COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (PUBLIC)   **18 JUNE 2019**

Report No. 19-063

Learning Disabilities Specialized Intervention Program (LD SIP) Monitoring Results

Key Contact: Peter Symmonds, Superintendent of Learning Support Services, 613-596-8211 ext. 8254

PURPOSE:

1.   This report outlines the program monitoring results for the Learning Disabilities Specialized Intervention Program (LD SIP), in accordance with Memo No. 18-080, Learning Disabilities Specialized Intervention Program (LD SIP) Update. Additional information regarding implementation is also presented for discussion purposes.

CONTEXT:

2.   The LD SIP was initiated in September 2016 following Board approval of the recommendations in Report No. 16-036, Changes to the Program Structure of the Learning Disabilities Specialized Intensive Program (LD SIP).

The following structural changes to the LD SIP program were approved:

- The program shall be known as the Learning Disabilities Specialized Intervention Program (LD SIP) (Junior and/or Intermediate);
- The program delivery model be formalized as a half-day of specialized intensive program support for students for a one year duration; subject to consideration of individual student needs, and up to one additional year may be provided; and
- The program be offered to junior and/or intermediate aged students, as required, in a grade 5/6 (Junior) and grade 7/8 (Intermediate) configuration.

Criteria for LD SIP was developed using the expertise of a multi-disciplinary team and is reviewed annually. Broadly, the LD SIP specialized program class is designed to support students with at least average intellectual ability and evidence of cognitive strengths accompanied by evidence of significant learning difficulties

with regard to reading, written expression and/or mathematics based on evidence of the tiered approach to intervention, and where the student is expected to benefit from a specialized program class at that time.

The LD SIP focuses on intensive remediation and the development of compensatory strategies with the aim of maximizing student independence, academic achievement and well-being. Using curriculum as a vehicle, students:
- develop concepts, practice skills and strategies; and
- reflect on strategies in order to develop an understanding of themselves as learners.

Supports in the form of human and technical resources are provided to students to transition back to the regular program.

The LD SIP has several sites across the District each with a half time junior (grades 5 & 6) and intermediate (grades 7 & 8) class. Each class can accommodate up to 8 students and therefore 16 students per site (total of 112 student placements across the District). In alignment with the Geographic Model for specialized program class locations there is a LD SIP site in each of the five geographic zones with two sites in both the East and West zones. LD SIP sites for 2019-2020 and corresponding geographic zones are provided in the chart below.

LD SIP School Sites	Geographic Zones
Fallingbrook Community Elementary School	Far East
Queen Elizabeth Public School	East
Alta Vista Public School	East
Broadview Avenue Public School	West
D. Roy Kennedy Public School	West
Vimy Ridge Public School	South
Katimavik Elementary School	Far West

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

3. **Program Monitoring Plan**
   In January 2016, a two-year program monitoring plan for the LD SIP was developed in consultation with the LD Steering Committee (see Appendix A). In Year 1 (2016-2017), several formative evaluation activities were undertaken to monitor student well-being and the impact of the LD SIP program on students, including i) academic skills through compensatory strategies; ii) acquisition of executive functioning skills; and iii) self-awareness and self-advocacy skills. This information was gathered via a parent survey and staff focus groups. Additional data was gathered through research collaboration with Dr. Maria Rogers at the University of Ottawa. Program monitoring in Year II (2017-2018) consisted of conducting structured interviews with students and gathering achievement data from non-standardized student assessments. The results from these qualitative and quantitative program monitoring activities are presented below.

4.   Quantitative Program Monitoring Data

I. Student Assessment Results

A non-standardized version of the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test, 3rd Edition (WIAT-III) was administered to students between grades five and seven at the LD SIP sites. Students were provided with the necessary accommodations outlined in their Individualized Education Plans (IEP) including the use of assistive technology, extended time limits, and virtual and/or concrete manipulatives. The assessments were administered in April-May 2018, over three sessions for reading, writing and math in order to accommodate the learning styles of LD learners. Results showed that students' average percentile scores increased significantly from their initial entry into the LD SIP to the time of testing (see Figure 1, next page).

