



Trends in Toronto District School Board Special Education Data: 2016-2022

Research & Development
Toronto District School Board



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INTRODUCTION

This report provides information on trends in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB)'s special education data from the 2016-17 school year through to preliminary data from the 2022-23 school year. It provides an update to a previous report by Brown, R.S., Parekh, G., & Marmurneau, C. (2016). Similar to the previous report, the sections below examine recent trends regarding special education identifications and placements across the TDSB.

Part 1 of this report examines changes in special education identifications and placements between the 2016-17 and 2022-23 school years, according to information available in the TDSB Student Information System (SIS).

Part 2 focuses on the number of students educated in integrated or congregated¹ classes in the TDSB from the 2016-17 school year up to the 2022-23 school year. Both the Intensive Support Program (ISP), in which students spend up to 100% of their day in congregated classrooms, and the Home School Program (HSP), in which students spend up to 50% of their day, are explored.

Part 3 looks specifically at students with a behavioural exceptionality. This section draws information from the Grade 9 cohorts between Fall 2000- Fall 2015. A cohort tracking study follows a group of students (in this case, Grade 9 students) over a period of four or five years in which most students would complete their secondary schooling. It includes information on the number of students who received a behavioural exceptionality and were in Grade 9 from Fall 2000- Fall 2015, the composition of these students by race, as well as outcome variables including Grade 9 credit accumulation, Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) pass rate, Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) levels 3 or 4 in mathematics, English, science and geography, graduation rate, Grade 9 academic program of study, and post-secondary confirmations.

¹The term 'congregated' is employed to describe placements for which students spend between 50% to 100% of their day in a separate, special education class/program.

PART 1

CHANGES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS, 2016-17 TO 2022-23

Part 1 of this report examines changes in special education identifications and placements between the 2016-17 and 2022-23 school years. **Note: the information for the 2022-23 school year is preliminary draft and therefore may change as the data is finalized at a later date.**

In Tables 1a (numbers) and 1b (percentages), all students in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) are listed in one of the following categories:

- Students identified as having a gifted exceptionality with placements in both special education and regular classes;
- Students identified as having other exceptionalities (excluding gifted) with placements in both special education and regular classes;
- Students informally identified as having a special education need and who have an Individual Education Plan (IEP); and
- Students who have not been identified as having special education needs (SEN).

Students placed in congregated special education classes receive substantive programming outside the regular class, between 50% to 100% of their school day.

Table 1a shows changes in identification and placement patterns over the 2016-17, 2018-19, 2020-21 and 2022-23 school years (based on the October 31 enrolment data):

- TDSB's enrolment declined by 9,486 students between 2016-17 and 2022-23.
- Over the same time period, the number of students identified with special education needs (SEN) decreased from 46,350 to 40,577 or by 5,773 students. This resulted in a decrease from 19% to 17% of all TDSB students being identified as having SEN.
- At the same time, the number of students who have not been identified as having a special education need declined from 199,209 to 195,496 (a decrease of 3,713 students). Taken together with declining enrolment, this was an increase from 81% to 83% of all TDSB students.
- A more detailed examination of Tables 1a and 1b shows that while students identified with SEN declined, one special education category increased in enrolment: the number of students identified as gifted placed in regular classes. By 2022-23, there were 294 more gifted students in regular classes – an increase from 1.0% to 1.2% of all TDSB students.

Table 1a: Changes in Key Special Education Categories 2016-17 to 2022-23: Numbers					
	2016-17	2018-19	2020-21	2022-23*	Difference
Gifted: Special Education Classes	4,423	4,526	4,226	4,283	-140
Gifted: Regular Classes	2,464	2,641	3,150	2,758	294
Exceptionalities without Gifted: Special Education Classes	7,945	6,952	6,109	5,753	-2,192
Exceptionalities without Gifted: Regular Classes	6,571	6,044	5,457	4,411	-2,160
IEP Only	24,947	26,233	26,686	23,372	-1,575
Students without Special Education Needs	199,209	200,229	195,605	195,496	-3,713
Total	245,559	246,625	241,233	236,073	-9,486

Table 1b: Changes in Key Special Education Categories 2016-17 to 2022-23: Percentages					
	2016-17	2018-19	2020-21	2022-23*	Difference
GIFTED: Special Education Classes	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%	0.0%
GIFTED: Regular Classes	1.0%	1.1%	1.3%	1.2%	0.2%
Exceptionalities without Gifted: Special Education Classes	3.2%	2.8%	2.5%	2.4%	-0.8%
Exceptionalities without Gifted: Regular Classes	2.7%	2.5%	2.3%	1.9%	-0.8%
IEP Only	10.2%	10.6%	11.1%	9.9%	-0.3%
Students without Special Education Needs	81.1%	81.2%	81.1%	82.8%	1.7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	

Note: IEP Only includes students who have not been formally identified as well as those who have an IEP, but no special education programming. Only students who are recorded as 'Non-Identified' are reported to the Ministry.

