

Annex A

Proposal for a Transition Coordinator **OTSS School Council**

Questions and Answers

Extent of the Problem

How significant is the need for more coordinated transition planning?

It has long been recognized that transition planning for secondary school is a critical objective for multiple government ministries, including the Ministry of Education.

In 2011, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) and the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) published a draft [Provincial Transition Planning Framework – Transitional Planning for Young People with Developmental Disabilities](#) to improve transition planning by better defining responsibilities. The framework recognized that:

Transition planning for young people with developmental disabilities can be complicated and complex. The lack of planning and inadequate transition support were described as “one of the most important issues for discussion” by families and individuals in the 2006 report on the transformation consultations. (pg. 2)

As the recently released [Ontario Autism Program Advisory Panel Report](#) (October 2019) noted:

Too often, barriers between service models in different ministries negatively impact children, youth and families and reduce the potential of all services to be delivered efficiently and to maximum capacity. (Pg. 33)

Although this report deals specifically with the OAP, the observations about lack of coordination apply equally to transition planning.

To address these problems, in 2013, a tri-Ministry memorandum was released by the MCYS, MCSS and the Ministry of Education (EDU) entitled [Integrated Transition Planning for Young People with Developmental Disabilities](#) (see below Appendix for text of the 2013 Memorandum). This Memorandum underscored the necessity of a shared partnership between the 3 ministries in developing integrated transition plans. Specifically, the Memorandum stated:

Collaborative planning processes are expected in the development of the Individual Education Plans (IEP) for students with special education needs, including those with developmental disabilities. (Pg. 2)

The Memorandum further stated that:

It is the shared goal of the ministries that district school boards, school authorities, provincial and/or demonstration schools and MCYS/MCSS regional offices will work together to integrate District School Board and MCYS/MCSS processes by revising and building on the current regional protocols to outline a new process that will lead to the development of a single integrated transition plan for every young person with a developmental disability. (pg. 2)

As parents at OTSS, we have never been advised of the regional protocols. We have never been offered integrated planning sessions by the District School Board (DSB) and the other ministries. No single integrated transition plans have been developed for our children. We have no information on whether the DSB has in fact implemented these plans or whether the DSB has regular discussions with other ministry agencies.

In sum, the laudable objectives set out in the 2013 Memorandum have not been realized.

Roles and Responsibilities

What is the role of other provincial ministries (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services) and support agencies (Services Coordination Support)?

As set out above, the responsibility for developing integrated transition plans is a shared responsibility between the 3 ministries. It is no answer to say that it is someone else's job – this is simply passing the buck. As the Ministry of Education stated in the 2013 memorandum, it is the expectation that the DSB will put in place a collaborative planning process.

Service Coordination Support (SCS), a funded agency of the MCSS, has responsibility for providing information on services available for children and adults with developmental disabilities. However, to our knowledge, SCS is not involved in school-related planning, through the IEP or otherwise. There are no integrated plans as contemplated by the 2013 Memorandum. Moreover, there are often long waiting lists to access SCS caseworkers, the implication of which is that parents/students are not able to access caseworker services until the later years of a student's career. This does not create an environment for effective integrated planning.

Does the School Board currently liaise with outside service providers to provide vocational and community participation support?

To our knowledge, there is little, or no, coordination between the DSB and SCS. We are not aware that regional protocols have been actioned. At some schools, individual teachers seek out vocational/community opportunities for their students and build appropriate skills development into their learning plans. But this is dependent upon the motivation of individual teachers. At OTSS, the school administration has invited SCS to attend parent information nights, but their participation is passive - they only present information about their service. We understand that there was a practice of having a specific SCS caseworker assigned to OTSS, but for reasons unknown to us this practice was stopped.

We are not suggesting that the DSB should replace the role of SCS. But we are proposing that processes be put in place to mandate collaboration.

Existing Resources within the District School Board (DSB)

Are there existing resources (guidance counsellors, learning support staff) that can be redeployed to provide these services?

Theoretically yes. However, regular guidance counsellors and co-op education teachers are already massively overwhelmed. Moreover, given that range of programs and needs of this population are complex and continuously evolving, knowledge of the available resources and opportunities requires specialization. This is not a situation where you can send generalists on a weekend course and then expect them to effectively understand the needs of this population. Adding to the duties of existing guidance counsellors is not feasible given the specialized needs of this population and the complexity of the programs. A more effective alternative is having dedicated staff role it is to liaise with SCS and assist principals and teachers with integrated transition planning.

