**English Demonstration Schools Discussion Paper & Survey Questions**

The ministry is consulting with our education and community partners to explore ways to provide a range of quality programs and services that best meet the needs of students served by English demonstration schools. This paper is intended to provide some background information on English demonstration schools for those who will be participating in the ministry’s consultation sessions and/or providing feedback through the online survey.

**INTRODUCTION**

In 2014, Ontario released its renewed goals for education in *Achieving Excellence*. These goals build on the education system's priorities and reach deeper and broader, raising expectations for the system and the potential of our children and students.

The four renewed goals for education are:

* [**Achieving Excellence**](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/great.html)**:** Children and students of all ages will achieve high levels of academic performance, acquire valuable skills and demonstrate good citizenship. Educators will be supported in learning continuously and will be recognized as among the best in the world.
* [**Ensuring Equity**](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/equity.html)**:** All children and students will be inspired to reach their full potential, with access to rich learning experiences that begin at birth and continue into adulthood.
* [**Promoting Well-Being**](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/wellBeing.html)**:** All children and students will develop enhanced mental and physical health, a positive sense of self and belonging, and the skills to make positive choices.
* [**Enhancing Public Confidence**](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/confidence.html): Ontarians will continue to have confidence in a publicly funded education system that helps develop new generations of confident, capable and caring citizens.

These four goals are interconnected – success in one contributes to success in the others. In this context, Ontario is launching a consultation with students, families and education and community partners to explore how programs and services for students at provincial and demonstration schools can evolve to best support them so they can develop the knowledge, skills and characteristics to be personally successful, productive and actively engaged citizens.

**PROVINCIAL AND DEMONSTRATION SCHOOL HISTORY**

Provincial and demonstration schools in Ontario provide education programs and services for children and students with special education needs who require intensive supports – Deaf or hard of hearing, deafblind, blind or have low vision or have severe learning disabilities (LDs). Schools for the Deaf have a long history in the province:

* Sir James Whitney School for the Deaf in Belleville opened in 1870
* Ernest C. Drury School for the Deaf in Milton opened 1963
* Robarts School for the Deaf in London opened 1974
* Centre Jules-Léger (CJL) in Ottawa added programs and services for the Deaf or hard of hearing in&n1986 to serve the needs of the Francophone population.
* Specialized programs for students from K-12 who are blind or have low vision and deafblind are provided at W. Ross Macdonald School for the Blind in Brantford which opened in 1872.

The opening of demonstration schools occurred around the same time that Bill 82 made amendments to the Education Act. Prior to the enactment of Bill 82, children with disabilities were often excluded from Ontario’s school system. The changes gave all students access to publicly funded education and required school boards to ensure special education programs and services were in place for exceptional students. Demonstration schools were originally established to provide a one year residential education program for students with severe learning disabilities, to provide students with sufficient skills and learning strategies to be able to return to local school board programs, and to provide in-service teacher education programs in instructional techniques for students with learning disabilities to build capacity in school boards to serve these students. These schools are located at the same sites as the provincial schools for the Deaf and include:

* Sagonaska School in Belleville, opened in 1982
* Trillium School in Milton, opened in 1979
* Amethyst School in London, opened in 1982
* CJL in Ottawa, opened its demonstration school in 1979 for students with severe learning disabilities under the stewardship of the University of Ottawa.

**KEY FACTS**

* **Current enrolment:** Currently, approximately 425 students attend the five provincial schools and 153 students attend four demonstration schools across Ontario.
* **Programs in School Boards:** There is growing evidence that students with LDs can be successfully supported in district school boards. These include developments in research, technology, pedagogical perspectives (e.g., *Learning for All, Kindergarten to Grade 12*) and school board’s improved ability to meet the needs of these students.
* In August 2014, the Ministry of Education issued [Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) 8 *Identification and Program Planning for Students with Learning Disabilities*](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/ppm8.pdf). The PPM promotes consistent practice across the province that are research-informed and evidence-based in the identification and program planning for students with learning disabilities. Examining the role of demonstration schools at this time is appropriate given our evolving understanding of how best to serve the needs of students with learning disabilities.

**Purpose of the Consultation**

The purpose of this consultation is to identify effective programs, practices and services for students attending both schools at Centre Jules-Léger, Robarts School for the Deaf and the English Demonstration Schools.

**Out of Scope**

The other schools for the Deaf (EC Drury School for the Deaf, Sir James Whitney School for the Deaf) and the W. Ross Macdonald School for the Blind are not being included at this time.

