



Special Education and Inclusion Annual Report 2022-2023

To: Program and School Services Committee

Date: 12 April, 2023

Report No.: 04-12-4507

Strategic Directions

- Transform Student Learning
- Create a Culture for Student and Staff Well-Being
- Provide Equity of Access to Learning Opportunities for All Students
- Allocate Human and Financial Resources Strategically to Support Student Needs
- Build Strong Relationships and Partnerships Within School Communities to Support Student Learning and Well-Being

Recommendation

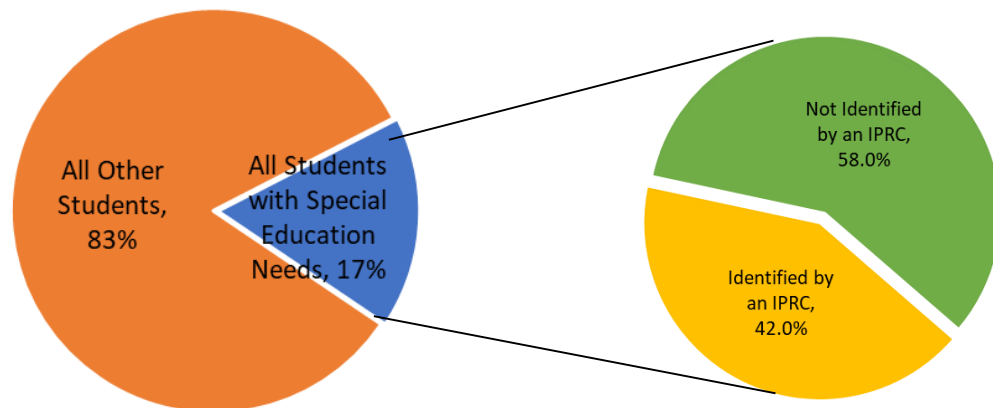
It is recommended that the Special Education and Inclusion Annual Report 2022-2023 be received.

Context

Please see Appendix E for the Executive Summary of this report.

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is committed to student achievement and well-being. We recognize that students develop and learn in different ways, have different strengths and needs, and require different levels of support. Some students require special education programs and services to meet their needs and they may receive support in Intensive Support Programs (ISPs) in integrated or congregated sites. This school year (2022-23), there are 40,577 students (17% of total TDSB student population) with special education needs (formally identified as well as IEP-only). Of the 40,577 or 17%, 17,205 or 42% are formally identified with exceptionalities as defined by the Ontario Ministry of Education (see Appendix A), while 23,372 or 58% only have IEPs (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Percentage of TDSB Students with Special Education Needs (Formally Identified with Exceptionalities and IEP-Only)



The Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP)

The work of the Special Education and Inclusion Department is guided by the goals outlined in the Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP), which specifically focus on improving learning experiences for students with special education needs:

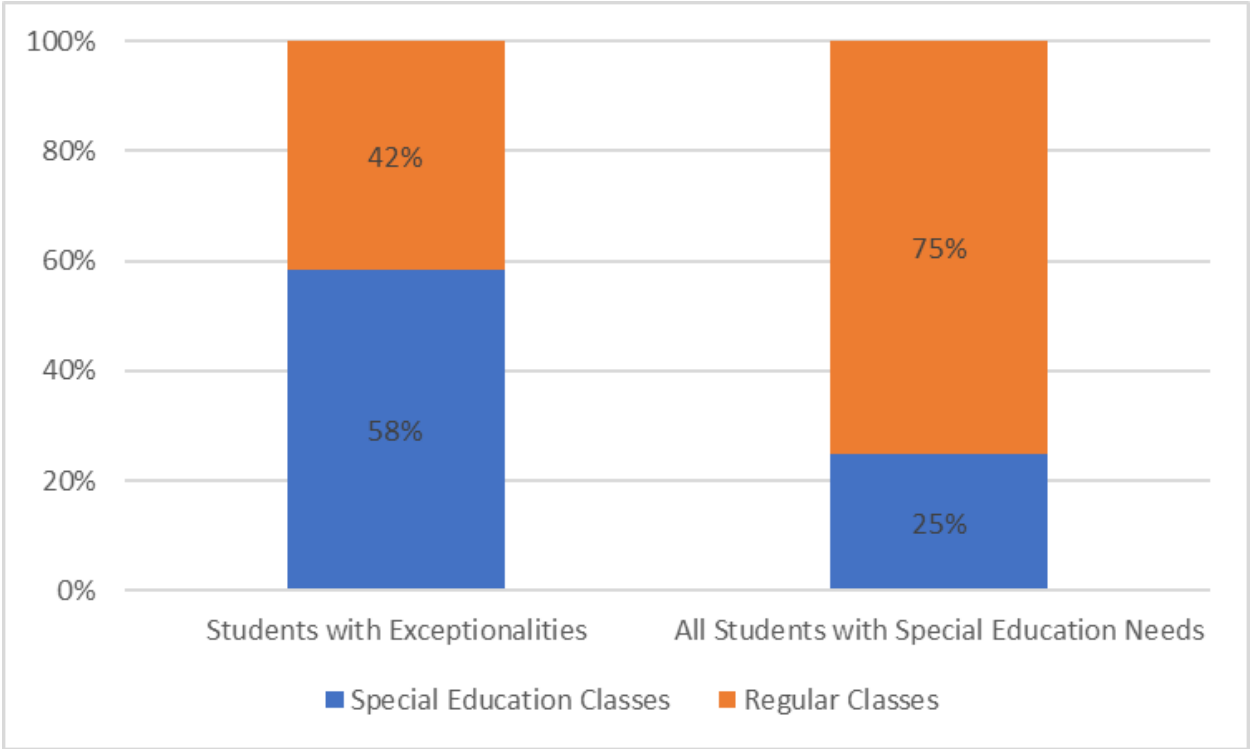
- We will welcome all students to an open and inclusive learning environment that recognizes that most students can be served effectively within their community school, and will also continue to provide intensive support programs for students with more specialized learning needs;
- We will continue to strengthen collaboration with parents/guardians/caregivers and engage effectively in the decision-making process regarding their child's program, placement, and well-being; and
- We will increase employment opportunities and outcomes for all students with Low Incidence Exceptionalities (e.g., Intellectual Disabilities, Physical Disability, Low Vision, Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Health/Medical).

Inclusion

Ontario Regulation 181/98 requires school boards to consider placing students with exceptionalities into regular classes with appropriate special education services before considering placement in special education classes (see Appendix B). In the TDSB, we continue to be responsive to the understanding that as students learn, they develop skills and so their special education service and program needs change over time. In 2022-23, of the 17,205 students with exceptionalities (formally identified), 42% are in regular classes. Looking at all students with special education needs (including the 23,372 with an IEP only), 75% are in regular classes (see Figure 2). Students being welcomed, included and supported in well-resourced neighbourhood schools in age-appropriate, regular classes are able to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of school life. This allows for valuable learning opportunities for groups which have been historically excluded, such as students with disabilities and intersecting identities. Some students with unique strengths and needs (behaviour, communication, intellectual and physical) may require more specialized or intensive programs and supports and, in collaboration with parents/guardians/caregivers and students as appropriate, we provide the necessary

placements. In 2022-2023, of the 17,205 students formally identified, 58% are in special education classes. In line with this shift towards inclusionary practices, TDSB phased out the Home School Program (HSP) (see Appendix C), which went from roughly 5,000 students in 2016-17 to 0 students in 2022-23.

Figure 2: Special Education Needs Classroom Setting



Anti-Oppression, Human Rights, Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti-Ableism

The Special Education and Inclusion Department, in collaboration with all staff, is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. This includes our ongoing commitment to anti-oppression, human rights, equity, anti-racism including anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism, and anti-ableism. This commitment aligns with the TDSB Vision for Learning and the TDSB Equity Policy, and underpins all programming across all grade levels. It is through this commitment that systemic barriers to high-quality education for historically underserved students, including students with special education needs, are identified, addressed and eliminated. This helps us create a more equitable school system where the achievement and well-being of every student is fostered in inclusive and accepting environments in which all students feel a sense of belonging, where every voice is heard, and where students’ intersecting identities and lived experiences are honoured.

