

**SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (PUBLIC)**

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Universal Screening Tool Exploration and Update

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

Amy Hannah, System Principal, Learning Support Services, 613-596-8211 ext. 8111.

PURPOSE:

1. To provide an update to Board on the exploration activities undertaken to review the potential implementation of a universal screening tool in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB).

CONTEXT:

2. In *Report 20-110, Updates on Supports for Students with Giftedness (Elementary) in the OCDSB*, Learning Support Services (LSS) shared that they were in the initial phase of exploring the possibility of a universal screening tool in the OCDSB. The exploration of the possible use of a universal screener within the District is rooted in the ongoing work and commitment District-wide to continue to explore ways to eliminate barriers of access for all students and to support underrepresented populations.

The use of a universal screening tool is rooted in research surrounding underrepresentation in identifying learners with giftedness. In recent studies in North America, the issue of “missingness”, which is defined as the students missing from gifted identification either because they attended schools that did not identify learners or because they were under-identified in their schools that did identify learners is a growing area of research and action (M. Gentry, 2019). In the OCDSB, the current practice is to offer individual student screening via two methods; teacher nomination or parent/guardian nomination to explore student potential for giftedness. Inherent in this approach, is the potential for unconscious bias and further perpetuation of the notion of “missingness” in the identification of learners with giftedness.

The Ministry of Education defines the exceptionality of giftedness as “an unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability that requires differentiated learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the regular school program to satisfy the level of educational potential indicated.” In addition to very high levels of cognitive ability (e.g., 98th percentile and above), students with giftedness are diverse and unique learners. For

example, students with giftedness can present with additional complexities such as autism, learning disability or executive function difficulties. It is important to identify and understand the unique needs of students with giftedness in order to ensure appropriate programming is provided and students remain engaged and appropriately challenged academically. When students with giftedness are not identified, educators run the risk of making inappropriate instructional decisions by mistaking the root of the challenges for what is readily observable (e.g., behaviour, disengagement).

The purpose of the ongoing exploration of a possible universal screener is to determine if there may be another tool to potentially lead to increased identification of learners with giftedness and to help the District to identify other students with other learning profiles who may not have been identified yet (i.e., learning disability, etc.).

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

3. A screening tool of this nature is an assessment which provides information about the cognitive abilities of a student. A screening tool can be universal (i.e., administered to a cohort of students) or administered on an individual basis. The use of a screening tool provides information that can inform decision-making about student learning. The District has offered universal screening in the past and currently makes a screening tool available based on teacher and/or parent nomination. While a universal screening tool may highlight students who should be provided with a more in-depth assessment to fully understand their cognitive profile, it is generally not used as a single tool for formal identification.
4. Equity
Research has shown that disproportionality exists in special education referrals (Raines, 2012). When teachers or parents are the primary method for nominating children for further screening, it is possible that barriers for some learners arise. Universal screening may work to reduce this barrier by providing equal access to screening (NAGC, 2018). This can include minoritized or racialized students, students of lower socio-economics status, English Language Learner, etc.
5. History of Screening in the OCDSB
The OCDSB has conducted universal screening in the past. Prior to 1999 and up to 2007, the Canadian Cognitive Abilities Test (CCAT) was administered to all grade 3 students by school-based staff. The CCAT could be administered to students prior to grade 3 if nominated by a parent/guardian or teacher. During this time, the CCAT was the main piece of information used to determine a formal identification of giftedness in line with the Ministry of Education definition for this exceptionality. The Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT) was administered on an as-needed basis in order to gather additional information if cognitive scores on the CCAT were close but did not meet the specified cut-offs.

In 2008, universal screening was discontinued but the CCAT was still administered by school staff based on parent/guardian or teacher nomination. School staff reviewed CCAT results to determine if a student could or should be

formally identified through the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) process with Giftedness. Alternatively, cognitive information provided through psychological assessment reports was also acceptable.

Since 2014 and up to the current time, additional emphasis was placed on the school multi-disciplinary teams to discuss the need for potential screening for giftedness. Referrals through teachers or parents are discussed at multi-disciplinary meetings to determine the need for a CCAT screening or a full psychological assessment. Results from the CCAT or other assessments are then reviewed by the school psychologist who may or may not request additional information to make a determination about formal identification of giftedness.

6. Environmental Scan – Universal Screening Tool in Ontario

As a part of the environmental scan, staff consulted with several other Ontario school districts in order to better understand their screening procedures. Consultations with the publisher also helped to inform the information gathered during the environmental scan.

There are many school districts within the province who have undertaken the process of universal screening using the CCAT 7 (the latest edition of the CCAT).

Most of these school districts screen all students either in grade 3 or in grade 4. The chart below details an overview of the Ontario school districts who are using the CCAT 7 and in what capacity.

Number of School Districts	Purpose of Use of CCAT 7	Grade Level
1	Universal	2 (transitioning to 3 this year)
4	Universal	3
12	Universal	4
1	Universal	4 and 7
4	Nomination	All

7. Emerging Themes from the Environmental Scan

As a component to the environment scan, other details were gathered from each district pertaining to the process and procedures surrounding the use of the universal screening. The chart below provides a summary of themes that emerged from this review.