**Principles to Guide this Consultation:**

* Ontario is committed to the success and well-being of every child and student to achieve high levels of academic performance, acquire valuable skills to become personally successful and demonstrate engaged, good citizenship.
* There should be a range of education choices supported by early intervention.
* Provincial funding is allocated to support an evidence-based and quality delivery model for programs and services that meet student needs.
* Provision of elementary and secondary French-language education is supported.
* Resources are focused on ensuring the best outcomes for student achievement and well-being in the context of declining enrolment.

**English Demonstration Schools Survey Questions**

Consultation participants are asked to consider the following discussion questions:

* What knowledge and skills do English demonstration school students need to have when they leave school?
* What are the best ways to prepare demonstration school students to enter the workforce, post-secondary education or other pathways and become productive and actively engaged citizens?
* Moving forward, what programs and services would provide a positive school experience for demonstration school students and their families?
* Do you have any further comments you would like to add?

**English-Language Provincial Demonstration Schools** [**Survey**](https://canview2.opinioninsight.com/survey/html.pro?ID=298&pcid=1)

**BACKGROUND: ENGLISH DEMONSTRATION SCHOOLS**

The Ministry of Education’s Provincial Schools Branch (PSB) operates three English demonstration schools: Sagonaska School in Belleville, Trillium School in Milton and Amethyst School in London. Each demonstration school shares a site with a school for the Deaf. Demonstration schools were introduced in 1979 to support students with severe learning disabilities (LD) through a short-term residential program, and to build system capacity to teach students with learning disabilities. Students between the ages of 6 and 21 can attend demonstration schools. Enrolment is capped at 40 students per school per school year.

For 2015-16, each English demonstration school has the capacity to serve approximately 150 (Sagonaska), 105 (Trillium) and 145 (Amethyst) students. Staff members consist of 27 at Sagonaska, 30 at Trillium and 29 at Amethyst.

**Admissions Criteria**

Admission criteria outlined in [Policy/Program Memorandum 89](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/89.html) includes the following:

* because of the nature of the learning disability and/or other factors, the student is in need of a residential education program;
* the student has a severe learning disability;
* a psychologist or other mental health professional has determined the student is **not** in need of treatment for emotional or behavioural disorders;
* an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) has recommended to the school board that the student be placed in a demonstration school; and
* the student has been assessed by a resource services consultant from a demonstration school.

The demonstration school program is designed to be a one-year program. Historically, if there are not enough first year students to make up the full student cohort, admission for a second year is offered to existing students who would benefit from continued intervention. For 2015-16, for example, approximately one third to one half of demonstration school students returned for a second year.

**Student Population**

For 2015-16, student enrolment for English demonstration schools is 39 students at Sagonaska, 37 at Trillium and 38 at Amethyst. The number of students that each  residence can serve is 54 at Sagonaska, 61 at Trillium and 130 at Amethyst (which includes Robarts School for the Deaf).

**Residences**

The residence program provides a structured and organized setting that encourages students to take responsibility for their environment. In this setting, the daily school program is supported in two ways; structured homework periods and social skills training.

Homework, when completed under residential supervision, is an effective reinforcing tool for students with learning disabilities. Students are assigned regular homework to reinforce organizational skills and good work habits. Counselors assist and monitor students' homework, providing assistance as needed.

An equally significant component of the residence program is the development of appropriate social behaviour through social skills training. The student’s social skills and identified needs are used to design individual programs for students.

**Programs and Services**

The demonstration schools provide educational programs for approximately 120 students. All students have average to above average potential. In addition to meeting the criteria for a severe learning disability through a formal professional assessment, they display some, or all, of the following characteristics:

* Difficulty with receptive and expressive language
* Poor sequencing, discrimination, coordination, organizational and spatial skills
* Auditory and/or visual memory problems
* Focusing difficulties

Specialized programs are provided for students with severe learning disabilities who may or may not also have an attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Since demonstration schools are designed to serve as a resource to school boards, rather than to function as a separate education system, every effort is made to help the student return as soon as possible to an appropriate program in his/her local community. Transition plans are prepared and follow-up is provided for students when they return to their home school boards.

With respect to the demonstration school programming, all admitted students undergo an educational assessment and an intervention plan is developed focusing on strategies to address their severe learning disabilities. Services in the areas of speech-pathology, psychology and social work are available and educational assistants are on staff to support educational interventions. Staff regularly participates in professional development activities to maintain currency in latest intervention strategies.

