



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

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General Learning Program Evaluation

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PURPOSE:

1. To present the findings of the General Learning Program (GLP) evaluation and considerations to inform the continued growth of practices and structures to support students with Mild Intellectual Disability (MID).

STRATEGIC LINKS:

2. The findings of the GLP evaluation align and will inform continued work across the three priority areas of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) 2023-2027 Strategic Plan. Specifically, it connects to the areas of Learning, Well-Being, and Social Responsibility with a focus on the following objectives:
 - a. improve program quality and accessibility for all students;
 - b. improve educator-student relationships built on empathy, understanding, and respect for differences; and
 - c. strengthen student voice and leadership through fair and ethical decision-making.

CONTEXT:

3. In the spring of 2022, Learning Support Services (LSS) submitted a proposal for application based funding to the Ministry of Education to remove barriers for students with disabilities and to promote and support accessible, inclusive and equitable education practices. Funding supported an initiative focused on students with MID who are receiving their educational program through a GLP specialized program class (SPC).

The funding allowed for the augmentation of the LSS Program Evaluation Office and the addition of an elementary and secondary inclusion teacher for the 2022-

2023 school year. Program Evaluators designed and carried out an exploratory evaluation to understand how a student's placement in the GLP is influencing students' academic and social outcomes. Over the course of the data collection phase of the GLP evaluation, the inclusion teachers focused specifically on the transition of grade 8 students in GLP to high school. Working alongside their teacher colleagues in the GLP, the inclusion teachers helped to remove barriers for students with disabilities by promoting and supporting accessible, inclusive and equitable education practices. The project approach LSS used aspects of developmental evaluation (Patton, 2011) that support program changes while the evaluation is happening. Its participatory nature also results in programming informing the evaluation activities.

The findings of the GLP evaluation will be an important source of information moving forward to strengthen support for school teams to meet the disability related needs of students with MID. In addition, the findings will focus the work of central LSS supports to address areas where special education processes and structures may require continued evolution to better support educators and the students they serve. Finally, themes that surfaced throughout the evaluation and the in-situ work of the inclusion teachers are another source of data for consideration in other system work including the Elementary Program Review (EPR).

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

4. GLP Description

The GLP is the SPC available for students with a MID exceptionality. Students with a MID exceptionality compared to students of the same age struggle with abstract thinking, communication and emotional regulation within social contexts. In addition, they may find practical aspects of life challenging including tasks of daily living (e.g., grocery shopping, using transportation, food preparation, and banking).

The GLP is available from grade 4 to 12 with junior (grade 4 to 6), intermediate (grade 7 & 8) and secondary (grade 9 to 12 or age 21) class configurations. Class size is capped at 16 students and is staffed with 1 teacher and 1 Educational Assistant (EA).

For the 2022-2023 school year, the District offered 13 elementary GLP classes including 7 junior and 6 intermediate classes located at 12 elementary schools. There were 15 secondary classes located in 3 schools. Geographically, GLP classes are located across the District; however, in the majority of cases, students must travel outside of their home community to access this placement. In all but one case, junior, intermediate and secondary GLP classes are located in different school locations, which results in more school transitions for students accessing the placement in comparison to most students in regular program classes.

5. Evaluation Approach

The exploratory nature of this evaluation was well-suited for a process evaluation. A process evaluation is used to investigate how well a program is working, the extent to which it is implemented as designed, and whether it is accessible to its target population. In accordance with the District's cyclical program review process, the GLP process evaluation falls under that category of 'program monitoring' for the LSS department.

The process evaluation was completed using a participatory evaluation approach, which refers to a collaborative process where the program evaluation officer works closely with key groups at all stages of the review. In participatory evaluation, intended primary users are those for whom the evaluation is designed to help (e.g., students, parents/caregivers, SPC teachers, EAs, school administrators, learning support consultants (LSCs), professional support staff and the LSS leadership team). A key element of the participatory approach included the formation of small interdisciplinary working groups that met regularly over the course of the evaluation.

6. Evaluation Activities

The following activities were completed over the course of the 2022-2023 school year:

Academic Literature Review - A scan of academic literature that explored service delivery factors related to the education and well-being of students with a MID was completed. The scope of current research on educational programming for students with a MID further informed the evaluation planning and data collection activities.

Jurisdictional Scan - A scan of demographically similar school districts to the OCDSB was completed in an effort to better understand provincial trends for service delivery models for students with similar profiles to students in the OCDSB supported through the GLP.

Data Collection Activities - A mixed method design was developed including the collection of quantitative and qualitative data during the same time period. This included gathering data from students, parents/caregivers, educators, as well as data from district databases and the inclusion teachers.

7. Data Analysis, Interpretation, and Reporting

Analysis and interpretation of the data took into account the complexity of special education processes and structures, and has included consultation with staff across central departments (e.g., LSS, Program & Learning Innovation (P&LI), Research Evaluation Analytics Division (READ)). Consistent with the intentional design of this initiative, findings were communicated as they emerged to key groups (e.g., principals, teachers, Special Education Advisory Group) and have contributed to decision making regarding annual planning activities related to special education supports and services (e.g., staffing). The data/analysis has been organized into themes. A streamlined report with links to more fulsome or

technical information was created in order to ensure accessibility for key groups that will be critical as collective work moves forward to improve educational outcomes and experiences for students supported through the GLP.