Figure 1: LD SIP Pre/Post WIAT-III Scores, 2018
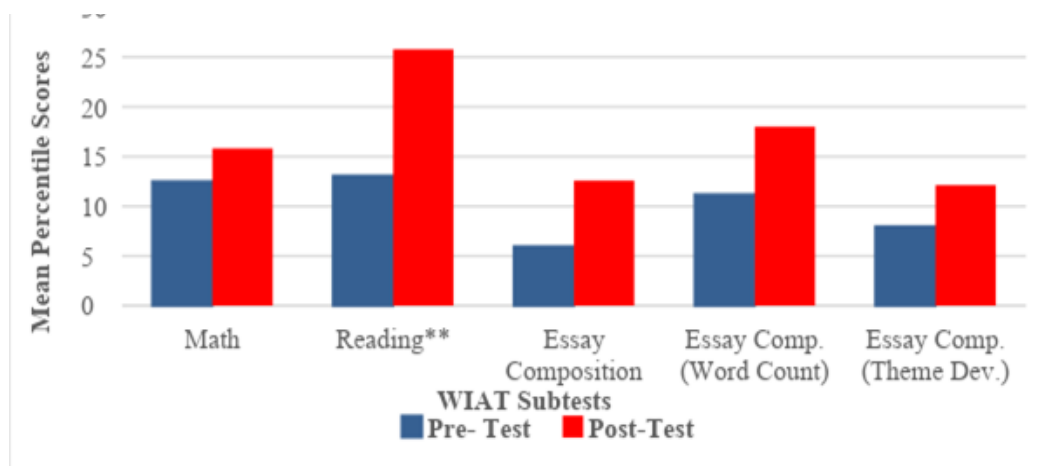
Highlights of the WIAT-III Testing Results:
- results showed an overall increase in pre and post test scores in each of the three different assessments of reading, writing and math;
- the reading assessment showed a statistically significant increase in percentile scores over time;
- the math assessment showed an average overall increase between pre-test and post-test scores as well; however, this difference was not statistically significant; and
- in writing, there were no statistically significant differences between the pre and post-tests in the essay composition; word count; or theme development subtests.

Results from the WIAT-III testing suggest that the LD SIP had an overall positive impact on academic achievement. However, caution should be exercised in interpreting these findings. Data was unavailable for several students on the pre-test (as it was not archived in historic electronic records), which may contribute to the lack of significant differences in certain subject areas. Also, the post-test was conducted using a modified, unstandardized version of the WIAT-III. Therefore, additional data should be collected before making any definitive claims about the efficacy of the LD SIP on academic achievement.
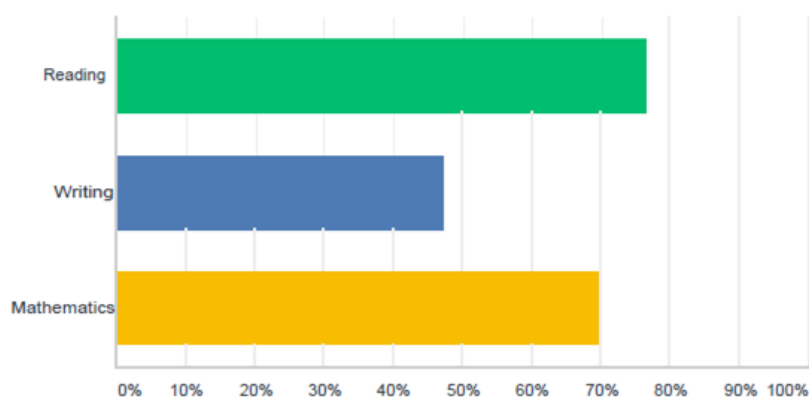
II. Parent/Guardian Survey

In the spring of 2017, an online survey was distributed to all parents/guardians of Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) students registered in the LD SIP program. The purpose of the survey was to assess parent/guardian perceptions about the impact of the LD SIP on their child in the following areas: i) wellbeing and overall satisfaction with school; ii) compensatory strategies for acquiring academic skills (reading, writing and/or math); iii) executive functioning skills; iv) understanding/use of assistive technology; and v) self-awareness and ability to self-advocate. Permission was also sought from parents/guardians to participate in a research study conducted in partnership with Dr. Maria Rogers at the University of Ottawa. In total, 25 parents/guardians responded to the survey, yielding a response rate of 20%.

