



COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (PUBLIC)

2 April 2019

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Learning Support Services Operational Review of the Process for Identification, Needs Assessment and Placement

Key Contact: Peter Symmonds, Superintendent, Learning Support Services, 613-596-8211 ext. 8254
Amy Hannah, System Principal, Learning Support Services, 613-596-8211 ext. 8713
Stacey Kay, Manager, Learning Support Services, 613-596-8211 ext. 8657

PURPOSE:

1. This report outlines the plan including the scope of work for the Learning Support Services (LSS) Operational Review of the process for identification, needs assessment, and placement for all exceptionalities and is presented to Committee of the Whole (COW) for discussion purposes.

CONTEXT:

2. In October, 2018, the Board passed a motion for staff to undertake an operational review of specific processes related to supporting students with special education needs and profiles. The motion emerged from COW and Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) discussions identifying the need to improve parent/guardian understanding of the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) process, specifically related to identification and placement. Other aspects raised were requests to ensure consistency of practice with respect to use of the IPRC as it relates to placement across schools in the District, as well as provide greater clarity and improved communication of practices regarding assessment of student needs and the tiered approach to intervention.

Recognizing the affective nature of special education programs and services for families and students, it is also important to note the legislated requirements that schools are required to adhere to for all students (e.g., O.Reg. 181/97 The Identification, Placement and Review Committee). In plain terms, these processes have both emotional and legislative elements that impact how stakeholders respond to and understand them.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

3. On 30 October 2018, the Board passed the following motion:

THAT staff be directed to undertake an operational review of the process for identification, needs assessment (including the use of tiered interventions as a support for all students, and as identification and placement evidence), and placement for all exceptionalities;

THAT a report be provided to the Board no later than February 2019, with a proposed outline and timeline for the operational review, and an update on any changes in practice introduced in the wake of the discussion of this motion; and,

THAT staff produce a series of updates, beginning no later than the end of October 2019, detailing the number of applications and the number of children receiving assessments and placements in all congregated programs, by exceptionality, at both the elementary and secondary levels, and details of waitlists for all congregated programs by geographic zone.

The LSS Operational Review of the process for identification, needs assessment, and placement for all exceptionalities is an opportunity to further the District's commitment to continued growth and operational improvement. In order to ensure that the operational review of the process for identification, needs assessment and placement provides meaningful, relevant feedback that can be translated into future work plans, a clear scope of the work is required. In the context of this work, a "clear scope" means a defined purpose with clear focus for inquiry informed by specific guiding questions. Importantly, however, a clearly defined scope for this operational review does not limit the District's opportunity to explore further areas for improvement in the future.

In order to objectively and efficiently accomplish this review, the District will contract an external consultant to complete this work. In addition to providing expertise in the area of operational practices and processes, an external consultant will be able to advise on effective methodology to best achieve the goals of this operational review. In order for an external consultant to undertake this work effectively, a clearly defined scope is required.

LSS Operational Review Proposed Timelines

4. The following general timelines and actions are anticipated for the LSS Operational Review of the process for identification, needs assessment and placement:

Dates	Actions
13 February 2019 - Cancelled 25 February 2019	SEAC - to define the deliverables expected upon completion of the review; and - to provide input regarding the goals and scope of work related to the process of identification, needs assessment, and placement for all exceptionalities
2 April 2019	COW to discuss the scope of work and plan for the LSS Operational Review of the process for identification, needs assessment and placement as determined through consultation with SEAC
April to June 2019	Request for Proposal (RFP) Development/Process - to develop a request for proposal, which includes the defined scope of work and project mandate; and - to review submissions by external consultants and select the successful consultant(s) to complete the work required
Summer 2019	Operational Review Planning Finalization to finalize review methods with the external consultant(s) for the Operational Review
Fall 2019/Winter 2020	Operational Review - external consultant(s) to conduct review - provide updates and a report to Senior Staff; and - receive and review the information provided by the external consultant(s) - updates to SEAC at key review milestones
Winter/Spring 2020	Completion of Operational Review - receive and review the final report presented by the external consultant(s); - invite external consultant(s) to present the final report to SEAC; and - final report to SEAC and COW (including the final report prepared by the external consultant)

N.B.: An updated timeline will be provided following the selection of the external consultant.

Scope of Work to Inform the LSS Operational Review

5. A critical component to ensuring that the LSS Operational Review provides value to informing the District practice with respect to identification, needs assessment and placement for all exceptionalities is to clearly define and narrow the scope of work associated with each component.

At the re-scheduled SEAC meeting on 25 February 2019, committee members were invited to engage in a structured, collaborative discussion to facilitate the identification of key questions, goals and deliverables to inform the scope of work to be included in the RFP. Through a series of steps, the committee initially identified a broad range of key questions, goals and deliverables and through consensus were able to arrive at priority areas. LSS has synthesized this information for Board consideration in what staff and SEAC would recommend are the key components to form the RFP. While the three areas of focus for the review were addressed individually, the outcome of the discussion did highlight that there are intersections and connections between the processes of identification, needs assessment and placement. In addition, the discussion highlighted that a subtle change in the order of the review areas may better reflect the application of these educational processes. The areas of focus for the Operational Review will therefore be presented in the following order: needs assessment, identification and placement. Finally, the discussion yielded key questions to narrow the review for all components. Potential goals and deliverables were identified in some areas, for others the review should surface recommendations for next steps.