Action Plan and Associated Timeline

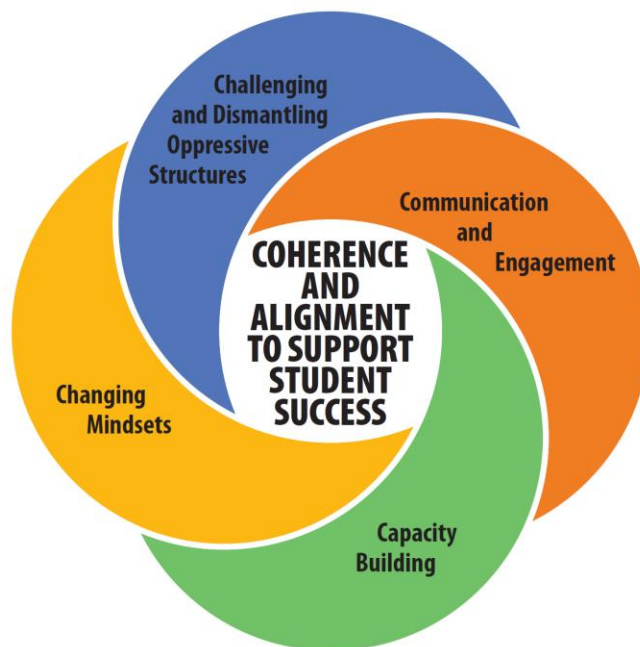
The strategies outlined in this section will continue to be implemented for the remainder of the 2022-2023 school year and into the 2023-2024 school year, and will be monitored and reviewed throughout this two-year cycle to determine next steps.

CREATING COHERENCE AND ALIGNMENT TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS

In an effort to create coherence and alignment of special education and inclusion practices, programs and structures across the TDSB to foster more inclusive environments for students with special education needs, the Special Education and Inclusion Department has been focusing on the following areas:

- Challenging and Dismantling Oppressive Structures;
- Capacity Building;
- Changing Mindsets; and
- Communication and Engagement.

These focus areas are interconnected and reflect the need for shared responsibility and shared accountability in serving students with special education needs, and indeed all students.



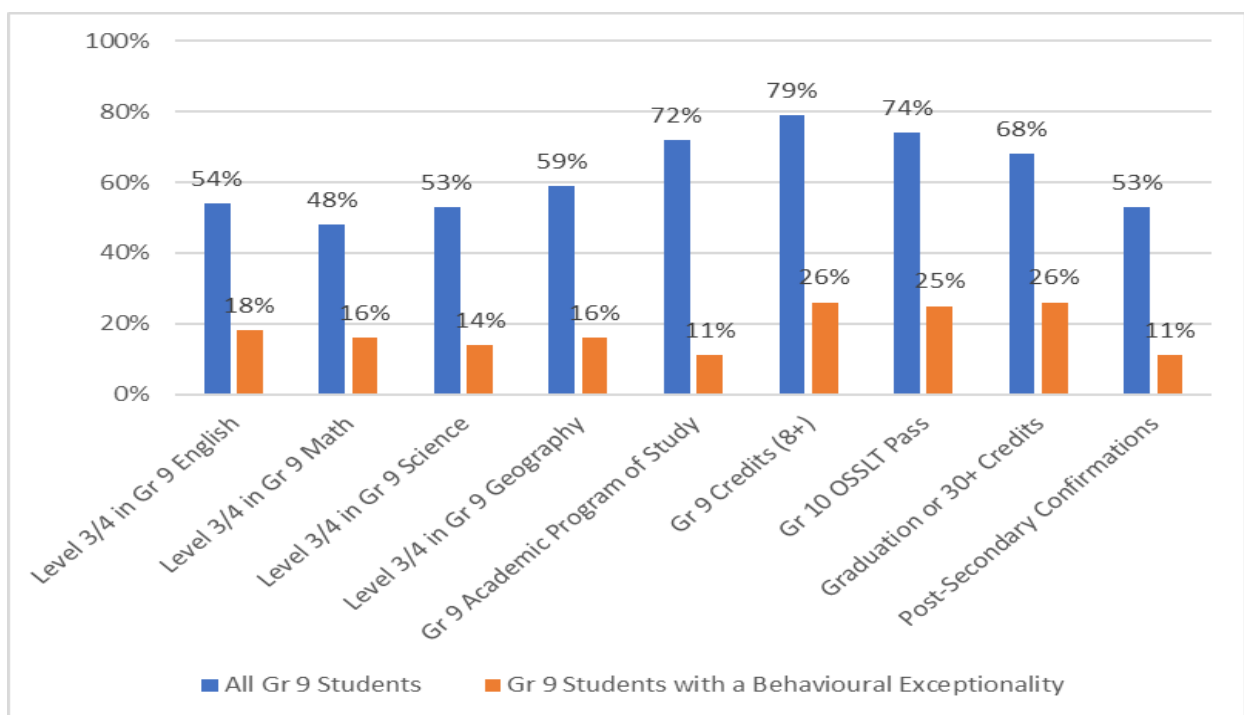
Challenging and Dismantling Oppressive Structures and Practices

