Toronto
District
School
Board

TDSB Psychological Services, Backlog Wait Lists, 2020-2021: Update

To: Program and School Services Committee

Date: 5 May, 2021

Report No.:   05-21-4086

Strategic Directions

- o   Transform Student Learning
- o   Provide Equity of Access to Learning Opportunities for All Students
- o   Create a culture student and staff well-being

Recommendation

It is recommended that the report on the Psychological Services backlog of wait list be received.

Context

The goal of all psychological staff is to complete assessments quickly and effectively to support students' well-being and learning. Psychology staff deliver a variety of services to students and staff. The majority of their time is devoted to understanding students' strengths and needs through consultations and assessments. The purpose of this report is to provide information regarding TDSB Psychological Services' back log of psychological referrals wait lists.

A wait list is defined as the total number of students waiting for assessment at any given time. It does not describe the length of time needed to complete an assessment. Historically, caseload information has been collected directly from psychological services staff on a monthly basis to enable the monitoring of assessment referrals and ensure accountability for work completion. This report is based on the best effort to reconcile the data from these monthly statistics, across the four Learning Centres.

Assessment referrals are continuously generated through monthly School Support Team (SST) meetings held throughout the academic year; meetings are attended by Principals, Teachers, parents/guardians and a variety of members of Professional Support Services Staff (including Psychologists, Social Workers, and Speech & Language Pathologists).

Wait List and Caseload Data

Depending on the circumstances, students may be seen promptly or placed on a wait list. It is noted that wait list figures do not reflect how long a student has waited for an assessment (i.e., it does not distinguish whether a student was referred on the first or last day of school). The new online database will provide information about response times which will support the identification of strategies to improve the delivery of assessments.

The following are some considerations a psychological referral would stay on the wait list:

- School staff or parent/guardian request that the assessment be delayed.
- The student has made progress and the referral is no longer a priority.
- The school prioritizes new, urgent referrals.
- Parents/Guardians are reluctant to give consent for the assessment.
- Other reasons (e.g., illness, family crisis, out of country, etc.)

Appendices A, B and C chart the wait list data for school years of 2018-2019, 2019-2020 and for the current school year from September 2020-April 2021.

- Appendix A presents the cumulative information as of June 2019 and the second table updates this data to August 2019. The second table includes the summer assessments completed through the additional funding from the Ministry of Education. The first table indicates that in the 2018-2019 academic year, 77.4% of all assessment referrals were resolved by the end of June (67.1% completed and 10.3% removed). The second table, end of August 2019, psychology staff resolved 79.3% of all referrals (68.9% completed and 10.4% removed); 19.6% remained on the wait list.

- Appendix B presents the cumulative information as of June 2020 and the second table updates this data to August 2020. The second table includes the summer assessments completed through additional funding from the Ministry of Education. The 2019-2020 school year was interrupted by the school lockdown in March 2020 as a result of the pandemic. The data reflects the impact the school lockdown from March to June 2020 had on the completion of psychological assessments. The data indicates, regardless of the school lockdown, 74.8% of all referrals were resolved (62.7% completed and 12.1% removed) and 25.5% remained on the wait list.
    - The wait list was 5% more than the previous year which is a direct result of the school lockdown from March 2020 to June 2020.
    - Re-aligning confidentiality and consent in a virtual platform took additional training and information gathering during the sudden school lockdown in March 2020.
    - Some psychological assessments cannot be completed virtually as a result of varying abilities of the child; consistent use of the technology; technological equity and barriers to assessments such as observation of

body language, non-verbal cues that cannot be accurately assessed virtually.

- o Appendix C details the statistical data regarding psychological assessments for the current academic year, up to the end of April 2021. 69% of current referrals (Regular and Gifted) were completed, removed, or were in progress as of end of April, 2021. This decrease in assessments is related to challenges experienced as a result of the pandemic and include:

  - o Late start to the 2020-2021 school year in September 2020.
  - o School closures from January 4, 2021 to February 16, 2021 and the current school closure order as of April 8, 2021.
  - o Staff being unable to safely assess students with high needs who could not wear face masks.
  - o Remote assessment methods were not possible for students who required tactile testing materials or students who did not have access to the necessary technology.
  - o Some families have chosen to wait until their child can be assessed safely at school.
  - o Challenges in trying to complete assessments when student cohorts were quarantined or students were absent from school.

Aligned with TDSB's Multi-year Strategic Plan with the continued focus on anti-oppressive practices psychological staff have provided a variety of supports to meet the learning needs of students, families and staff members during the school closures such as:

- o Professional development for staff and parents on learning strategies;
- o Academic guidance and interventions for students- both in person and in virtual classrooms and the provision of relevant resources.
- o Psychological Services staff have worked collaboratively with Special Education staff by participating on IPRC committees
- o Have engaged in initiatives with Special Education staff and PSS staff to support new and inclusive models that provide learning strategies for all students.

