full time special education classes, and two special education schools, namely, Crystal Bay Centre for Special Education and Clifford Bowey Public School. Students who attend Crystal Bay and Clifford Bowey are some of the District's most vulnerable learners. They have moderate to severe developmental disabilities and the majority of students are non-verbal.

Historically, the last Developmental Disabilities Program review was conducted by LSS in 2010. Since then, the needs of students with moderate to severe developmental disabilities at Crystal Bay and Clifford Bowey have increased. For example, there has been an increase in the number of students with a dual diagnosis (i.e., severe intellectual disability and autism), challenging behaviours, and/or complex health care needs. There has also been an increase in the amount and types of specialized equipment used daily by students to access the curriculum.

Review Process

In June 2022, following the appointment of the DDP Review project lead and approval of the program monitoring plan, initial meetings were held with the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), the principals of Crystal Bay and Clifford Bowey, and the school councils of both schools. In addition, an interdisciplinary working group was established to provide input into the development of the review plan and review related activities.

Throughout the review process, the LSS Program Evaluation Officer and project lead used a collaborative evaluation approach whereby the program evaluation team worked closely with key stakeholders at the various stages of the evaluation process (e.g., parents/guardians, specialized program teachers, educational assistants, school administrators, professional staff, LSS staff and senior management). For example, school council members from Crystal Bay and Clifford Bowey participated in working group meetings to provide feedback on the parent/guardian survey and focus group questions. Parent/caregiver consultation at these meetings was also instrumental in addressing how best to engage parents/caregivers in the review process.

Consultation was based on common themes across key stakeholder groups and these themes were explored using a mixed model design including both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods such as focus groups and surveys. Areas of exploration included educational programming, staffing, and facilities. Given the participatory nature of this review, regular updates pertaining to review activities were provided to both school councils and to SEAC.

Review Activities

To understand the profiles of students who attend Crystal Bay and Clifford Bowey, non-identifying central data was collected for the 2022-2023 school year and additional non-identifying student information was collected directly from each school. And as part of an anonymous survey, parents and caregivers were asked identity-based questions to provide insight into the lived experiences of their children and families.

In addition to the survey distributed to parents and caregivers, focus group sessions for parents/guardians were offered both virtually and in-person. A separate voluntary survey was shared with teachers and educational assistants, and one-on-one interviews were conducted with administrators to gather their input.

Other review activities included an academic literature review to understand current evidence-based best practices and factors that relate to improved outcomes for students with moderate to severe developmental disabilities. Finally, a jurisdictional scan was done to examine service delivery models in demographically similar school districts to learn how students with moderate to severe developmental disabilities are served in the coterminous board and other parts of Ontario.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

4. Findings

The report provides guidance and considerations for how to address the changing special education needs of students in the DDP at Crystal Bay and Clifford Bowey. It reinforces the importance of implementing evidence-based instructional practices and the essential role of multidisciplinary professionals in the learning and support of students with severe DD. The findings also emphasize the important role of parents and caregivers who serve as the voice of their children.

5. Parent/Caregiver Engagement

The findings in the report are based on a relatively high rate of parent/caregiver participation (i.e., over 50%) and indicate overall satisfaction with the special education programming their children receive at Crystal Bay and Clifford Bowey. Many participants expressed a strong sense of belonging in relation to their school community. However, several parents/caregivers described feeling disconnected from the OCDSB and the ways in which some initiatives are implemented.

6. OHRC Policy on Accessible Education for Students with Disabilities

The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) updated its policy on accessible education for students with disabilities in 2018. The updated policy places an emphasis on education providers to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities by designing more inclusive learning environments. The duty to accommodate extends beyond the design of educational facilities and applies to education policies, programs, services, and activities keeping in mind that the most appropriate accommodation is one that promotes the inclusion and full participation of students with disabilities.

This basic principle is also reflected in the policy's statement on the placement of students. When deciding the most appropriate placement, educators should consider the following factors, among others:

- "the student's preferred learning style;
- the geographical proximity of the placement to the student's home;

- the extent to which a placement affords the student with opportunities to socialize and interact with other students.” (See section 8.4.3 of the OHRC policy)

Of note, the policy also mentions the importance of considering intersecting factors such as ancestry, race, and students with more than one type of disability, which may contribute to barriers that students and families experience.

7. Inclusion

Crystal Bay and Clifford Bowey present unique challenges in terms of opportunities for inclusion with regular program students because the students at each site are congregated and there are no OCDSB community schools nearby.

Research supports the benefits of inclusive practices for students with special education needs and their neurotypical peers. The challenges lie in how to implement inclusive practices in community schools when students have high needs in areas such as communication, and self-regulation. Important considerations include student and staff safety, staff and administrator capacity, attitudinal barriers, school-level educational assistant and multidisciplinary support, central support and services, as well as the physical layout and accessibility features of the school.

8. Identity Based Data

The collection of identity based data is essential to understanding who is represented in the student populations at Crystal Bay and Clifford Bowey, and who is not. The analysis of this data promotes an understanding of the ‘whole child’ and is of value in considering broader issues related to intersectionality such as anti-racist work and systemic ableism.

9. Facilities

Both programs at Crystal Bay and Clifford Bowey are at capacity for student enrolment and lack storage space for specialized equipment used by students to access the curriculum. This means that any expansion of the DDP for students with severe developmental disabilities would entail an assessment of other facilities and may necessitate facility modifications. It would also require the transition of some students to a new site and thereby present an opportunity to consider a more inclusive learning environment for these students.

10. The Way Forward

The DDP Review report highlights 14 recommendations for consideration which are intended to inform educational programming and practices in four broad categories:

- system level;
- integration with central departments;
- school level; and
- professional learning activities for system leaders, administrators, and DDP educators.

The recommendations include short-term and long-term considerations. LSS has already begun work on promoting a culture of disability inclusion within the

OCDSB. For example, this year the department offered professional learning opportunities related to inclusive educational practices, and LSS staff are working with the Research, Evaluation and Analytics Division (READ) to prioritize and gain an understanding of identity among students with disabilities and their families.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

11. The total cost of review activities was approximately \$24,000 and were covered within the existing departmental budget.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

12. The report will be shared directly with Trustees, school administrators and staff at Crystal Bay Centre for Special Education, Clifford Bowey Public School, and their respective school councils, and SEAC.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

13. The following questions are provided to support the discussion of this item by the Committee:
 - How will this work benefit students?
 - How does this work connect with the District's commitment to equity and inclusion?
 - What are some considerations with regard to meeting the future needs of students with complex learning profiles?

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APPENDICES

Appendix A DDP Review Report
Appendix B Infographic