Improving outcomes for students with special education needs requires us to continue to examine the mechanisms we currently have in place to ensure we are identifying, challenging and dismantling oppressive structures and practices.

Reviewing Behaviour Intensive Support Programs (ISPs)

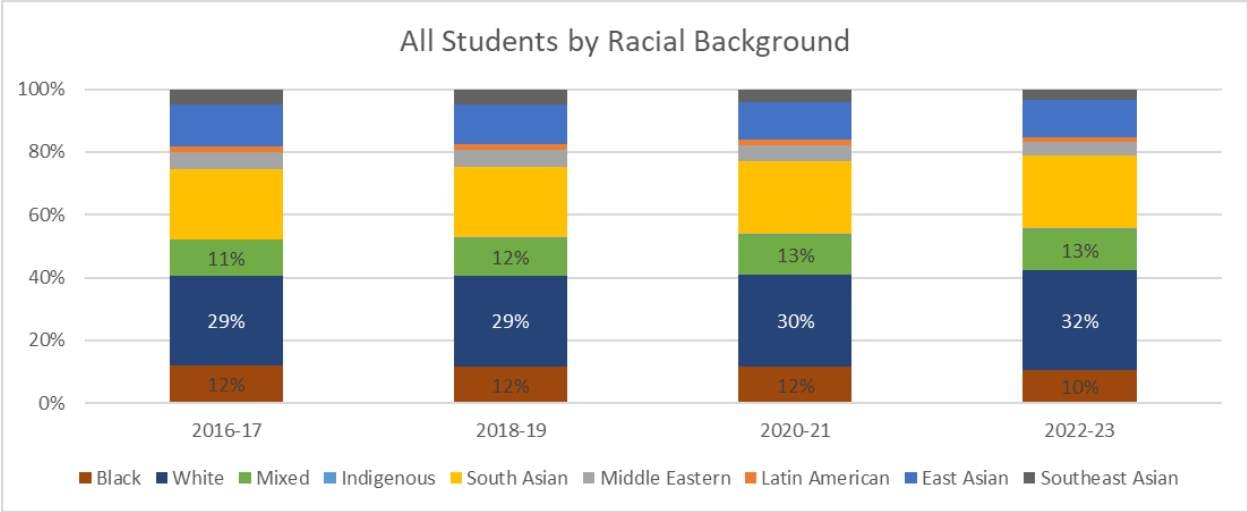
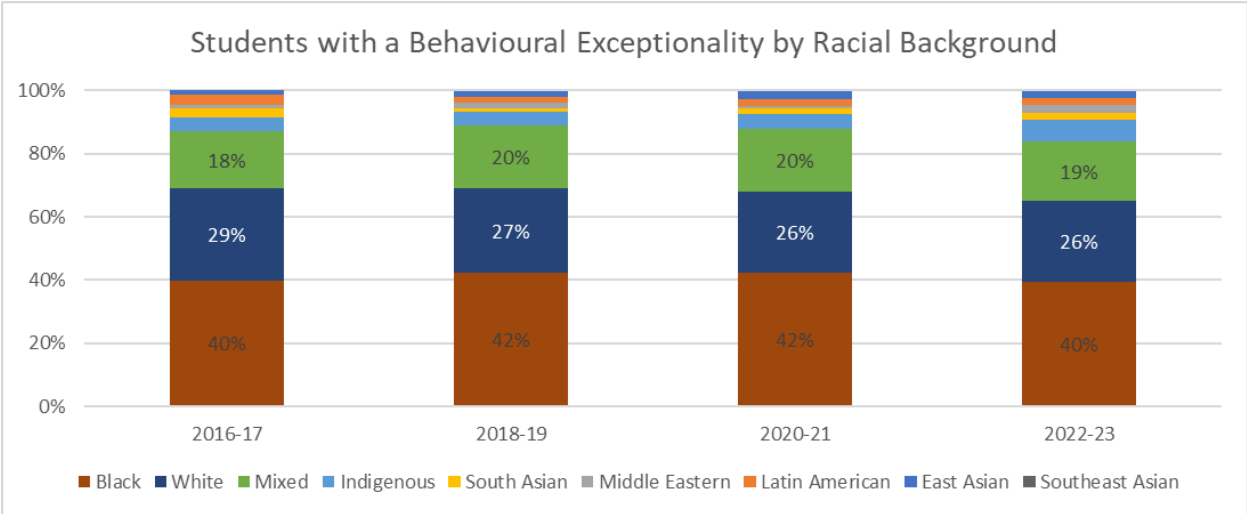
As an example of the importance of examining current practices in order to improve student outcomes, an analysis of secondary outcomes for students with a behavioural exceptionalality was completed to examine whether there were any differences in outcomes for these students (see Appendix D). Looking at aggregated data from the Grade 9 cohorts between 2000-2015, students with a Behavioural exceptionalality had significantly lower academic performance than the overall Grade 9 student population on secondary indicators including EQAO scores, credit accumulation, academic program of study, OSSLT pass rate, graduation and post-secondary confirmations (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Student Performance on Secondary Indicators With and Without a Behaviour Exceptionality (taken from Grade 9 Cohort data from 2000-2015)