There are a number of factors which have contributed to the wait lists. They are as follows:
- o Prioritization of new referrals over older referrals based on students' needs.
- o Rate of new referrals received in each school.
- o Variability of time taken to complete a referral. While some assessments can be completed relatively quickly, others are complex and require more time.
- o Referrals received in May and June are likely to be carried over to the next school year. There were 1589 referrals carried over to the 2020-2021 school year.
- o Requests to complete assessments without compelling evidence rather than seeking alternative solutions or interventions.
- o Gaps in staffing due to short-term absences and inability to replace staff quickly and effectively.
- o Parents/Guardians are reluctant to give consent for the assessment.
- o Other reasons (e.g., illness, change of schools, out of country, etc.).

Action Plan and Associated Timeline

What is being done to reduce wait lists?

Despite staffing reductions, several strategies are being considered in order to ensure timely service and address the backlog:

- o Consideration of targeted or brief assessments, when appropriate.
- o Consideration for per diem psychological staff that only do Gifted Assessments next year allowing the rest of the staff to concentrate on regular assessments and waitlists.
- o Use staff consultation and intervention skills to address referral concerns without an assessment (APA, NASP, CPA recommendation).
- o Hiring practices—consider timelier and not after school year begins to post jobs; have more permanent postings.
- o Discussion with Special Education about assessment deadlines for DK and gifted.
- o Emphasis on prevention; evidence-based practice in early years to screen, support and intervene potentially preventing an assessment in the future reducing wait lists.
- o Board considerations for on-call short term supply psychologists to replace leaves.
- o Starting in September 2020, a new referral and database system for all Professional Support Services was implemented. This new system allows for the tracking of time intervals between when referrals are received and when service begins; provides information about actual wait times for service, and offers detailed data on the completion time of referrals. We continue to work with our IT department to finalize these tracking priorities.
- o Continue to implement the Action Plans in the TDSB MYSP for Inclusion. Ensure all staff understand the goals in the plan and have the skills required to meet students' needs.
- o Review School Support Teams (SST) and In-School Support Teams (IST) processes to ensure they are utilizing consultative supports from psychological services prior to referrals to assessments.

Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)

Not applicable

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Appendices

- Appendix A: Assessment Statistics from September 2018 to Late August 2019
- Appendix B: Assessment Statistics from September 2019 to Late August 2019
- Appendix C: Assessment Statistics from September 2020 to April 2021 Per Learning Centre
- Appendix D: Wait List Referrals & Time Per Learning Centre
- Appendix E: Pie Graphs of Wait List Referrals & Time Per Learning Centre
- Appendix F: Wait List Referrals Per School Per Learning Centre Excel Chart

From

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Appendix A
Psychological Services: Assessment Statistics
(2018-2019)

Cumulative Statistics for each LC from September 2018 - June 2019

	LC1	LC2	LC3	LC4	Total	Percentage*
Completed/[1] Removed	1738	1643	1228	1701	6310	77.4
In Progress	11	26	13	39	89	1.1
Waiting	518	250	349	639	1756	21.5
Total Referrals	2267	1919	1590	2379	8155	100

Waiting as of end of June: **1756**

Cumulative Statistics for each LC as of August 31, 2019

	LC1	LC2	LC3	LC4	Total	Percentage*
Completed/[2] Removed	1770	1663	1249	1745	6427	79.3
In Progress	11	26	13	39	89	1.1
Waiting	486	230	328	551	1595	19.6
Total Referrals	2267	1919	1590	2335	8111	100

* The calculations for each category were determined on the basis of total referrals

Summary:

Completed to June reporting period	6310
In Progress Cases	89
Completed in July/August 2019 EPO	117

Total Completed/Removed by end August 2019   **6427**
Remaining end of August 2019   **1595**

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[1] [1]*Referrals Completed:* Assessment cases that have been completed or closed (e.g., parents refused assessment, moved out of board, etc.)

[2] Ibid.

Cumulative Statistics for each LC from September 2019-June 2020

	LC1	LC2	LC3	LC4	Total	Percentage*
Completed/[3] Removed	1140	1082	830	1205	**4257**	**68.4**
In Progress	23	18	47	136	**224**	**3.6**
Waiting	461	266	403	617	**1747**	**28**
Total Referrals	1624	1366	1280	1958	**6228**	**100**

Wait list end of June 2020:   **1747**

Cumulative Statistics for each LC as of August 31, 2020

	LC1	LC2	LC3	LC4	Total	Percentage*
Completed/[4] Removed	1183	1188	902	1366	**4639**	**74.5**
In Progress	0	0	0	0	**0**	**0**
Waiting	441	178	378	592	**1589**	**25.5**
Total Referrals	1624	1366	1280	1958	**6228**	**100**

* The calculations for each category were determined on the basis of total referrals

<u>Summary:</u>

Completed to June reporting period	6228
Removed to June 2020	751
In Progress Cases	224
Completed in July/August 2020 EPO *(only in progress assessments)*	382

Total Completed/Removed by end August 2020   **6228**
Wait list end of August 2020   **1589**

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[3] [1]*Referrals Completed:* Assessment cases that have been completed or closed (e.g., parents refused assessment, moved out of board, etc.)

