

Report No. 19-114

**In Year Support for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders and
Developmental Disabilities**

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

PURPOSE:

1. To seek approval for an increase in staffing to support students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and Developmental Disabilities (DD).

CONTEXT:

2. The District supports students with a range of needs both in regular program classrooms and in specialized program classes. Currently, the District operates 34 elementary and 15 secondary ASD specialized program classes, 25 DD classes at specialized program schools (i.e., Clifford Bowey, Crystal Bay) and 10 DD classes at community schools.

Annually, Learning Support Services (LSS) reviews student needs and provides recommendations for specialized program class openings and/or closings that are considered through the OCDSB Academic Staffing and Budget process. For the 2019-2020 school year, 14 new specialized program classes (9 elementary, 5 secondary) were opened to address projected student needs and to minimize waitlists. The specialized program class referral estimate process was highly predictive of system needs and waitlists for specialized program classes were well managed as of 28 June 2019 for the 2019-2020 school year.

Each year, new students arrive with diverse developmental profiles that were not known to the District during the spring planning process. LSS provides a range of strategies to effectively support transitions for these students, parent/guardians and the receiving school team (e.g., ASD/DD Intake, Emergency EAs, EA allocation in reserve, specialized program class placement).

While a small number of unexpected students is anticipated annually, this fall the District has welcomed an unprecedented number of students with complex ASD and DD profiles. Given that this level of student need was not anticipated during the spring planning process, LSS is working to develop an immediate plan for in year support.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

3. Updated Wait List Information

As of 25 October 2019 the following information is available:

- 6 students with DD are waiting for placement at a specialized program school (i.e., Clifford Bowey, Crystal Bay); and
- 21 students with ASD are waiting for placement in an ASD specialized program class.

These students present with a range of complex needs that require a high level of support. Many of these students present with very low developmental levels (i.e., 10 to 18 months), are non-verbal (without communication systems established) and have behaviours of concern (e.g., elopement, self-injurious behaviours).

4. Options for In Year Support

LSS is committed to the development of a plan that ensures student safety, promotes the development of school readiness behaviours as well as the provision of appropriate educational programming and skill development for students waiting for placement. To this end, two options have been evaluated including:

- opening additional specialized program classes during the 2019-2020 school year; and
- providing additional staff (i.e., EAs, Itinerant ASD/DD Teacher) to meet student needs in regular programs.

5. Feasibility Analysis

Consultation with the Planning and Facilities departments indicated significant operational challenges associated with in year specialized program class openings. Significant facilities modifications are required to open both ASD and DD specialized program classes, especially for classes with younger students and students with complex profiles. Facilities work would not be reasonably completed until approximately March 2020 and risks causing major disruption to the learning environment of the host school. From a student accommodation perspective, new portables and classroom relocations would be required that could also significantly impact the host school community.

Opening new specialized program classes involves significant preparation in terms of staff hiring and training, resource acquisition, and communication with the school community. Past experience with specialized program class openings indicates that approximately 2 months are required to complete this important work.

Currently in the District, placement options from regular class to specialized program class exist to support students, including those with complex needs. For some students and their parents/guardians, the regular program is the preferred placement. Personalized to student needs, specific supports and services may include:

- EAs;
- Learning Support Teacher and/or Learning Resource Teacher;
- Multidisciplinary team (Learning Support Consultant, psychology, social work, speech-language pathology);
- Central teams (i.e., ASD/DD, Early Learning, Social Emotional Learning, Augmentative and Alternative Communication); and

- Referral to community supports (e.g., School Health Supports).

By augmenting staff allocations, the level of support to students could be increased to address student needs in the regular program class. However, current labour shortages with specific employee groups could limit the District's ability to hire additional staff (i.e., EAs).

6. Trend Analysis of Student Need

An initial review suggests the following:

- An increase in the number of new elementary students (grades 1 through 8) with more severe presentations of ASD and DD (e.g., new Canadians, out of District transfers); and
- An increase in the number of new Kindergarten program registrants with complex ASD and DD profiles.

LSS has begun the process to better understand the factors that may be contributing to this unexpected increase in the number of new registrants with complex needs. It is not yet possible to determine whether this level of need will be a consistent pattern or an anomaly. During the annual spring planning process LSS will present contingency options should this level of student need become a more consistent pattern.

7. Interministerial Collaborations

The coordination of supports and services for children and youth with developmental disabilities, including ASD and Intellectual Disabilities, continues to be a challenge. Provincially, the Ministries of Education, Health, and Children Community and Social Services share this responsibility. LSS continues to leverage collaborations and partnerships with government and community agencies in support of our students and their families.

It is evident that the support required to meet the needs of students with increasingly complex profiles is a challenge with respect to human resources and budgetary considerations. Ongoing advocacy at all levels is required to ensure that these issues and challenges are well understood by the Ministry of Education and elected officials.

8. Summary and Recommendations

There are significant complexities as the OCDSB considers how best to support students with developmental disabilities, including ASD and Intellectual Disabilities, in the long term. This work will continue in close collaboration with all stakeholder groups.

To ensure support in the regular program for students new to the OCDSB who are waiting for placement in ASD/DD specialized program classes, the following in year supports are recommended:

- 25 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Educational Assistants; and
- 1 FTE Itinerant ASD/DD Teacher.

A hybrid staffing approach with increased EA support and the addition of an Itinerant ASD/DD Teacher would ensure student safety, provide coaching support for classroom teams to facilitate developmentally appropriate educational programming, and promote school readiness skills.

LSS will work collaboratively with Human Resources (HR) to recruit and allocate additional EAs (e.g., to maximize staffing resources). LSS, HR and school teams will work together to provide training opportunities for new staff.

Projections for the number of vacancies at specialized program schools (i.e., Clifford Bowey, Crystal Bay) indicate that the current cohort of students waiting for this type of placement could be accommodated in September 2020 with the existing number of pupil places.

Additional elementary ASD specialized program classes would be required for September 2020 to provide specialized program class placement options for the current cohort of students on the ASD wait list.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

9. The estimated cost associated with the proposed increase to in year staffing is as follows:
- 25 FTE EAs = \$1,417,800;
 - 1 FTE elementary Itinerant Teacher for ASD/DD = \$107,404; and
 - Total in year cost = \$1,525,204.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

10. LSS continues to collaborate with the school teams that are supporting students on the waitlist for ASD and DD specialized program classes to ensure collaborative and transparent communication with parents and guardians.

The information in this report will be shared with the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC).

STRATEGIC LINKS:

11. The presented information directly relates to the key priority areas of Culture of Caring and Social Responsibility. This information will contribute to equity of access, opportunity and outcomes for learners with special education needs and facilitate informed decision making for the system.

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Board approve the proposed in year increase to staffing (25.0 FTE Educational Assistants and 1.0 FTE Itinerant Teacher) effective immediately, to support students with ASD and DD.

Peter Symmonds, Superintendent of
Learning Support Services

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