Equally problematic is the overrepresentation of Black students with a behavioural exceptionalality. An examination of which students received a behavioural exceptionalality by race showed that Black students are the largest group of students with behavioural exceptionalities despite the demographic makeup of the TDSB student population remaining fairly consistent across student census periods - approximately 12% Black and 30% White (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Behavioural Exceptionality and Racial Background



Special Education and Inclusion staff have been working intentionally with all Professional Support Services teams, including Psychological Services, Learning Network superintendents and school administrators to critically examine the strategies and supports that can be put in place for students demonstrating externalized behaviours before placing them in Behavioural Intensive Support Programs (ISPs).

While the overall number of students who receive a behavioural exceptionality has declined to 402 students in 2022-23 from 730 in 2016-17 (a decrease of 328 students), the breakdown above suggests there is still a need to examine the process of how and why behavioural exceptionalities are given and to identify how students' needs can be met in a more inclusive setting in order to address the inequitable outcomes experienced by students who receive a behavioural exceptionality.

Providing Precision and Personalization Through the Individual Learning Plan (ILP)

All students learn best when assessment and instruction, resources, and the learning environment are suited to their particular strengths, interests, needs, and readiness. The revised Individual Learning Plan (ILP) is a tool used by the classroom teacher in consultation with school-based staff to plan for and provide assessment and instruction that take into account the student's particular needs while centering their strengths. Through the intentional use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Differentiated

Instruction (DI), and Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP), the teacher is able to personalize strategies for success for the individual student. The information gathered on the ILP is critical when having continued discussions about students who require additional support and particularly students for whom an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is being considered.

Another important revision to the ILP is the addition of a page to the plan that encourages student agency and voice by asking students to reflect on their strengths and needs. This is particularly important given that the ILP is about the student (see Figure 5). There will be ongoing opportunities for teachers and administrators to focus on using the ILP as a tool to personalize learning and support for students.