Will a transition coordinator role replace the role of teachers or other learning support professionals in the system with the result that the roles and responsibilities will just be reallocated?

There are teachers and learning support professionals are trying to fulfil this role, but are doing so in addition to their other responsibilities. They need assistance to effectively fulfil this role. A transition coordinator would make them more effective in working with parents to develop transition plans, as they, individually, would not have to spend the considerable time and effort gaining this knowledge and keeping it current

Moreover, a centralized transition coordinator would help disseminate best practices amongst principals, special education teachers and support staff. There are a lot of dedicated teachers who have developed an expertise in this area (e.g. knowing how to set up appropriate work placements, identifying potential employers etc) but this expertise is often lost when the teacher leaves or when principals de-prioritize this function.

Scope of Responsibilities

What should be the scope of responsibilities of the transition coordinator?

There are legitimate questions as how far reaching the role of a transition coordinator should be. Should it be limited to providing support for schools with specialized programs? Should it be limited to a particular type of specialized program (e.g. autism, GLP, or the physical support program)? Our suggestion would be to start small, with a pilot project targeted to a particular population and grow from there.

How does this proposal affect the role of parents in developing an appropriate transition plan?

Parents invariably play a critical role. By providing parents with the necessary information and a framework early in their child's secondary school career, parents will be better able to navigate the system and contribute to their child's success.

The OTSS School Council is trying to develop better information products to assist parents (See for example the [Transition Planning document](#), setting out things for parents to do at certain age milestones). Whether parents take advantage of this information is up to them.

How do we ensure equity across the student population so that families who are less able to advocate for their children are not disadvantaged?

A transition coordinator would, in fact, address the inequality that currently plagues the system. Motivated, engaged parents currently have an advantage because nobody is helping those less able to advocate. A transition coordinator would be ideally suited to assist those less able to advocate for themselves.

Budgetary Implications

What impact would this proposal have on the budget of the DSB for Special Education? Would these resources be better spent elsewhere?

The creation of a transition coordinator would have an impact on the DSB budget (salary, administration support etc). The question is whether the coordinator position could provide efficiencies elsewhere in the system, by freeing up teachers and support staff to time to implement the plan (e.g. increasing efficiency by not having individual teachers reinvent the wheel) to outweigh the costs.

It would be useful to explore whether the province or federal government has resources available to support more effective transition planning, given their focus on skills training and increasing independence and self-reliance. As an example, having students learn how to navigate the public transit system saves public funds over the long term by decrease reliance on Para-transport services. This is an area where some creativity is necessary.

More generally, having students better prepared for post-graduation would have overall cost benefits for the social service system generally. We recognize that such cost savings do not accrue to the education system directly. However, a longer-term perspective on cost savings for the province should be considered.

Measuring Performance

What metrics could be adopted to determine whether the resources are being spent wisely?

In the Ministry of Education Special Education Updates from 2016 (See Appendix), the MOE indicated that a parent and young person survey will be launched to determine their satisfaction with the transition planning process.

We have never been surveyed. A survey of the subjective level of satisfaction with the transition planning process would provide some form of metric, although there are inherent problems with surveys as a means of gauging performance (e.g. low response rates).

How does the school board currently evaluate the effectiveness of any teacher or principal? Perhaps the same form of metric could be used in this instance.

Alternatives

Are there options other than a transition coordinator that should be considered?

Invariably yes. These include:

- (i) more training for existing DSB teaching and support staff;
- (ii) increasing support staff in order to free up time for teachers to focus on this area

However, these are things that could have been done to implement the recommendations of the 2013 Memorandum. It appears they were not, at least not on a systemic basis. By formalizing and prioritizing this function, we will be better placed to ensure that we achieve effective transition planning.

Appendix I

Tri-Ministry Memorandum on Integrated Transition Planning for Young People with Developmental Disabilities, January 2013, to Directors of Education

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/memos/jan2013/TransitionPlanDevelop.pdf>

The purpose of this memo is to provide updated tri-ministry direction on integrated transition planning to support young people with developmental disabilities.