[4] Ibid.

Appendix C
Psychological Services: Recent Assessment Statistics
(As of April 2021)

Referral Statistics Per LC

	LC1	LC2	LC3	LC4	Total	Percentage
Completed/[5] Removed	604	598	515	618	**2335**	**40**
Completed Gifted	297	237	22	380	**936**	**16**
In Progress	142(43)*	160(9)	189(9)	253(67)	**744**	**13**
Waiting	392(82)**	342(60)	383(75)	677(98)	**1794**	**31**
Total Referrals	1435	1337	1109	1928	**5809**	**100**

*Number in bracket indicates Gifted as part of the total
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[1]*Referrals Completed:* Assessment cases that have been completed or closed (e.g., parents refused assessment, moved out of board, etc.)
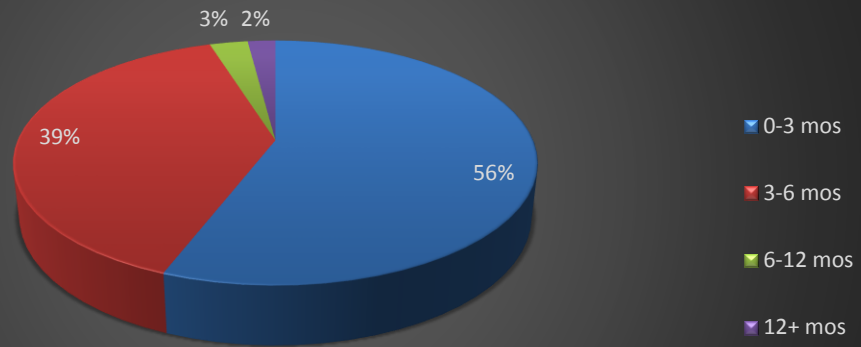
Appendix D
Psychological Services: Wait List Referrals & Wait Time Per Learning Centre (As of April 2021)

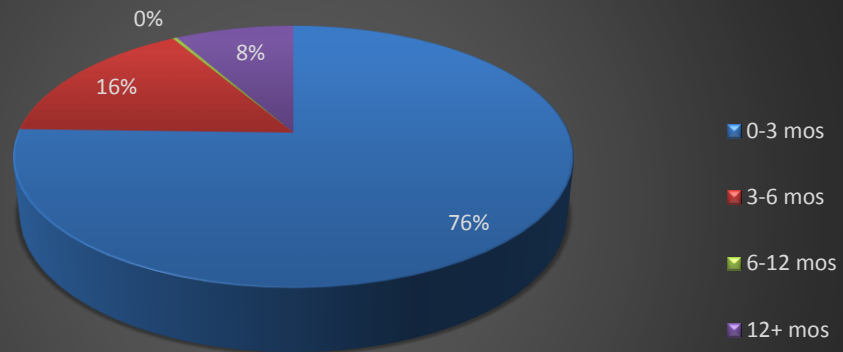|	LC1	LC2	LC3	LC4	Total	Percentage
0-3 Months	219	258	237	298	1012	56
3-6 Months	154	55	46	124	379	21
6-12 Months	11	1	58	33	103	6
12+ Months	8	28	42	222	300	17
	392	342	383	677	1794	100

Appendix E
Psychological Services: Pie Graphs of Wait List Referrals & Time Per Learning Centre (As of April 2021)
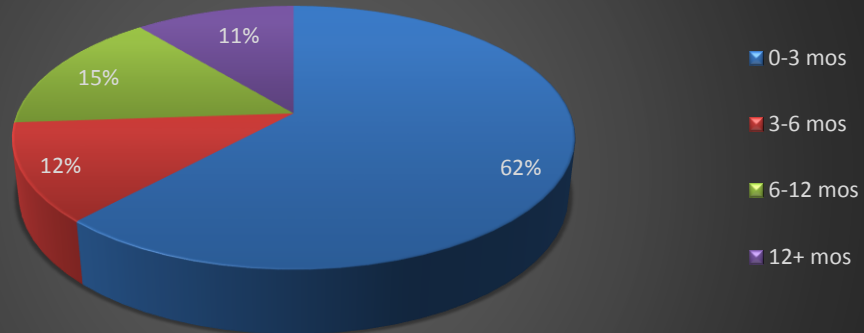

LC 1

- 0-3 mos: 56%
- 3-6 mos: 39%
- 6-12 mos: 3%
- 12+ mos: 2%

LC2

- 0-3 mos: 76%
- 3-6 mos: 16%
- 6-12 mos: 0%
- 12+ mos: 8%

LC3

- 0-3 mos: 62%
- 3-6 mos: 12%
- 6-12 mos: 15%
- 12+ mos: 11%