Figure 5: Samples of Student Voice from Individual Learning Plans (ILP)

<p>Where is your ideal space to learn and what does it look like? I like working in a quiet area with someone to talk and confirm to.</p> <p>What strategies do you use if you are having difficulty? I normally take a break and read one of my favourite books.</p> <p>When are you able to learn best? I'm able to learn best when people love and accept me.</p>	<p>How do you learn best? I learn best from visuals - they help me learn better.</p> <p>Where is your ideal space to learn and what does it look like? I prefer to learn with a partner or more. I like a normal classroom.</p>
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Implementing the TDSB K-1 Individual Education Plan (IEP) Strategy and Grade 2-12 Individual Education Plan (IEP) Review

The TDSB K-1 IEP Strategy and Grade 2-12 IEP Review support interrupting the automaticity in IEP creation for early learners as well as the automaticity of rolling over the need for an IEP from year to year for learners in Grades 2-12. Given the disproportionate number of racialized students on IEPs in the early years, key professional learning sessions continue to focus on viewing the child as competent and capable, understanding the whole child, and implementing evidence-based pedagogical approaches that support early learning development. Learning around the Grade 2-12 IEP Review continues to focus on the concept of 'necessary for some, but good for all' - accommodations needed by some students benefit all students. By annually reviewing each student who has an IEP, we operate from the stance that ability is not fixed; students are continually changing and developing as they are not static learners.

Changing Mindsets

As education is an ableist system, a cultural shift continues to be required and work needs to continue to be done with regards to assumptions or perceptions about students'

abilities and future capacities, and even more so when ability intersects with gender, race, class, etc. Specifically, we need to disrupt the following assumptions which are harmful to students:

- early years students who demonstrate learning challenges have special education needs;
- students are better served elsewhere; and
- students with special education needs are best served by special education teachers.

Reducing Disproportionate Outcomes by Enhancing Academic Pathways

As we work towards reducing disproportionate outcomes and fostering engagement and belonging, we continue to examine how beliefs and mindsets on ability impact student trajectories and post secondary outcomes. With the implementation of academic pathways, course expectations are more inclusive of students' personal and academic backgrounds and broaden the purpose of learning at the secondary level. Expanding access to the highest level of subjects through a de-streamed curriculum must be paired with inclusive instructional practice and targeted support to ensure the success for all students, particularly those with special education needs. Accommodations for students based on assessment data and learning plans should also be provided for those who require them to succeed. Promoting meaningful inclusion in mathematics classes for students with special education needs and supporting them to achieve grade-level learning whenever possible is a key component to TDSB's ongoing commitment to challenging academic streaming. In collaboration with central departments, professional learning opportunities have focused on modifications in secondary courses to support all students in accessing de-streamed programs.

Early Reading Interventions

The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) Right to Read Inquiry Report provided recommendations to support reading instruction, early intervention and assessment. The earlier effective interventions for students with reading difficulties, the more likely they are to fully catch up with their peers in the foundational reading skills that are essential for making continued yearly gains in reading. This focus on early intervention challenges the assumption that students who are experiencing reading difficulties require special education placements. The TDSB Early Reading Framework provides consistency of expectations in early reading instruction for all students and recognizes the importance of a structured literacy approach where foundational reading skills are explicitly taught within authentic and meaningful contexts. Tiered reading intervention instruction and support continues to be a focus for schools. Special Education and Inclusion, in partnership with the Early Years and English/Literacy departments, have offered all schools the Wilson Reading training resources which support tiered interventions in reading for students. This includes Wilson Reading System Gr. 2-12 (Tier 3), Just Words Gr. 4-12 (Tier 2) and Foundations: Kindergarten OR Level 1-Gr. 1-3 (Tier 2). Another resource, Lexia, a digital reading program (Tier 3) has reached 5,400 students. Lexia provides adaptive, individualized reading instruction to students at their own reading level and provides educators with information to provide focused intervention.

Employability Skills for Students with Special Education Needs

It is critical that staff, like families of students with special education needs, hold high expectations and aspirations for students as they transition out of the TDSB. Educators in Developmental Disability (DD) and Mild Intellectual Disability (MID) Intensive Support Programs (ISPs) from congregated sites engaged in a three-part series focused on developing intentional workplace pathways by building on the numeracy and literacy skills necessary for post-secondary employment. Opportunities like these help to disrupt the life trajectory of students, and reinforce the belief that students with special education needs can make positive and necessary contributions to society.