*2022-23 data is preliminary draft

EXCEPTIONALITIES AND IEP ONLY, 2016-17 TO 2022-23

Table 2 shows changes to the number of students formally identified with an exceptionality² as well as students who only have an IEP between 2016-17 and 2022-23. Key findings:

- Nine of the 11 exceptionality categories declined in number; most noticeable were students identified as having a learning disability (a decline of 3,824 students), students who were informally identified and only had an IEP (a decline of 1,369 students) and students with a mild intellectual disability (a decline of 582 students). The decreases of these 9 categories resulted in an overall decrease of students with Special Education Needs, as seen in Tables 1a and 1b.
- Conversely, two of the 11 exceptionality categories increased: autism (an increase of 674 students) and giftedness (an increase of 154 students).
- While the number of students with an IEP Only has decreased, they still make up an increasing proportion of the student population due to declining enrolment. Students who only had an IEP now account for 57.6% of all students identified with special education needs, compared to 53.6% in 2016-17 (a 4% increase).

²Only exceptionality categories with 100 or more students were included.

Table 2: Exceptionalities and IEP Only, 2016-17 to 2022-23

	N (2016-17)	% of Students with SEN (2016-17)	N (2018-19)	% of Students with SEN (2018- 19)	N (2020-21)	% of Students with SEN (2020- 21)	N (2022-23)	% of Students with SEN (2022- 23)	N Change	% Change
Learning Disability	7,784	16.9%	6,423	13.8%	5,083	11.1%	3,960	9.8%	-3,824	-7.1%
Giftedness	6,887	14.9%	7,167	15.4%	7,376	16.2%	7,041	17.4%	154	2.5%
Mild Intellectual Disability	1,810	3.9%	1,596	3.4%	1,419	3.1%	1,228	3.0%	-582	-0.9%
Behavioural	730	1.6%	649	1.4%	573	1.3%	402	1.0%	-328	-0.6%
Autism	2,336	5.1%	2,562	5.5%	2,781	6.1%	3,010	7.4%	674	2.3%
Developmental Disability	1,102	2.4%	1,097	2.4%	1,110	2.4%	993	2.4%	-109	0.0%
Physical Disability	276	0.6%	251	0.5%	207	0.5%	205	0.5%	-71	-0.1%
Language Impairment	139	0.3%	108	0.2%	87	0.2%	62	0.2%	-77	-0.1%
Deaf and Hard of Hearing	279	0.6%	267	0.6%	271	0.6%	252	0.6%	-27	0.0%
OTHER	60	0.1%	43	0.1%	35	0.1%	52	0.1%	-8	0.0%
Total Exceptionalities	21,403	46.4%	20,163	43.3%	18,942	41.5%	17,205	42.4%	-4,198	-4.0%
IEP only	24,741	53.6%	26,394	56.7%	26,686	58.5%	23,372	57.6%	-1,369	4.0%
Total	46,144	100.0%	46,557	100.0%	45,628	100.0%	40,577	100.0%	-5,567	

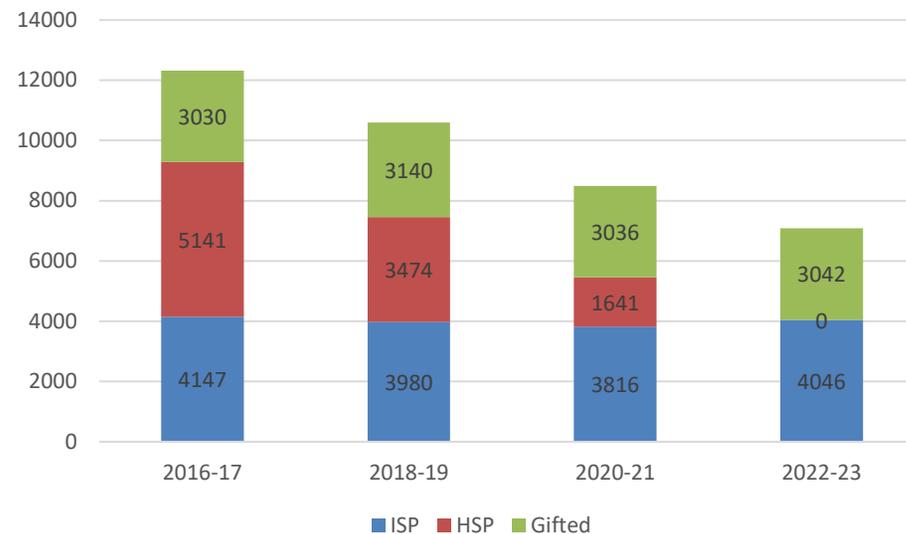
PART 2

COMPOSITION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IDENTIFIED WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS AND PLACED IN CONGREGATED CLASSES