Parent/Guardian Survey Highlights:
- the majority of parents/guardians reported seeing improvements in their child's reading and math skills (80% and 70%, respectively), and approximately half (47%) saw improvements in their child's writing (see Figure 2);
- nearly 2/3 of parents/guardians agreed that their child enjoyed attending school (67%), and/or were satisfied with the specialized class placement their child received (57%);
- approximately half of respondents agreed that their child's social skills; self-esteem and/or self-confidence towards school work improved;
- the majority of parents/guardians (42%) agreed that their child had a better understanding of their learning disability and/or of themselves as a learner;
- most respondents agreed that their child received adequate support in the specialized component of the LD SIP (58%), whereas 60% felt their child did not receive adequate support during the integration component; and
- approximately half of parents/guardians agreed that their child's IEP was effectively implemented in both the specialized class and/or the regular class components of the LD SIP.

Figure 2: LD SIP Parent Survey Improvement in Academic Skills

Results from the parent/guardian survey suggest generally that the LD SIP program had a positive impact on their child in terms of the program's goals. However, caution should be used when interpreting these findings as responses were required from more parents/guardians in order for the results to be reasonably representative of the population and/or to avoid biased results.

III. Assistive Technology Teacher Survey

In the spring of 2017, an assistive technology teacher survey was completed by 30 educators at LD SIP sites, including regular classroom teachers (i.e., integration teachers), LD SIP teachers, Learning Support Teachers (LST) and/or Learning Resource Teachers (LRT) and core French teachers. The majority of respondents taught in the regular program (English) and were fairly evenly distributed across the Junior and Intermediate panels. The purpose of the survey was to gather information about educators' experiences with assistive technology support for students in the LD SIP.

Assistive Technology Teacher Survey Highlights:
- the majority of teachers (77%) rated students' skills and understanding of assistive technology at least Level 3 (proficient) at their site (see Figure below);
- approximately 2/3 of teachers (i.e., 64%) agreed that their own skills and understanding of assistive technology were at least proficient; and
- several teachers indicated that they, or their LD SIP students, would benefit from additional assistive technology training in many areas.

Information from this survey was used to better understand and improve the assistive technology services being offered to all students with LD in the OCDSB. For example, anecdotal data from the survey suggests that assistive technology use can enable students with LD to better access the curriculum.

Please rate the LD SIP students at your site in terms of their general skill level and understanding of assistive technology:

30 responses
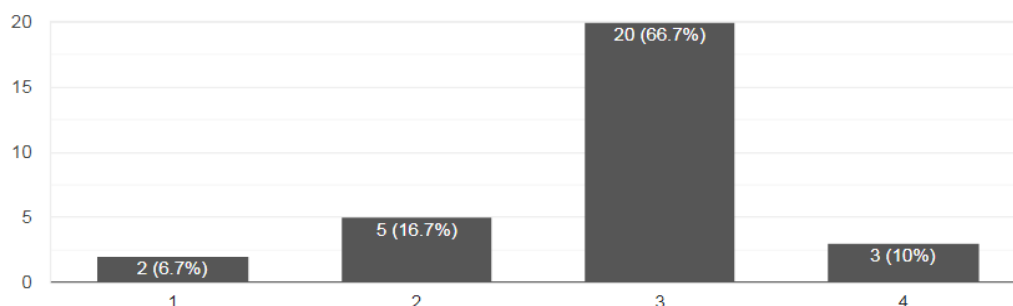
IV. University of Ottawa Research Collaboration

In 2017, teachers of 90 students in the OCDSB's LD SIP completed standardized rating scales measuring students social-emotional functioning at school, as well as their academic competencies (i.e., motivation, engagement and study skills). For most students, both the LD SIP teacher and the Integration teacher completed the battery of tests which asked teachers to rate their students in various areas including: i) self-regulation; ii) social competence; iii) empathy; iv) responsibility; v) teacher/student relationships; and vi) ADHD symptoms (i.e., inattention and/or hyperactivity/impulsivity). The purpose of the study was to describe the social-emotional functioning of students with LD and to compare the students' social-emotional functioning across two instructional contexts. Another major purpose was to compare LD SIP students' social-emotional functioning to established norms (i.e., students without special education needs).

