

MEMORANDUM

Memo No. 19-131

TO: Trustees
Student Trustees

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

DATE: 8 November 2019

RE: **Release of the Ontario Autism Advisory Panel Report**

This memo provides an update to trustees regarding the development of a new needs-based Ontario Autism Program (OAP). On 30 October 2019, Todd Smith, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS), announced the release of The Ontario Autism Advisory Panel Report, October 2019 which contains recommendations for MCCSS to consider in developing the new OAP.

In the spring of 2019, the Ontario government engaged in a province-wide public consultation process and appointed a new 20-member Ontario Autism Program Advisory Panel (the Panel). This Panel was comprised of parents with lived experience, adults with autism, educators and other experts from a range of disciplines including psychology, behaviour analysis, speech language pathology, rehabilitation services, developmental pediatrics and research.

The Panel was initially tasked to review the results of information and data collected through the public consultation process and to provide advice to the government on how to better support children and youth on the autism spectrum who have complex needs, including through additional direct funding. However, based on feedback from families of children and youth on the autism spectrum and the Panel, in July 2019 Minister Smith expanded the scope of the Panel to provide advice on the design of new needs-based OAP.

The Panel was asked to provide recommendations that would help to inform an approach that is responsive to the individual needs of children and youth to improve their long-term outcomes, and provide advice on the design of a new OAP that is:

- Needs-based and addresses individualized needs of children and youth;
- Sustainable within an annual budget of \$600 million;
- Able to serve as many children, youth and families as possible; and
- Aligned and coordinated with schools and the health system to facilitate a child and youth-centred approach.

The Panel has identified a list of OAP Core Services that include:

- Applied Behaviour Analysis;
- Speech Language Pathology Services;

- Occupational Therapy;
- Mental health services, including time-limited psychotherapy and/or counselling delivered by regulated professionals who have the controlled act of psychotherapy in their scope of practice; and
- Access to technology, including Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), at the recommendation of a regulated health professional or Board Certified Behaviour Analyst (BCBA).

The comprehensive report contains many recommendations for MCCSS but also established as part of its guiding principles to seek integration with the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of Education (EDU). For a list of all of the broad areas considered, please see Appendix A - Categories of Recommendations.

The Panel has recommended that an education advisory committee on autism be formed before the end of 2019 that includes stakeholders from the education sector, MCCSS, MOH, parents and individuals with autism. The Panel has offered to provide recommendations by the spring of 2020 to the Minister of Education on the most effective ways to meet the needs of students on the autism spectrum, including ways to align MCCSS and EDU services for autistic students, as well as the implementation of education-related policies, programs and professional development.

While there are many recommendations contained in the report, those that directly relate to education are provided in Appendix B - Recommendations to the Ministry of Education. The Panel affirmed their belief that these options should be funded by EDU.

One of the ongoing challenges faced by our families and the District is the uncertainty regarding the transition to the new needs-based OAP. The Panel has made two recommendations regarding the transition which will impact how and when students transition back to school. Both recommendations involve establishing a care coordinator who will meet with families as their current plans approach their completion date. While MCCSS has not provided a response as of yet, should this recommendation be accepted and implemented, it would allow the District to establish protocols for communication with care coordinators and provide adequate time to plan for an effective transition to school.

Currently, MCCSS is considering the recommendations of the Panel and developing a new needs-based OAP for implementation in April 2020. To date, there has not been a response from EDU.

At this time, there is no change to the District's practices regarding our programs and services to support students with autism. Learning Support Services continues to monitor MCCSS and EDU announcements and will provide updates as details become available.

The full report is available [online](#).

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Peter Symmonds at peter.symmonds@ocdsb.ca

cc Senior Staff
 Special Education Advisory Committee
 Manager of Board Services
 Corporate Records