The TDSB enrolment data has school-level programming including HSP, gifted, and other special education congregated programs (e.g., programs dedicated to students identified with learning disabilities, developmental disabilities, and autism) which are collectively called Intensive Support Programs or ISPs. This data is not reported to the Ministry, but we can use it to show program patterns over time.

Figure 1 and Table 3 show the number of students in these programs from Fall 2016 to Fall 2022. In Fall 2016, HSP had an enrolment of over 5,000 students. As part of a shift towards more inclusionary practices, the TDSB has phased out of HSP as of 2022-23 (Special Education Plan, 2020, p. 85). As a result, by Fall of 2022, there were no more students in HSP. Excluding HSP, since 2016-17 the number of students in gifted programs and ISPs has remained fairly stable, with a slight increase in gifted and a slight decrease in ISPs.

Figure 1: Composition of Elementary School Students with Special Education Needs in Congregated Classrooms³



³ Source: TDSB Student Information System

	2016	2018	2020	2022*
Gifted	3,030	3,140	3,036	3,042
HSP	5,141	3,474	1,641	0
ISP	4,147	3,980	3,816	4,046
Students in Spec Education	12,318	10,594	8,493	7,088
Total TDSB Population	171,689	173,614	169,467	163,700

*2022-23 data is preliminary draft

⁴Source: TDSB Student Information Systems

PART 3

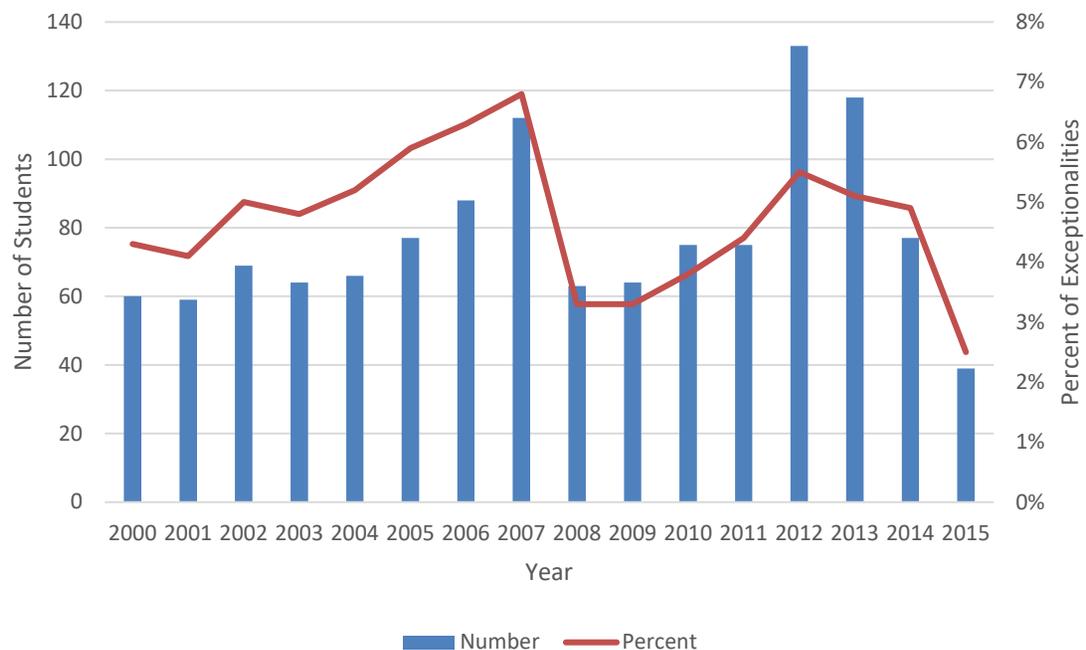
STUDENTS WITH A BEHAVIOURAL EXCEPTIONALITY: GRADE 9 COHORTS FALL 2000-FALL 2015

In Parts 1 and 2, the evolving trends within special education across the TDSB between October 31, 2016 and October 31, 2022 were examined. In Part 3, we look specifically at the behavioural exceptionalities and secondary outcomes. In order to look at performance on secondary indicators, data from the Grade 9 cohorts between 2000- 2015 was used. A cohort tracking study follows a group of students (in this case, Grade 9 students) over a period of four or five years in which most students would complete their secondary schooling. This section examines the overall number of Grade 9 students with a behavioural exceptionalities, the number of Grade 9 students with a behavioural exceptionalities by race, and by outcome measures including Grade 9 credit accumulation, EQAO level 3 or 4 in English, mathematics, science and geography, Grade 9 academic program of study, OSSLT pass rate, graduation rate, and post-secondary confirmations.