Capacity Building

Special Education and Inclusion has prioritized capacity building for staff at all levels to ensure coherence and alignment of special education and inclusion practices across the district to better serve students with special education needs. As we continue to build leadership capacity, we have engaged staff to gain a deeper understanding of the policies, procedures and practices related to special education and inclusion in order to provide high quality learning experiences and positive outcomes for students with special education needs.

Mandatory Professional Learning for Senior Team

Special Education and Inclusion staff facilitated two half-day mandatory learning sessions for the senior team. The comprehensive sessions made connections to the goals outlined in the Multi-Year Strategic Plan and also to principles of human rights, equity, anti-oppression and anti-ableism, and focused on working collaboratively with parents/guardians/caregivers and other partners to support students with special education needs. Senior team participated in case studies to identify effective strategies for responding to concerns related to students with special education needs. Senior leaders now have increased competence and confidence to guide school-based staff in addressing concerns as they arise, with the support of Special Education and Inclusion staff.

Professional Learning for Administrators

To support newly-appointed and experienced principals and vice-principals to deepen understanding of their legal and moral responsibilities in serving students with special education needs and also in connecting this to school improvement planning and professional learning for their staff, the following sessions were held:

- Special Education for Newly Appointed Administrators Summer Institute;
- New Administrator Meet-Up Sessions;
- Special Education for Administrators (two-part series);
- Demystifying Special Education for Administrators; and
- Developing an Individual Learning Plan (ILP).

Effective Instructional Practices to Support Students with Special Education Needs

At the centre of inclusive classrooms and schools are effective assessment and

instructional practices. Classroom-based staff have participated in professional learning in the areas of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Differentiated Instruction (DI), a Tiered Approach to Learning, and Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP). The following are a sample of some of the additional professional learning opportunities that have been offered to staff across the system since the start of the 2022-2023 school year:

- Supporting students with special education needs within the destreamed classroom through the use of Tier 1 strategies;
- Using assistive technology tools to support students to access the curriculum and exploring digital tools in STEM to increase accessibility to engaging learning experiences;
- Developing Individual Learning Plans (ILPs);
- Implementing Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) strategies;
- Tier 1 Strategies in the Kindergarten Classroom; and
- Pre-Employment Skills for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Professional Learning for Intensive Support Program (ISP) Staff

As we continue to provide Intensive Support Programs (ISPs) in integrated and congregated sites for students with more specialized learning needs, we have engaged staff in professional learning sessions focused on learning more about specific exceptionalities. Educators and support staff explored inclusionary practices specific to the exceptionality, deepened their understanding of the intersection of anti-ableism, anti-oppression and anti-racism, and discussed ways in which students can effectively be integrated into regular classrooms. Educators also explored assistive technology tools available to assist students with their daily learning.

To support accessibility, inclusion, and awareness in school communities, Special Education and Inclusion and Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy Services are working with 24 schools (20 elementary and 4 secondary) with Intensive Support Programs (ISPs) for students with developmental and/or physical disabilities to engage in a learning series for students and staff. The "Be the Change" initiative supports school communities, including parents/guardians/caregivers, with training on promoting and encouraging equity, diversity, inclusion, anti-ableism, anti-racism, and anti-oppression across the school. The learning series concludes with each school site engaging in an initiative that will focus on opportunities to amplify student voice and increase visibility of students enrolled in ISPs.

Professional Learning for Special Education and Inclusion Department Staff

Special Education and Inclusion Coordinators, Consultants and Regional Services teams engage in ongoing professional learning in order to be better able to support school-based staff to serve students with special education needs. This year, the entire department is participating in a book study focused on Zaretta Hammond's book entitled *Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*. We have been looking at how to access culture as a way to activate learning pathways in the brain.

Professional learning opportunities for all staff members will be ongoing and will be developed proactively and also in response to student, staff and system learning needs. A priority next step will be mandatory professional learning for all administrators to increase competence and confidence to lead school-based staff in supporting students with special education needs.