Highlights from the University of Ottawa Study:
- the social-emotional and academic skills of students in the LD SIP were substantially below the norm in most areas;
- students were rated as displaying higher functioning in empathy, responsibility, and inattention in their specialized class component vs. the integration component of the LD SIP;
- students were also rated with higher levels of academic competency in the areas of motivation, engagement, and study skills in their specialized class component vs. the integration component of the LD SIP; and
- LD SIP teachers reported closer relationships with their students compared to integration teachers.

Implications from the University of Ottawa study suggest that integration teachers perceive the social-emotional needs of LD SIP students differently than specialized class teachers.
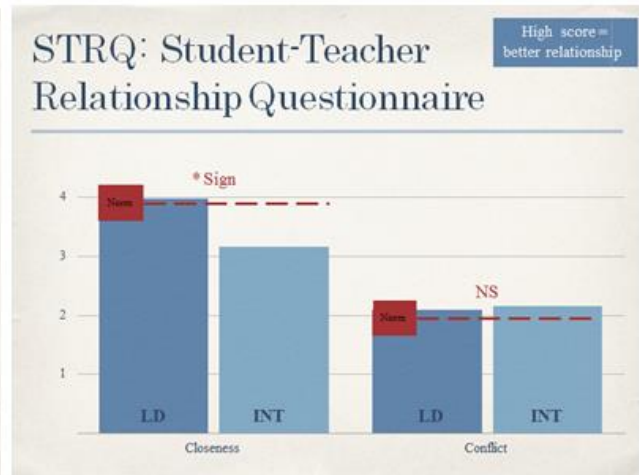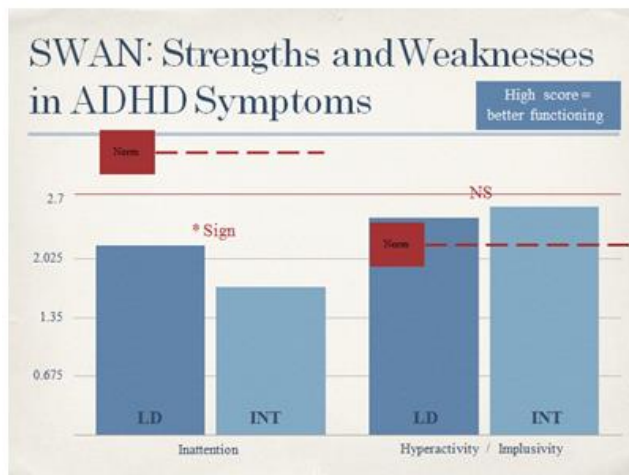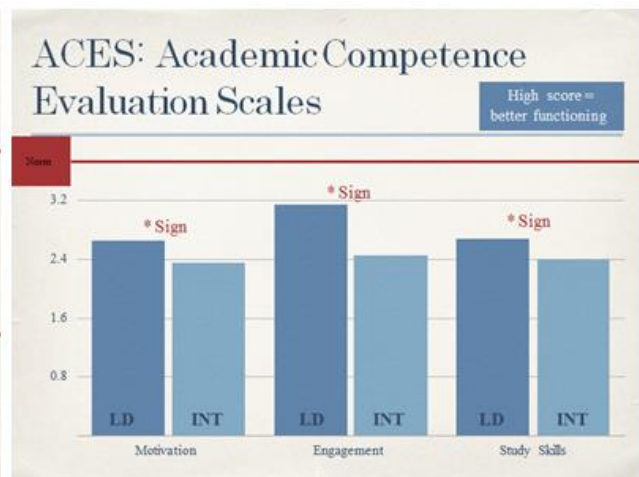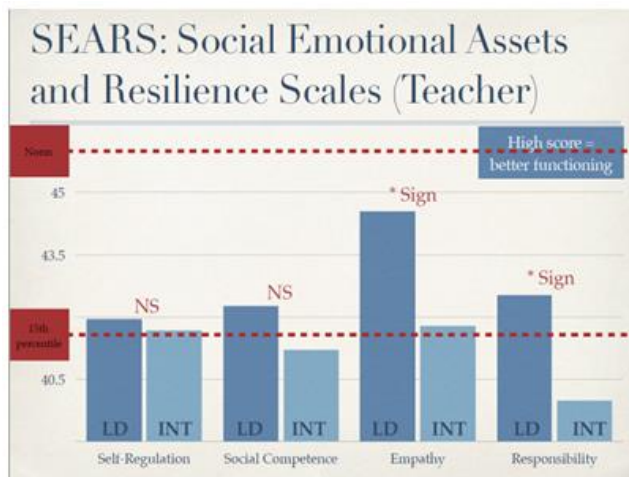
5. Qualitative Program Monitoring Data
   I. Student Interviews
   In the spring of 2018 several structured interviews were conducted with a small number of male and female students from both the junior and intermediate panels at all six LD SIP sites. The purpose of the interviews was to explore students' experience with the LD SIP program along several key areas of interest aligned with the program goals.