8. Overview of the GLP Report

The GLP Report attached as Appendix A provides detailed information and interpretation of the study, including key findings of the evaluation and is organized into the following themes:

- a. **Demographic Information:** The report highlights various patterns that have emerged in the GLP that could indicate potential shifts in the demographics of students in the program. Analysis includes: Exceptionalities; Linguistic Diversity; and Gender;
- b. **Pathway Analysis:** Analysis in the report includes entry points and placement patterns for students in the GLP;
- c. **Student Achievement:** Analysis in the report includes Individual Education Plan (IEP), report card data, reporting practices and secondary credit attainment;
- d. **Parent Understanding & Perceptions of the GLP and Related Special Education Processes:** Analysis in the report includes: perceptions of involvement, satisfaction, understanding of program outcomes, and parental role in their child's educational placement;
- e. **Program Structure:** Analysis in the report examines impacts related to: inconsistencies across sites; availability of central support; and challenges related to the model; and
- f. **Integration into Regular Class, School Community and Community:** Analysis in the report includes perceptions of parents, educators and students.

The report highlights the following:

- The literature revealed a spectrum of approaches to educating students with MID; however, a noticeable shift in the research towards more inclusive approaches to supporting students with special education needs was documented;
- Demographic data indicates that elements of a student's identity may be influencing their experience with special education processes and/or support;
- A Pathway Analysis has confirmed that the majority of students who enter the GLP remain in the placement;
- Analysis of IEPs revealed that in some cases the program is defining the IEP rather than individualized student need;
- Modified learning expectations in combination with current reporting and data storing practices impact the ability of the District to monitor student achievement for students in elementary GLP;

- Secondary GLP educators have expanded opportunities for credit attainment and credential opportunities (i.e., Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), Ontario Secondary School Certificate (OSSC));
- Parent and educator perceptual data indicates that while parents understand the basic structures associated with the GLP, they may not be fully aware of the likely educational outcomes associated with a GLP placement;
- The GLP program structure lacks consistency across school sites at elementary and secondary that has resulted in different educational experiences and credential opportunities available to students; and
- Opportunities for integration are highly valued by students, parents and educators associated with the GLP; however, current structures limit integration opportunities.

Interpretation and understanding of the findings will continue as LSS shares the GLP Report with key groups that support this population of learners.

9. System Shifts Informed by the Evaluation

As initial findings were shared with the LSS leadership team, the issues that could be addressed were implemented in real time over the course of the evaluation. Actions LSS has taken since the data collection have included:

- Providing clarification and guidance regarding Identification Placement Review Committee (IPRC) placement options (e.g., to the extent possible, the IPRC process for students in GLP should be Partially Integrated (PI) with at least one instructional block in a regular class environment);
- Messaging to principals regarding integration opportunities for students in all SPCs (e.g., where possible, students in all SPCs should be integrated into a regular class for a minimum of one instructional period/activity);
- Providing increased flexibility for secondary principals in the use of special education staffing allocations to create additional opportunities for integration;
- Developing asset-based student profiles for students currently placed in SPCs to support transitions to more inclusive community schools;
- Delivering targeted professional learning opportunities for elementary GLP teachers; and
- Expanding of the inclusive teacher model in order to support the disabilities related needs of:
 - intermediate students as they transition to the secondary environment (8 inclusion teachers);
 - secondary students in grade 9 and 10 core courses;
 - grade 9 students leaving grade 8 GLP to attend community secondary school (2 inclusion teachers); and
 - elementary students at three elementary schools (3 inclusion teachers).

10. Looking Forward

In addition to the actions that have taken place over the course of this evaluation LSS will continue to focus central resources with an aim to improve the District's abilities to meet the disability related needs of students within the GLP. The GLP report highlights specific actions related to:

- structures, process and reporting;
- communication with parents/caregivers; and
- professional learning activities for GLP educators.

These actions represent short term goals that can be accomplished within existing special education structures and with minimal or no financial impacts. It is important to note that the qualitative and quantitative findings of the GLP evaluation are understood in the context of learning through inclusive education prototyping that collectively points to shifts that would require larger system transformation. The structure of the SPC model, of which the GLP is an example, appears to be limiting opportunities for the District to meet the disability related needs of students across personal, social and intellectual domains. This is particularly evident as staff begin to understand issues related to modified curriculum expectations and special education models that limit integration in a school community. As the findings in the GLP Report are shared more broadly it will be important to determine if there are opportunities to evolve structures through District program reviews that may better support the disability related needs of students including those with MID.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

11. In 2022, staff applied to a special purpose ministry fund focused on removing barriers for students with disabilities and were successful in receiving \$517,000. As per the application, approximately \$115,000 was directed to the completion of this evaluation and approximately \$456,000 was used for elementary and secondary teacher staffing focused on support for students with inclusive education practices. A similar application was made in 2023 and the District received a total of \$308,000. Approximately \$85,000 of this funding was used to complete the GLP evaluation.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

12. The evaluation design has included opportunities for communication and consultation throughout the process including updates and sharing of initial findings with educators, principals, central departments and the OCDSB Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC). The GLP Evaluation Report will be shared for discussion with SEAC, federation partners and central and school based staff. Virtual meetings will be available to parents and caregivers with children in the GLP to review the contents of the evaluation report.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

13. The following questions are provided to support the discussion of this item by the Committee:
- What findings stood out to you in reading The GLP Report?
 - How might the findings inform our Special Education Programs and Services Policy and program model?
 - How might this and future work of this nature be used to inform the Elementary Program Review?

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APPENDICES

Appendix A - The GLP Report