Communication with and Engagement of Parents/Guardians/Caregivers

Parents/guardians/caregivers and TDSB staff alike want what is best for each student. Parents/guardians/caregivers of students with special education needs have a unique understanding of their children and want them to become as independent as possible in a safe and nurturing learning environment. In continuing to partner with families, we are focusing on communication, engagement, and collaborative decision-making. We deeply value the insights and input that parents/guardians/caregivers have with regards to their children, and believe that we are better able to serve students when their parents/guardians/caregivers are well-informed of our services and processes.

The Special Education and Inclusion department has developed a multi-pronged approach to enhance communication with and engagement of parents/guardians/caregivers. Engaging in a frequent feedback loop with a number of stakeholders, including the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), parent advocacy groups, staff, students, trustees, and unions, allows us to improve in this area.

Resource Development

To support parents/guardians/caregivers with accessing information on special education supports, programs and services, a number of parent guides have been developed. These guides provide clear and concise information on The Referral Process, the Individual Education Plan (IEP), and the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC). These guides are available on the main special education website in a number of formats, including audio summaries and accessible Microsoft Word documents. Schools have also been asked to share these guides with parents as needed. We will be translating these documents as we move forward which will further enhance accessibility to information for families.

Sessions for Parents/Guardians/Caregivers

Special Education and Inclusion staff continue to create and deliver a number of sessions to support families in navigating special education services in the TDSB. The following are some examples of parent/guardian/caregiver sessions that were offered/will be offered this year:

- Special Education and Inclusion Information Sessions (Special Education and Inclusion in the TDSB, IPRC Reviews and Transitions, Supporting Your Child's Learning During the Summer Break);
- Grade 8-9 Transition Information Session (in collaboration with the Guidance Department);
- Parent and Caregivers as Partners Conference:

- Special Education Practices Based on the Principles of Equity, Inclusion, Anti-Oppression and Anti-Racism
- Supporting the Successful Transition to Kindergarten for Students with Autism
- Supporting Students with Developmental Disabilities and their Transition beyond High School
- Trustee Ward Forum Presentations; and
- Presentations to specialized daycares, children's hospital programs and universities.

Website

The TDSB Special Education and Inclusion website provides families and the public with pertinent information on special education and inclusion supports, services and resources offered by the TDSB. In collaboration with Web Services, links to content are being updated and content is being organized so that information is easier to access. This year, we have prioritized posting recorded parent/guardian/caregiver engagement sessions so they can be accessed at any time. We continue to work to ensure that the site is compliant with Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) standards.

Experiential Learning

The intersectionality of identity and ability greatly impacts opportunities and outcomes for students with disabilities. Experiential learning and co-op placements directly address rich experiential learning opportunities for students who face additional barriers (systemic, institutional and societal) by providing training and opportunities that will directly improve outcomes for meaningful employment. The TDSB has engaged in career pathway and employability skills development programming in various formats through collaboration among the Special Education and Inclusion Department, Experiential Learning (Cooperative Education), and Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy Services. Our current Special Education Experiential Learning (SPEEL) and Project SEARCH programs focus on providing job training and skills development opportunities to students with disabilities with the goal of transitioning to employment. In both programs, we have been able to improve student outcomes with regards to employability post-graduation and increase our network of community agency and industry sector partners willing to work in collaboration with program staff. Although students with a Developmental Disability (DD) exceptionality remain the priority group, the SPEEL team continues to expand its reach and is beginning to serve students enrolled in Mild Intellectual Disability (MID) ISPs. We will continue to work with supervisors and employers to support successful placements for students with special education needs so they may continue to gain employability skills necessary for the workplace.

Resource Implications

Continuous supports and resources are based on the approval of the budget annually by the Board of Trustees and subject to funding through the Ministry of Education.

Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)

- [TDSB Special Education Plan 2022-2023](#)
- [TDSB Vision for Learning](#)
- [TDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan](#)
- [TDSB Equity Policy](#)

Appendices

- Appendix A: [Categories of Ontario Ministry of Education Exceptionalities](#)
- Appendix B: [TDSB Placement Options](#)
- Appendix C: [Home School Program \(HSP\)](#)
- Appendix D: [Tam, G. and Armson, S. \(2022\) Trends in Toronto District School Board Special Education Data: 2016-2022](#)
- Appendix E: [Executive Summary](#)

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