Main Themes from the Student Interviews:
LD SIP Class Experience
- smaller class size provided a calmer, less stressful environment where students had their own work-space, and where they were able to access supports such as sensory tools and/or assistive technology;
- students found it easier to ask for help in the LD SIP because of the slower instructional pace, less intense workload, and more in-depth instructions; and
- specialized program teachers checked-in more often with students providing them with individualized instruction and enabling them to complete their work in class, rather than assigning homework.

Integration Experience
- participants reported that the regular class was much larger, louder, busier and more crowded, making it challenging for students to stay focused at times. The class also operates at a faster pace and the work is more difficult, so it can be difficult for students to keep up;
- students must work more independently in the regular classroom; however, there is support if needed. Students learned to ask for help but they also expressed feeling self-conscious or embarrassed about help-seeking because they felt as though their peers were judging (i.e., stigma);
- participants reported that transitioning from the LD SIP to the regular class with their chromebooks and belongings was manageable when the class was close by; and
- students reported that they were able to interact and work with friends in the regular class, but sometimes they felt disconnected because they were not in the class full-time.

Use of Assistive Technology
- assistive technology was used regularly in the LD SIP for language, and for assignments in the regular class such as science, social studies, history and French;
- students reported using Google classroom, Read and Write (text-to-voice for reading, voice-to-text and word prediction or spell check for writing), Google Drive, Google Docs and Google Slides; and
- participants noted that the noise level in the regular class interfered with the voice-to-text technology and some students felt self-conscious using reading technology in front of their peers. Wearing headphones or working out in the hall was reported as helpful.

Executive Function, Awareness, and Self-advocacy
- students were able to use time in the LD SIP to complete assignments from the regular classroom;
- some students reported actively working on goal setting such as reviewing SMART goals for the month, which helped them stay organized and complete work on time. Other students stated that they developed effective systems to keep their lockers, binders, and computers organized;

- learning about their IEPs and developing self-advocacy cards has helped students understand how they learn and what helps them in their learning; and
- the skills they developed in the LD SIP were helping them in the regular class. For example, they learned to check in with the teacher when they did not understand a concept and to ask for what they needed.

II. Staff Focus Groups
In 2017-2018, several focus groups were conducted with various groups of the District's special education staff assigned to the LD SIP schools including: i) principals and vice-principals (1 group); ii) Learning Support Services staff (2 groups comprised of Psychologists, Speech Language Pathologists, Social Workers, Learning Support Consultants [LSC]; and Itinerant Teachers of Assistive Technology [ITAT]); iii) LD SIP teachers (1 group); and iv) LD SIP Integration Teachers including the Learning Resource Teachers (LRT) and/or Learning Support Teachers (LST) from each LD SIP site (2 groups).