Theme	Details
Time of year to conduct universal screening	Universal screening is usually conducted in the Fall in most districts in order to engage in appropriate program planning for students.
Post universal screening considerations and possible follow-up actions for each learner	Many school districts use the CCAT 7 as part of a process to screen for gifted learners but the CCAT 7 information is only the first step for those students who meet a certain cut-off, additional information is obtained about that

	learner (e.g., parent input, further cognitive testing, academic testing, etc.).
Multi-disciplinary team consultation	Many districts use consultation within their screening procedures in order to develop program plans for students (e.g., school support staff, school psychologist, etc.).
Professional Development and training for staff	Staff require training on how to interpret and use score information appropriately for programming.

The themes listed above are areas where further exploration will be required and will be a part of the next review activities moving forward.

8. Selection of a Universal Screening Tool

The purpose of selecting a tool for universal screening is complex. Selecting an appropriate tool is important but also considering how that tool will be used in a broader context of programming and decision-making is critical. In plain terms, the use of a universal screening tool should help to inform instructional decisions for all learners including those who may require further enrichment.

During the exploratory review of possible screening tools, the following assessments have been considered:

- Canadian Cognitive Abilities Test (CCAT 7);
- Otis-Lennon School Ability Test (OSLAT);
- Raven's 2 Progressive Matrices; and
- Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test-3rd Edition (NNAT3).

The CCAT 7 has many advantages. It is the most widely used cognitive screener in Canada, primarily because it offers Canadian norms. The updated CCAT 7 has also addressed issues of equity in several different ways including replacing some verbal prompts with visual prompts and addressing other language concerns within item development (e.g., removing colloquial terms). Further, the CCAT 7 scores are categorized into Ability Profiles that are then linked to specific instructional strategies to inform programming for each individual learner. For each learner, an Ability Profile score is generated, which is a summary of the student's demonstrated level of ability while providing insight into their strengths and areas for growth along with potential instructional strategies for the teacher to consider.

As with any standardized test, careful consideration needs to be taken when interpreting scores. Next steps will include an examination of the responsible use of CCAT 7 score data in the context of building individualized learner profiles. Staff are also exploring the potential of using local norms, which is possible with this tool. Local norms are a percentile ranking of a student compared to all other students in a building (school) on a standardized assessment versus Canadian norms which compare percentile rankings of a student on a national level.

9. Universal Screening Tool Project Team

A project team will be established to review the key details and considerations to inform the final recommendation on the use of a universal screener for the OCDSB. This project team will have cross departmental representation (e.g., LSS, Program and Learning (PAL), Research, Evaluation and Analytics Division (READ), Indigenous Education, Equity, and ESL/ELD team, etc.) and school-based staff. Key work of the project team will be to facilitate discussions with community and stakeholder groups.

10. Overview of Continued Exploration of Universal Screening Tool Activities

The project team will continue to undertake a variety of exploration activities to gather further information required to make a decision to move forward with a universal screening tool in the OCDSB. Significant review activities are listed below:

Timeline	Review Activity
12 March 2021	Creation of Universal Screening Tool Project Team.
February – 30 April 2021	Regular meetings with representatives from the publisher <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review implementation costs; • Review aggregation levels and data extraction possibilities in conjunction with READ; • Review staff training requirements, materials, student screening preparation materials, and tool implementation plans for school districts.
February – 31 May 2021	Project team consultation with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PAL; • READ; • Business & Learning Technologies; • Corporate Records; • Federations; • Focus Groups; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ School-based staff including multi-disciplinary teams; and ○ LSS staff team. • LSS psychology team members to review research surrounding grade level/cohort administration of the tool; and • Collaborate with Communications to explore the possibility of a speaker series on universal screening to engage parents/guardians, and the community.
February – 31 May 2021	Advisory Committee Consultation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)
31 May 2021	Completion of a Literature Review
June 2021	Update report

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

11. The work undertaken on this initiative continues to be substantial which will continue until the end of June 2021. LSS estimates that approximately 30 days of work will be invested by different team members in the department to complete the ongoing exploration into the adoption of the CCAT 7 to the OCDSB. Other departments and school staff selected to be a part of the project team will also be required to devote time to some of the tasks outlined previously. LSS anticipates that this in total will be another minimum total of 20 days of work.

If the CCAT 7 is selected as a universal screener, implementation costs will include test booklet bundles, administration manuals, and training. Initial exploration of the recurring annual cost of universally administering the CCAT 7 is anticipated to be approximately \$50,000.00. Consideration will need to be given to District level staffing to support the annual administration of the assessment.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

12. The key focus of the project team is to ensure that the goal of eliminating barriers of access and to support underrepresented populations is achieved. In June 2021, a report will provide an update on the progress of the project team. Regular updates will be shared with the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC).

STRATEGIC LINKS:

13. The continued investigation about the possible implementation of a universal screening tool in the OCDSB has several links to the District Strategic Plan 2019-2023 with a focus on reducing barriers to learning and providing individualized personalized support. A universal screener may help to begin to address equity concerns by identifying students who need extra support who may have traditionally been overlooked without a standardized assessment.

GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What additional factors should be considered to inform the exploration of a universal screener?
- How might a universal screening tool ensure equity for racialized and minoritized students?

Peter Symmonds, Superintendent of
Learning Support Services

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

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