The ministries of Children and Youth Services (MCYS), Community and Social Services (MCSS) and Education (EDU) are working collaboratively to build on and improve the continuum of transition supports for young people with developmental disabilities. It is a shared understanding of the ministries that integrated transition planning among youth with developmental disabilities and their 2 families, service providers, school boards, school authorities, provincial and/or demonstration schools supports smooth transitions to work, further education, participation in life activities and community living.

Collaborative planning processes are expected in the development of the Individual Education Plans (IEP) for students with special education needs, including those with developmental disabilities. Similarly, a draft Provincial Transition Planning Framework was introduced in 2011 by MCYS and MCSS to improve transition planning support to young people with developmental disabilities who are preparing to transition to adulthood. Regional protocols were developed by MCYS/MCSS regional offices to guide local transition planning for young people with developmental disabilities in 2012 and a number of school boards participated in the protocol development process. The intent of integrated transition planning is to build on effective collaborative transition planning practices, facilitate a smooth and comprehensive transition experience and to support positive transition outcomes for each young person with a developmental disability and their family/caregiver.

It is the shared goal of the ministries that district school boards, school authorities, provincial and/or demonstration schools and MCYS/MCSS regional offices will work together to integrate District School Board and MCYS/MCSS processes by revising and building on the current regional protocols to outline a new process that will lead to the development of a single integrated transition plan for every young person with a developmental disability. We would like to support you in the development of the revised protocols that will guide the development of a single transition plan for young people with developmental disabilities with a view to implementation beginning in the 2013-14 school year.

To begin the protocol revision process, in February 2013, MCYS/MCSS regional offices and EDU field offices will jointly lead initial meetings with local district school boards and agencies to outline the vision for integrated transition planning processes as well as the next steps for school board involvement in regional protocol revision. These regional meetings will also allow participants to engage in cross-sector discussions to identify practices and local considerations to enhance and support integrated transition planning. Materials to support this process will be distributed for the regional meetings.

As part of the ongoing protocol revision process, other stakeholders will be invited to provide input, including youth with a developmental disability and their families.

This memo forms an addendum to the [2011 Draft Provincial Transition Planning Framework: Transition Planning for Young People with Developmental Disabilities](#) (attached) to achieve integration with EDU transition planning.

We appreciate your support as we move forward in partnership to improve transition planning supports for students with developmental disabilities and their families.

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https://www.opsba.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/SpecialEducation_Feb16Update_Accessible.pdf

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KEY FACTS

- Protocols continue to be reviewed by regions annually and revised accordingly.
- Monitoring of integrated transition plans continues by MCYS/MCSS Regional Offices.
- A Tri-Ministry memo was released on January 31, 2013 emphasizing the shared goal of the ministries that district school boards, school authorities, provincial and/or demonstration schools and community service providers will work together to integrate current district school board and MCYS/MCSS transition planning processes by revising and building on existing regional protocols.
- The tri-ministry protocols outline an agreement between community organizations and school boards on how they will work together to help support the transition of a young person with a developmental disability to adulthood. The protocols build on existing regional transition processes to provide a more consistent and coordinated approach to supporting young people's transition to adulthood. The protocols specify that:
 - o every young person with a developmental disability will have a transition plan;
 - o planning will begin early; and
 - o transition planning processes will be integrated, consistent, and transparent.
- Integrated transition planning is for young people (age 14 and older) who meet the definition of having a developmental disability under any of the EDU, MCSS and MCYS legislation frameworks or agency criteria.
- Integrated transition planning for young people with developmental disabilities went into effect September 2014. Lead agencies for integrated transition planning are monitoring implementation and reporting back to the ministries.

NEXT STEPS

- A parent and young person survey will be launched to determine their satisfaction with the transition planning process.

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WHAT'S NEW

- Protocols have been revised and implementation of integrated transition planning began September 2014.
- The next phase is to collect data on the number of young people and adults who have received an integrated transition plan and determine the level of satisfaction young people adults and their families have had with the process. The monitoring of integrated transition plans will provide data that will be used to improve processes going forward so that the experience of young people and their families may be enhanced. MCYS/MCSS Regional Offices are in the process of collecting this data.

KEY FACTS

- The Integrated Transition Planning for Young People with Developmental Disability Protocols are intended to be living agreements that are regularly reviewed and updated by regional offices in consultation with district school boards and community service providers to ensure they remain current with any legislation, regulations, policy, resource or community changes.

NEXT STEPS

- In September 2015, a parent and young person survey will be launched to determine their satisfaction with the transition planning process.