Main Themes from the Staff Focus Groups:
Complexity of student needs requires acknowledgment
- LD SIP students have a variety of academic as well as social-emotional and behavioural needs; cognitive profiles varied considerably.

Need for increased definition and communication about program goals and how they are to be met within the classes, including:
- explicit programming for non-academic elements like executive function skills, self-advocacy skills, self-awareness and understanding of LD;
- specific resources to be used by all classes; and
- common assessment measures/checklists/criteria.
- Acceptance criteria/Exit criteria (whether students stay for 1 or 2 years); and
- Roles of LSS staff, LD SIP teachers, integration teachers, support teachers.

Additional time is required for professional collaboration.
- The increased demands and responsibilities that come with LD SIP class for LSS staff, LRTs, LSTs, integration teachers;
- Collaboration among LD SIP teachers and integration teachers and support teachers; and
- Collaboration between LSS professional staff and teachers, particularly at multi-disciplinary team meetings at LD SIP sites.

Additional instructional support is needed for students within the integration classes.
- LRT support for schools with LD SIP classes;
- Educational Assistant (EA) support for transitions and behaviour needs;
- In-school support for Core French teachers in effectively implementing differentiated instruction (e.g., LST support for programming and/or understanding IEP accommodations/modifications for LD SIP students); and
- Class sizes are very large when LD SIP students are integrated and non-core subjects can be challenging due to lack of structure, noise level.

Proactive timetabling and scheduling is important for making the program work and for building in collaboration times.

- ○ LD SIP teacher role worked well when there were 2 half time teachers who worked half of the day in the LD SIP class and the other half in LRT role supporting students; and
- ○ Need scheduled collaboration time with teaching partners.

6. **Implementation Activities**

Program Development

Following Board approval of the LD SIP model, a multidisciplinary committee of central LSS staff, school based educators and administrators was established to form goals and programming recommendations to prepare for the launch of the LD SIP.

During the first year of implementation (i.e., 2016-2017), significant release time was committed to bring LD SIP teams from each site to central: professional development; program planning; and program evaluation sessions. The LD SIP is supported by large team including the LD SIP teacher, LRT, LST, integration teachers, multidisciplinary and administrative teams; therefore, release time to support 7 to 9 team members from each site was provided. In addition to central activities, follow up release time was provided to each school team to support school based collaboration activities.

In year 2 (i.e., 2017-2018) and year 3 (i.e., 2018-2019) release activities have been restricted due to the challenges associated with the availability of replacement staff. Continued support to LD SIP teams has been provided through the LD Google Community, LSCs, ITATs and the multidisciplinary team assigned to each site. In addition, evaluation activities were structured to minimize the requirement for teacher release time.

Transition Supports

In order to facilitate successful transitions from the LD SIP to the receiving school the following activities were completed in each of the first two years of implementation:

- Updates to the Student Profile Summaries to reflect progress and strategies in the LD SIP;
- LSCs with responsibility for LD SIP attended IPRC meetings along with representatives from receiving schools;
- Students developed Self Advocacy Cards with support from members of multi-disciplinary teams;
- Creation of transition packages containing a copy of the most recent IEP, the updated Student Profile, and Self Advocacy card. These packages were delivered to a contact teacher at each receiving school; and
- LD SIP teachers and LSTs liaised with personnel at the receiving school to share information and arrange for the students to visit the receiving school.

Significant central LSS staff resources were required to support school teams with transition activities from the LD SIP to the receiving school.

Enrolment Trends

Given that the LD SIP is currently in its third year of implementation (2018-2019), there is insufficient data available for traditional trend analysis. LSS will continue to monitor enrolment trends going forward in order to carry-out this type of analysis.