Figure 2 shows the number of Grade 9 students from Fall 2000–Fall 2015 who received a behavioural exceptionalities. Key findings:

- From 2000 to 2007, there was an increasing number and proportion of Grade 9 students who received a behavioural exceptionalities.
- After a significant decline in the number and proportion of Grade 9 students with a behavioural exceptionalities for 4 successive cohorts (2008-2011), there was a large increase in students with a behavioural exceptionalities in the 2012 Grade 9 cohort.
 - While the 2012 Grade 9 cohort had the largest overall number of students with a behavioural exceptionalities since the 2000 cohort, the proportion of behavioural compared to other exceptionalities was lower than the high seen in the 2007 Grade 9 cohort.
- The most recent Grade 9 cohort (Fall 2015) had the lowest number and proportion of students with a behavioural exceptionalities.

Figure 2: Students with a Behavioural Exceptionality: Grade 9 Cohorts Fall 2000 – Fall 2015



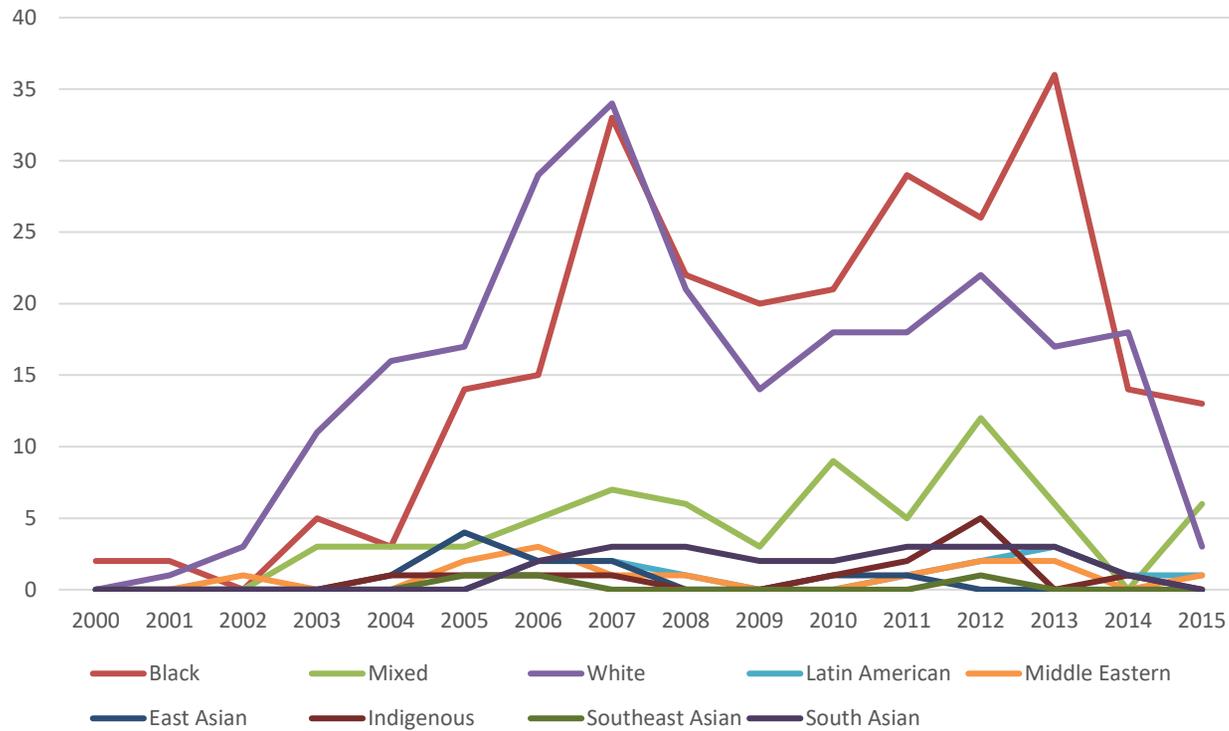
NUMBER OF GRADE 9 STUDENTS WITH A BEHAVIOURAL EXCEPTIONALITY BY RACE

Figure 3 shows the number of Grade 9 students who received a behavioural exceptionality by race. Note that for many of the years of analysis, there were fewer than 100 Grade 9 students with a behavioural exceptionality in a single year. In addition, there were some students who did not write the Student Census which provides the race data information for this analysis. The Grade 9 cohorts from 2006 to 2011 have the least amount of missing student race data due to 2006 and 2011 being Student Census administration years.