Focus Area: Needs Assessment (including the tiered approach to intervention):

This area of focus generated rich discussion and identified multifaceted work that will impact cross departmental collaboration and work plans (e.g., Curriculum Services, Business and Learning Technologies). Feedback provided through COW and SEAC discussions has highlighted the perception that the tiered approach to intervention is not clearly defined or understood by critical stakeholder groups. Key questions from the SEAC consultation included:

- What processes are used in the OCDSB to learn about individual student needs?
- What are the indicators used District-wide to determine that a student's needs are being met?
- What are the processes (or mechanisms) used within the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) to provide and receive feedback to parents/guardians regarding student needs? and
- What indicators are used to measure the effectiveness of the current supports and processes used in engaging all students and families?

Goals and deliverables of this component of the review that may lead to improved student achievement and well-being include:

- A plan to consolidate and strengthen the skills and strategies of classroom educators related to planning, assessment and instruction and specifically the development of student profiles.

Focus Area: Identification:

The central question that framed the review priority for this process was identified as:

What is the fundamental difference in the understanding of parents and staff regarding the IPRC process?

This directly impacts staff messaging regarding the IPRC and the corresponding understanding of parents/guardians and students. In the absence of a shared understanding of the IPRC process, it is a challenge to ensure consistency in communication and administration of this process to all staff, parents/guardians, and students.

Goals & deliverables of this component of review that may contribute to system improvements include:

- Tools and resources to support improved communication to all stakeholder groups (e.g., staff, parents/guardians, students);
- Improved use and understanding of data and how this may inform practice; and
- Establishing conditions where parents/guardians and students feel confident and capable to make informed decision regarding the IPRC

Focus Area: Placement:

The discussion of this review component reinforced that there are clear intersections between the process of identification and the placement process both in practice and in the legislation that governs this work. The goals and deliverables for this component of the review were felt to directly relate to the key questions identified as priorities and are as follows:

- What information and data is considered to support a placement decision at an IPRC?
- What is the role of parents/guardians in the placement decision?
- What are the tools and resources to support consistency of information as it relates to placement options in the OCDSB?

Establishing Review Methodology

6. When engaging an external consultant to provide services to the District, maintaining student privacy and confidentiality is of the utmost importance. LSS will work collaboratively with Risk and Supply Chain Management to develop the RFP and establish an evaluation process to review proposals and presentations to identify which proposal best meets the expectations of the RFP. Based on

the scope of work defined by the District, external consultants submitting a proposal will detail a methodology to achieve the stated goals.

Concurrent Learning Support Services Work

7. As stated above, the District is committed to ongoing growth and improvement. To that end, significant work will continue concurrent to the operational review activities and will be adjusted as the review progresses. Staff continue to engage school teams in professional learning opportunities, both formal and informal, through existing structures (e.g., multidisciplinary teams, networks, operational meetings). Further, LSS has been engaged with stakeholders to redevelop the Quality Program Indicators (QPI) resource document and are planning a broader release to the system.

Since the discussion at COW on 16 October 2018, staff has leveraged opportunities to address concerns raised related to the identification, needs assessment, and placement processes.

Professional Development to Principals

Through District Principal Operations meetings, key messages have been reviewed with elementary principals and vice principals. Specifically, topics have included:

- Reviewing the current referral process for all exceptionalities;
- Clarifying the full range of supports available for students with the exceptionality of giftedness, including specialized program classes:
 - grade configuration (e.g., primary through secondary);
 - program options (e.g., English vs French Immersion); and
 - requests for CCAT 7 assessment
- Engaging parents/guardians as partners throughout the needs assessment and referral process including careful consideration of parent/guardian input, preferences and requests; and
- Transparent and effective communication practices with parents/guardians related to support options

Professional Development to Learning Support Teachers (LSTs)

Through LST Network meetings and Learning Support Consultant (LSC) coaching, the key messages have been reviewed with all LSTs. In addition, strategies to share this information with the rest of the school team were collaboratively developed (e.g., staff meeting, in school team meetings, staff coaching).

Central Multidisciplinary Staff Focus/Work Group

LSCs, psychology staff, speech language pathologists and social workers, supporting all exceptionalities, participated in two half day sessions to critically evaluate the following aspects of each referral committee:

- composition;

- referral review calendar; and
- process associated with referrals.

Changes to increase transparency, efficiency and consistency across committees were developed through consensus and structured into a two year implementation plan. Further adjustment will be made subject to the findings and recommendations of the LSS Operational Review.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

8. Based on previous District reviews of similar scope, costs associated with external consultants are estimated at approximately \$100,000. More precise costs will not be available until the conclusion of the RFP process.

In addition, there will be implications for the work plans impacting the superintendent, manager, system principals and, potentially, LSCs and other LSS staff to support and inform the work of the operational review. This will reduce the available time to engage in other priorities that may emerge.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

9. The Superintendent of LSS has collaborated with the SEAC Chair to consult SEAC, as an advisory committee, in the planning phases of the LSS Operational Review of identification, needs assessment and placement for all exceptionalities. Regular updates will be provided at SEAC meetings as the work of the operational review progresses.

STRATEGIC LINKS:

10. The LSS Operational Review of the process for identification, needs assessment and placement for all exceptionalities is aligned with the OCDSB 2015-2019 Strategic Plan in the areas of Learning (i.e., improve and increase access to the educational pathways for every student) and Engagement (i.e., develop strategies to enhance communication and dialogue with and among staff, students, families).

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

The following questions are provided to support the discussion of this item by the Committee:

- Why is the LSS Operational Review being undertaken?
- How do the inquiry questions inform the fundamental purpose of the LSS Operational Review?
- What are the expected deliverables of this review?

- How does the structured consultation between SEAC and staff add value to this work?
- How might an external consultation with expertise in operational processes inform the operational review?

Peter Symmonds, Superintendent
of Learning Support Services

Camille Williams-Taylor
Director of Education and
Secretary of the Board