Nevertheless, the following key patterns are beginning to emerge from the available data:

i) *Referrals* - The number of referrals to the LD SIP has increased from 31 in 2017-2018, to 66 in 2019-2020, representing an increase of 113%;

ii) *Placement Duration* - The LD SIP model was approved as a one-year placement, with up to one additional year subject to individual student needs. Enrollment information from 2017-2018, shows that there were a total of 74 students in the LD SIP. Of these, 59% of eligible students continued for a second year in the specialized program class. This year, 78% of 66 eligible students opted to remain in the LD SIP next year (i.e., 2019-2020); and

iii) *Secondary Pathways* - Secondary pathway analysis indicates that the majority of students exiting the LD SIP transition into either their community secondary school or a secondary LD specialized program class (see chart below). In 2017-2018, 64% of students graduating from eighth-grade transitioned to either a specialized LD secondary program placement, or to a placement in their community secondary school. Similarly, in 2018-2019, 63% of grade 8 students transitioned to either a specialized LD secondary program or placement in their community secondary school. Approximately 1/3 of grade 8 students exiting the LD SIP transitioned into adaptive sites both years.
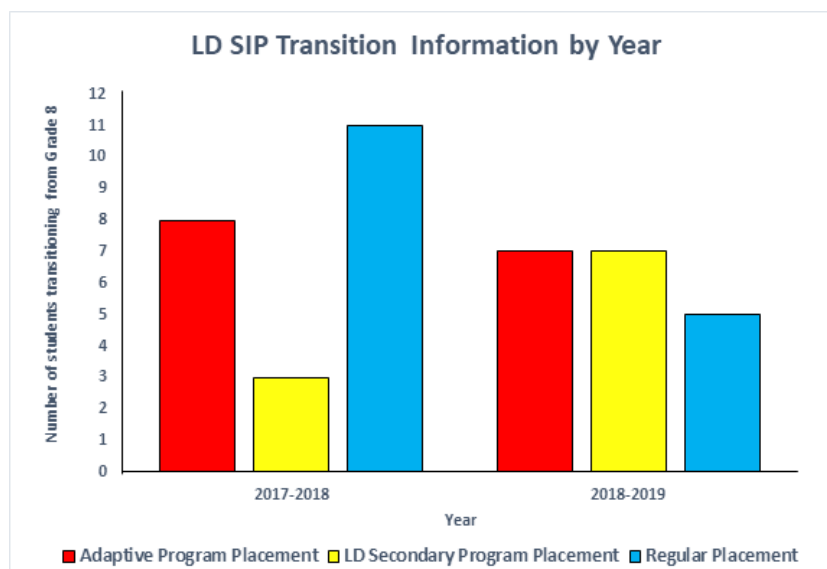
Staffing Implications

i) Supporting Integration - The LD SIP model is unique among specialized program classes at the OCDSB in that students spend approximately 50% of their day in a low ratio class environment and approximately 50% of their day integrated into regular classes. The model is designed to allow students to receive intensive supports and the acquisition of compensatory strategies in the low ratio environment and support to application of these skills in the regular class environment. LD SIP sites host both a junior (i.e., grade 5/6) and intermediate (i.e., grade 7/8) class with up to 8 students in each. Schools are allocated 1.0 LD SIP

teacher (plus preparation time) as well as an additional 0.5 LRT position to support LD SIP students in the integrated setting.

ii) Staffing Challenges - The model has led to specific staffing challenges to ensure appropriate class size in the regular junior and intermediate classes that LD SIP students integrate. Specifically, students in the LD SIP are counted as specialized program class students; however, they spend approximately 50% of their day in regular classrooms and are not included in the Average Daily Enrolment (ADE) numbers that generate regular class teachers at the school site. In some cases this had the effect of creating very large class sizes when the LD SIP students were integrated.

Collaboration between Human Resources, Planning, Finance and LSS have allowed for solutions to mitigate these challenges. Namely, contingency staffing to facilitate additional regular classes at LD SIP sites where integration of LD SIP students creates unreasonable class sizes has annually been included in academic staffing and accounted for in the staff recommended budget.   As required, staffing to create new regular junior or intermediate classes has been allocated following consultation between the LD SIP site principal and the HR staffing officer.

