

Ministry of Education

Special Education Policy
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Ministère de l'Éducation

Direction des politiques et des
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MEMORANDUM TO: Directors of Education
Supervisory Officers and
Secretary-Treasurers of School Authorities
Director of Provincial and Demonstration Schools
Supervisory Officer of Centre Jules-Léger

FROM: Barry Finlay
Director
Special Education Policy and Programs Branch

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Regional Office Manager
X Regional Office

DATE: January 26, 2009

SUBJECT: **Special Education Policy and Programs Branch Initiatives**

The purpose of this memo is to notify you about three initiatives beginning January 2009 from the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch, namely, a survey on assessment methods, review of funding processes and support for the recommended professional activity day dedicated to special education and closing the gap strategies.

Survey on Assessment Methods

As you know, one of the Ministry of Education's core priorities is improving the achievement of all students, including students with special education needs. To further support this, we will be distributing an electronic survey to all school boards to gather specific information on current methods used by school boards to assess the achievement of the very few numbers of students who are in programs where none of the student's learning expectations are derived from the Ontario curriculum. These students would therefore be exempt from all standardized provincial assessments (i.e., EQAO, grade 3 reading, writing and mathematics, grade 6 reading, writing and mathematics, grade 9 mathematics and OSSLT).

In January, the survey will be sent directly to the Superintendent responsible for special education services, unless you designate someone else and notify the special education lead in your regional office by Wednesday January 28, 2009. Only one completed electronic survey should be submitted from each board.

The completed survey must be submitted by Friday February 13, 2009. The responses will be collated and provincial feedback will be provided to school boards.

Attached to this memo is a PDF version of the survey questions that can be reviewed prior to online completion of the electronic survey.

Review of Funding Processes

This year, we will also be conducting a review of the Special Incidence Portion (SIP) and the Special Equipment Amount (SEA) allocations of the Ministry of Education's Special Education Grant (SEG). This review will assess the effectiveness of these funding models to support students with special education needs. It will include onsite visits to provide a better understanding of supports required by students for whom SIP and SEA funding claims were submitted by school boards. The review will also inform an understanding of how some school boards serve their highest needs students without accessing the SIP allocation and will provide an understanding of the growth in demand in these two areas.

Phase one of the review will be conducted during January and February 2009, when twelve school boards will be reviewed. School boards have been identified for review through a statistical analysis of SIP and SEA data and taking into consideration regional representation as well as participation from all school systems. School boards identified for review will be notified later this month.

Phase two of the review will be conducted during March and April 2009 and phase three, if required, may be conducted in May and early June 2009, with the possibility of it extending into the 2009-10 school year. A summary of findings will be shared with all boards following phase two of the review.

Special Education Professional Activity Day (Winter/Spring 2008/2009 School Year)

As you are aware, the Ministry of Education is committed to supporting school boards with the implementation of the recommended professional activity day dedicated to special education and closing the gap strategies. As part of this commitment we are pleased to advise you that resources, including a series of presentations, have been designed and will be made available to you by the end of January 2009 on the following website: <http://www.ontariodirectors.ca>. Opportunities for feedback regarding the usefulness of these resources will be provided on the website.

Classroom teachers are the key educators of all students and for those students who have special education needs. Classroom teachers have a responsibility to help all students learn, and they work collaboratively with special education teachers, and others where appropriate, to achieve this goal. Effective instruction begins with an understanding of students' learning strengths and motivational needs, both collectively as a classroom unit and as individual students. *Education for All: The Expert Panel Report on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students with Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6 (2005)* describes this key step as "knowing your students". This theme is explored further, and, is key to the implementation of the *Learning for All K-12* resource document scheduled for release late spring 2009.

Resources that will be posted on the above web-site build on the theme “Knowing Your Students” and are designed to support educators who work with all students and those students who may require an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

A sequential series of four slide decks will be available that build towards the implementation of the *Learning for All K – 12* resource document and can be used as resources to support professional learning. A brief description of the slide decks follows:

Slide Deck No. 1-Knowing Your Student

This deck provides the framework for the theme “Knowing Your Students”. It introduces *Learning for All K – 12* and its link to *Education for All K – 6* and provides a workshop framework that begins to unpack the theme of “Knowing Your Students” that promotes discussion and dialogue among educators. This process will help to establish a process for individual and collective planning on “Knowing Your Students” to improve student engagement and effect positive change in student learning.

Slide Deck No. 2-Individual Education Plans (IEPs) 101

This deck provides an overview of the process for developing effective IEPs. All of the components of the IEP are discussed. Links to other resource documents and websites are included.

Slide Deck No. 3-Developing More Effective IEPs

This deck takes the information garnered from the Provincial IEP Collaborative Review to share ways on how to improve IEPs. There is an emphasis on the program section of the IEP to demonstrate how to make the learning expectations in the IEP ‘measurable and observable.’ Links to other resource documents and websites are included.

Slide Deck No. 4-Collaborating for Better IEPs

This deck looks at the components of the IEP through the lens of collaboration. Each step in the development of the IEP has opportunities and challenges in collaborating with a number of individuals/groups in schools, school boards and beyond with families and the community. Links to other resource documents and websites are included.

These decks are designed to be used in whole, in part, or in combination with school board resources to meet your learning needs. Professional activity day facilitators may use these resources to lead discussions or activities at the system or school level to reflect upon or enhance current practices to meet the needs of all students including, those students with special education needs. Slide decks No. 1, 2 and 4 are designed to be used for half day workshops and Slide Deck No. 3 can be used in its entirety, for a full day workshop. The slide decks have components that are appropriate for both the elementary and secondary panels.

Since fall 2008, school boards have been accessing sample IEPs regularly on the above noted web-site. Additional IEP samples and supporting resources will continue to be posted on the

web-site. These resources continue to support the Ministry's special education strategic goals within the student achievement agenda including:

- Improving the outcomes for students receiving special education programs and services;
- Increasing the capacity for schools to effectively meet the needs of a variety of learners in settings ranging from regular to self-contained classrooms;
- Ensuring that programming in the IEP is linked to the Ontario curriculum and the Provincial Report Card;
- Improving the balance between a focus on teaching and learning, and the need for appropriate process, documentation and accountability; and
- Closing the gap.

The Ministry of Education is committed to improving the outcomes for students with special education needs and believes that a professional development day related to special education will continue to help close the gap in achievement for these students.

If you have any questions about any of these initiatives, please speak to the special education lead in your regional office.

Thank you for your on-going work to support students with special education needs.

Original signed by

Barry Finlay

Regional Office Manager

Attachment