The program was designed to take advantage of research informed rehabilitative interventions. Special education materials specific to students’ needs are developed and students have access to computers, innovative technology and work areas.

**Ontario School Boards’ Programs and Services for Students with Learning Disabilities**

Students with learning disabilities (LDs) represent the largest exceptionality group in Ontario. During the 2013-14 school year, students with LDs represented approximately 76,000 (25%) of all students identified by an Identification Placement Review Committee (IPRC). It is reasonable to approximate that many students among the 151,820 who are receiving special education programs and services and are not identified by an IPRC, may also have learning disabilities.

In 2014, the Ministry of Education released the revised [*Policy/Program Memorandum No. 8 (PPM 8): Identification of and Program Planning for Students with Learning Disabilities*](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/ppm8.pdf) that defines learning disability as one of a number of neurodevelopmental disorders that persistently and significantly has an impact on the ability to learn and use academic and other skills and that:

* affect the ability to perceive or process verbal or non-verbal information in an effective and accurate manner in students who have assessed intellectual abilities that are at least in the average range;
* result in (a) academic underachievement that is inconsistent with the intellectual abilities of the student (which are at least in the average range) and/or (b) academic achievement that can be maintained by the student only with extremely high levels of effort and/or with additional support;
* result in difficulties in the development and use of skills in one or more of the following areas: reading, writing, mathematics, and work habits and learning skills;
* may typically be associated with difficulties in one or more cognitive processes, such as phonological processing; memory and attention; processing speed; perceptual-motor processing; visual-spatial processing; executive functions (e.g., self-regulation of behaviour and emotions, planning, organizing of thoughts and activities, prioritizing, decision making);
* may be associated with difficulties in social interaction (e.g., difficulty in understanding social norms or the point of view of others); with various other conditions or disorders, diagnosed or undiagnosed; or with other exceptionalities;
* is not the result of a lack of acuity in hearing and/or vision that has not been corrected; intellectual disabilities; socio-economic factors; cultural differences; lack of proficiency in the language of instruction; lack of motivation or effort; gaps in school attendance or inadequate opportunity to benefit from instruction.

**Placement decisions and options**

An IPRC applies the above definition to their identification and placement decisions about students with LDs. The regulation governing the identification and placement of exceptional pupils directs the IPRC to consider integrating exceptional pupils into regular classes. Before considering placing a student in a special education class, the committee must first consider whether placement in a regular class, with appropriate special education programs and services, would meet the student's needs and the parent's preferences.

In Ontario school boards, a range of placement settings are offered to students with LDs. The majority of these students are placed in regular classrooms for more than half of the instructional day, receiving indirect support, resource assistance or withdrawal assistance. Some school boards have special education classes for students with LDs, where their attendance varies from halftime to fulltime.

**Intervention strategies and assistive technology**

School boards, schools and educators may use intervention strategies to support students with learning disabilities through a tiered approach, in which high-quality, evidence-based assessment and instruction are provided and respond to an individual student’s strengths and needs. Applying the principles of Universal Design for Learning and differentiated instruction, personalized and precise learning and teaching strategies are implemented to match the unique learning profiles of students with LDs.

Most students with LDs follow the Ontario curriculum, with some accommodations, as needed. For example, as hardware and software advance and are more widely available, educators, students and parents improve their knowledge and skills using technology. Assistive technology is extensively used to support students with LDs. The ministry’s Special Equipment Amount (SEA) application process allows school boards to purchase hardware, software and related training for their staff and students to use assistive technology. The technology varies and is personalized depending on the needs of the student. Tablets, recording devices, and computers are examples of the hardware used by school boards.Text-to-speech or speech-to-text and organizational software may be used to maximize students with LDs access to the curriculum.

**Practices, resource sharing and professional development**

Teams of professionals in school boards work to support students with LDs. These professionals may include classroom teachers, resource teachers, educational assistants and other professionals, as necessary. As the field of LDs is consistently evolving, the ministry and school boards recognize parents’ concerns about building educator capacity. They work with key partners representing parents of students with LDs to develop and share resources, and provide professional learning opportunities for educators online and/or face to face. These resources reflect current research in LDs and promote evidence-based practices to identify, assess and plan programs across the province.

School boards continue to implement practices guided by research and evidence to support students with LDs through a range of professional learning for educators. In addition, community organizations have developed programming to help educators to better support students with LDs. For example, the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) has developed educator resources, including the websites LD@school and TA@l'école. The organization also holds an annual summer institute for educators and has regional chapters that support students and families.