7. <u>Next Steps</u>

LSS will continue to monitor enrollment patterns in the LD SIP, including conducting traditional trend analysis when sufficient enrollment data becomes available in future. Other available sources of data such as the OSSLT, Grade 9 EQAO Math and/or secondary credit attainment could provide longitudinal achievement data for LD SIP students. These particular data sources would enable the District to track secondary academic outcomes, and yield more robust secondary pathway analyses for students leaving the LD SIP. Meanwhile, several other program monitoring options may also provide important information for program improvement and/or accountability purposes. For example, additional administrations of the modified WIAT-III assessment on a larger sample of students would provide valuable information regarding the impact of the LD SIP on academic achievement.

With respect to future professional development initiatives, based on the results of the program monitoring activities, support to integration teachers at LD SIP sites will be an area of priority. In addition, increased support through the ITAT team to focus on effective use of technology in the integration portion of LD SIP will be further targeted and evaluated. As well, review of the supports and human resources required to assist the educator teams receiving students returning from LD SIP will be an area of future development.

Feedback from school teams would indicate that additional resources, tools and guidelines are required to support students, parents and educator teams determine whether a second year in the LD SIP specialized program class is required. LSS staff will work collaboratively with school teams to develop guidelines that will be trialed during the 2019-2020 school year.

LSS will also continue to support the implementation of the Quality Program Indicators (QPI) Initiative. The QPI resource guide was designed to provide educators with a comprehensive overview of quality programming to meet the

specialized learning needs of students within both regular and specialized program classes.

8. Summary
    The goal of the LD SIP is to provide a learning environment to target students' understanding of themselves as learners and compensatory skill development essential for ongoing academic growth. The design of the LD SIP service delivery model is intentional in meeting the stated goals.

    Students spend part of the day in a low ratio class setting for intensive instructional time and for the introduction of compensatory strategies. The integration portion provides the opportunities for instruction in the regular class environment and supported practice of targeted compensatory strategies. Building skills, compensatory strategies and confidence through integration is crucial for student success upon return to the regular class environment and for access to the secondary pathway of their choosing. Through a gradual release of responsibility, students in the LD SIP learn to be increasingly independent while experiencing success.

    The results of year 1 and year 2 of the LD SIP program monitoring plan indicate that students are making academic gains, acquiring compensatory strategies and developing metacognitive abilities. The integration portion of the model; however, is challenging for students and staff. To facilitate students' optimal learning, the program needs to have a component of explicit teaching as well as ample opportunities for generalization. Generalization of strategies is most successful when practiced in an authentic environment where challenges are anticipated. In order to enhance the opportunity for generalization during the integrated portion, continued professional development for staff is required to support the use of evidence-based instructional practices and interventions in the regular classroom environment.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

9. Program monitoring activities to date, have been completed using existing LSS department resources and by leveraging our partnership with Dr. Maria Rogers and the University of Ottawa.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

10. The program monitoring plan was developed in collaboration with the LD Review Steering Committee. The results of year 1 program monitoring activities were also previously shared with this committee along with an update of implementation activities. LD SIP implementation updates have been shared with Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) through the superintendent department update as well as through Memorandum No.18-080, Learning Disabilities Specialized Intervention Program (LD SIP) Update. A meeting with the LD Steering Committee will be convened to review the results of the Year 2 program monitoring plan.

STRATEGIC LINKS:

11.   Program monitoring activities to support the implementation of the LD SIP directly aligns with the strategic objectives of learning, equity and well-being.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

12.   The following questions are provided to support the discussion of this item by the Committee:
   ● Will the next steps for continued program monitoring fulfill the information needs of the committee?
   ● Have the program monitoring activities to date adequately engaged relevant stakeholder groups (i.e., students, parents/guardians, staff)
   ● What factors should be considered in supporting student transitions from the LD SIP?

_____   _____
Peter Symmonds, Superintendent of   Camille Williams-Taylor, Director of
Learning Support Services   Education and Secretary of the Board

APPENDICES
Appendix A: LD SIP Program Monitoring Plan