

Appendix B - Recommendations to the Ministry of Education¹

The education advisory committee on autism should endeavour to:

- Design best practice guidelines to address school board implementation of special education policy and regulations specific to autistic students/students on the autism spectrum to support effective programming and consistency across the province
- Review the implementation of Regulation 181/98, Identification and Placement of Exceptional Pupils, as it pertains to students on the autism spectrum and create best practice guidelines to support adherence to this regulation across school boards
- Conduct a review of school board adherence to Individual Education Plan (IEP) Standards
- Implement a process for collecting data on the topic of both formal and “soft” exclusions, modified days and students being sent home
- Phase out the practice of using seclusion rooms in a systematic manner that maintains the safety of all children and youth and school board personnel. Review policies related to classroom removal/exclusions (e.g. use of calming, exclusion or sensory rooms) and establish standards to ensure safe and ethical use that contributes to student success
- Develop guidelines to ensure that parents are aware of all special education programs and services at their local school and in their local school board and their rights by:
 - Ensuring that upon entry to school families are provided with a package detailing the special education programs and services available, including information related to the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) process and the Ontario School Roadmap for Children with Special Needs
 - Informing parents of a child or youth on the autism spectrum registered to attend a public school of their legal right to an IPRC, regardless of their specific Board
 - Developing an IPRC package for families, including the Ontario School Roadmap for Children with Special Needs upon registration to any public school in Ontario
- Design and implement strategies to mitigate the negative impact of policy changes such as class size and e-learning expansion on autistic students
- Review the 2016 advice/report from the Multi-Sector Working Group on the Transition to Postsecondary Education for Students with Disabilities with an Early Focus on Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Consider this advice regarding the core components of an individualized transition process, transition partners’ roles and responsibilities, and responsive environments to help students with ASD get the right support at the right time, as one of many ways to strengthen the mandated transition planning process out of secondary school into adult life.

The following recommendations are aimed at improving access to integrated community and school-based supports for students on the autism spectrum to support meaningful access to education. The Advisory Panel recommends:

- Develop protocols to facilitate meaningful collaboration between OAP providers and the accepting school. This may include continuing Connections for Students, as well as identifying and removing barriers to direct observation and support within the school
- Support wraparound services by developing mechanisms to allow meaningful collaboration between the school team, and clinicians/therapists
- Undertake a comprehensive review of provincial policies including Policy and Program Memorandum (PPM) No. 140, Incorporating Methods of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) into Programs for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and PPM 149, Protocol for Partnerships with External Agencies for Provision of Services by Regulated Health Professionals,

¹ The Ontario Autism Advisory Panel Report, October 2019, pp.33-39.

Regulated Social Service Professionals, and Paraprofessionals with a focus on resolving conflicting messages and integrating approaches to reduce the potential for barriers

- Support development of collaborative partnerships among Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs), regulated health professionals such as Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) and Occupational Therapists (OTs) and educators in schools to determine the most effective ways to integrate these services into a child or youth's education plan. Consideration should be given to the integration of more direct service as appropriate and based on student need
- Expand the Pilot to Improve School-Based Supports for Students with ASD focusing on dedicated space. Continue to evaluate the outcomes of the pilot and use that information to design program components that are supported by evidence from the pilot
- Dedicate space in schools for all therapies such as ABA, OT and SLP
- Expand Care, Treatment, Custody and Corrections (CTCC) programs to guide ongoing service development for students. These classrooms offer the opportunity for collaboration between OAP service providers with expertise in ABA, educators, as well as regulated health professionals including OTs, SLPs and mental health professionals. These classrooms should be expanded to ensure ongoing access to evidence-based school and community agency collaboration within the education system
- Expand the number of mental health workers and Educational Assistants (EAs) to support autistic students/students on the autism spectrum in schools with due consideration of appropriate representation in both elementary and secondary schools

To enhance access to evidence-based ABA, OT and SLP supports for children and youth on the autism spectrum in school boards, PPM 140 and PPM 149 should be modernized to include updated, evidence-based standards for the implementation of ABA educational practices and those services provided by Regulated Health Professionals, Regulated Social Service Professionals, and Paraprofessionals.

The Advisory Panel recommends:

PPM 140 and PPM 149

- Include a broad range of services, both consultative and direct, which consider the varied needs of students on the autism spectrum
- Require the staff designing and implementing ABA educational practices to have the appropriate qualifications (e.g. BCBAs, Registered Behaviour Technicians)
- Reduce barriers to access to facilitate strong partnerships between schools and external agencies, including OAP ABA, SLP and OT providers
- Develop strategies to support adherence to best practice standards
- Add a parent/student survey to monitor implementation
- Implement requirements for ongoing data collection and analysis.

PPM 149

- Reduce barriers to access by facilitating strong partnerships between schools, external agencies and external regulated health professions, regulated social services professionals and paraprofessionals for students on the autism spectrum.

Improved professional learning and training supports for educators and professionals supporting students on the autism spectrum is recommended through the following:

- Review Ontario's Initial Teacher Education and relevant Additional Qualification Courses to enhance content related to the development, implementation and monitoring of IEPs, behavior and safety plans for students with special education needs, including students on the autism spectrum
- Ensure that all members of the child or youth's education team receive the training required to support the mental health needs of students on the autism spectrum

- Develop a provincial in-service curriculum for educators, educational assistants (EAs) and school administrators specific to supporting students on the autism spectrum, including registered behavior technician training. Basic training should also be provided to office, and caretaking staff and bus drivers
- Ensure that appropriate training is provided for all educators working with non-speaking, minimally speaking and unreliably speaking autistic students on AAC. Training and communication support should be collaborative in nature and involve experts in communication training for children and youth on the autism spectrum, including SLPs, OTs, and BCBAs
- Work with relevant ministries to ensure that the curricula for postsecondary programs for teachers, developmental services workers, child and youth workers, early childhood educators, educational
- support workers and regulated health professionals include content related to best practices in supporting children and youth on the autism spectrum, including an understanding of common co-occurring conditions and learning requirements
- Review the current positive practices in Ontario's school boards to promote consistency and continuity of EAs working with students on the autism spectrum to minimize in-year staffing changes where possible. Where this is not possible, ensure that policies and practices are in place to support warm transfers and seamless transitions.

The School-based Rehabilitation Services (SBRS) program, delivered by Children's Treatment Centres, should be utilized to achieve the government's goals of cross-ministerial integration to improve services to students on the autism spectrum through the following:

- Review and amend PPM 81, Provision of Health Support Services in School Settings that splits the responsibility for speech and language between SBRS and school boards' SLPs to allow all SLPs working in the school setting to intervene using a holistic approach that addresses the speech and language challenges of children/youth on the autism spectrum
- Standardize the interpretation of the SBRS mandate across the province, specific to autistic students/students on the autism spectrum. At present, the interpretation of the SBRS mandate varies. The mandate is interpreted more narrowly in some areas of the province thereby restricting the scope of practice for therapists
- Recognizing that the needs of children and youth on the autism spectrum are not well met by consultative models alone, amend the service delivery model of the SBRS occupational therapy program
- (which is primarily consultative) to embrace tiered service delivery models which provide consultative approaches, and group and direct therapy approaches depending on the needs of the child/youth
- Consult with key stakeholders (stakeholders from education, MCCSS, SLP, OT, parents and people with lived experience) prior to any transitions in service provision or changes in service delivery model in the SBRS program. Approach to transitions should have as a guiding principle that any change should prioritize the minimization of disruption to continuity of care (including disruptions during the school year) and/or any reduction in service levels for children and youth on the autism spectrum.