Key findings:

- Black and White students made up the majority of students with a behavioural exceptionality.
- Prior to 2008, White students were primarily the largest group with the behavioural exceptionality; from 2008 onwards, Black students have primarily been the largest group.

Figure 3: Number of Grade 9 Students with a Behavioural Exceptionality by Race



SECONDARY INDICATORS FOR STUDENTS WITH A BEHAVIOURAL EXCEPTIONALITY

Table 4 shows levels of achievement in secondary indicators for students with a behavioural exceptionality aggregated from Fall 2000 – Fall 2015 using Grade 9 cohort data. The data was aggregated due to low student populations for each individual year. Overall, the table shows that students with a behavioural exceptionality had lower levels of achievement across all indicators.

Table 4: Secondary Indicators for Students with a Behavioural Exceptionality

Levels 3/4 in Grade 9 English		Grade 9 Academic Program of Study		Graduation or 30+ Credits	
All Grade 9 Students (N=283,940)	Grade 9 Students with a Behavioral Exceptionality (N=1,148)	All Grade 9 Students (N=283,987)	Grade 9 Students with a Behavioral Exceptionality (N=1,148)	All Grade 9 Students (N=304,234)	Grade 9 Students with a Behavioral Exceptionality (N=1,195)
54%	18%	72%	11%	68%	26%
Levels 3/4 in Grade 9 Mathematics		Grade 9 Credits (8+)		Post-secondary Confirmations	
All Grade 9 Students (N=283,925)	Grade 9 Students with a Behavioral Exceptionality (N=1,148)	All Grade 9 Students (N=279,097)	Grade 9 Students with a Behavioral Exceptionality (N=1,114)	All Grade 9 Students (N=315,001)	Grade 9 Students with a Behavioral Exceptionality (N=1,239)
48%	16%	79%	26%	53%	11%
Levels 3/4 in Grade 9 Science		Grade 10 OSSLT (Pass)			
All Grade 9 Students (N=265,144)	Grade 9 Students with a Behavioral Exceptionality (N=1,087)	All Grade 9 Students (N=259,641)	Grade 9 Students with a Behavioral Exceptionality (N=895)		
53%	14%	74%	25%		
Levels 3/4 in Grade 9 Geography					
All Grade 9 Students (N=228,962)	Grade 9 Students with a Behavioral Exceptionality (N=960)				
59%	16%				

SUMMARY - DISCUSSION

THE CURRENT PICTURE

The data presented in this report reveal some positive trends within special education across the TDSB, as well as areas where challenges persist. The overall number of students identified with special education needs (SEN) has declined since 2016-17. A decrease in the number of students in most special education identification categories is responsible for this decline. On the other hand, the giftedness and autism exceptionalities increased in number and proportion, while the proportion of students with an IEP Only also increased.

An overview of the number of students in congregated special education classes shows that, in line with the Board's decision to phase out HSP (Special Education Plan, 2020), the number of students in HSP has decreased from over 5,000 in 2016-17 to 0 in 2022-23. Conversely, the number of students in ISP and gifted classrooms has remained fairly stable.

Overall, the number of students in the TDSB that receive a behavioural exceptionality is decreasing. However, data examining the behavioural exceptionality by race shows that since 2008, Black students have primarily been the largest demographic group to receive this exceptionality. This shift has occurred despite the demographic makeup of the overall student population within the TDSB remaining consistent across multiple student census periods- approximately 12% Black and 30% White. An exploration of secondary indicators for students with a behavioural exceptionality also shows that these students experience significantly lower outcomes than the overall Grade 9 student population. Students with behavioural exceptionalities were less likely to achieve 8+ Grade 9 credits, to pass the OSSLT, to have a Grade 9 academic program of study, to achieve a level 3 or 4 in Grade 9 English, mathematics, science and geography, to accumulate 30+ credits for graduation, or to confirm an application to post-secondary. Taken together, these lower secondary indicators suggest inequitable outcomes for students with behavioural exceptionalities. The Board should further examine the behavioural exceptionality to better align with the goals of the TDSB's Multi-Year Strategic Plan (2018) and Special Education Plan 2022-2023 (2022).

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