

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION SPECIAL EDUCATION UPDATE

October 2008

This update includes key activities from the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch led by Barry Finlay, Director.

KEY SPECIAL EDUCATION INITIATIVES

Education for All/Learning for All K – 12

As a result of the education sector's overwhelmingly positive response to the strategies and direction found within *Education for All: The report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students with Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6* in 2005, a request for a resource document to include all learners was proposed.

In addition, the Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE) responded to the release of the expert panel report by recommending that the Ministry continue to work to extend the principles of the report. They also resolved that it was an important first step in special education. MACSE further highlighted the applicability of the principles in the expert panel report to all students and teachers regardless of ability and grade level.

These sentiments and support for the direction of the expert panel report have been echoed throughout both the elementary and secondary panels, and have given the Ministry direction to expand on the recommendations of the report and make them truly for all.

Through a series of field consultations sessions, conducted in May and June 2008, with school teams, various stakeholders and intra-ministerial staff, feedback was gathered and inputted into a working draft document of Education for All/Learning for All K – 12. Working with a team of writers from the education field and building upon the principles from the Expert Panel report, the draft document is expected to be released in January 2009.

Special Education Funding

The 2008-09 total increase of \$57.3M to the Special Education Grant (SEG) will extend the transitional funding levels for the High Needs Amount (HNA) to ensure that no board receives less HNA funding in 2008-09 than it received in 2007-08; and that enrolment-growth boards receive an increase in HNA funding.

The funding increase will also support the number of education programs for school-aged children/youth in Government- approved care and/or treatment, custody, and correctional facilities (Facilities Amount / FA; programs are inter-ministerial).

This funding enhancement is the first instalment of the Government's commitment to increase special education funding by 8 per cent by 2011-12. The Ministry is continuing to introduce reforms that will help support better outcomes for children with special needs, including those with ASD.

The Ministry has invested \$17 million, through targeted funding outside the Grants for Student Needs (GSN), in 2006 – 2008 to build capacity and improve the learning environment for students with ASD, including:

- \$5M for Geneva Centre for Autism to train Teachers' Assistants (2006);
- \$1M for Geneva Centre for Autism to provide principal training (August 2007);
- \$3M for school team training (August 20-23, 2007);
- \$4M to DSBs to further school teams' ABA training (2007/08);
- \$2M for Collaborative Service Delivery Models for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (2007/08); and
- \$2M for Geneva (4th Q Investment in March 2008)

The Ministry continues to implement the recommendations of the Working Table on Special Education by reviewing and refining the components of the grant. The Ministry will continue to consult with stakeholders to ensure that the evolution of the funding approach:

- supports students with special education needs,
- improves student outcomes, and places less emphasis on the identification process for students with special education needs.

School Board Special Education Plans

School boards and school authorities will be required to report amendments only for their 2009 Special Education Plans. The Ministry is continuing to work on a process to align the improvement planning and reporting processes for the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Student Success/ Learning to 18, and Special Education Plans. These branches will work to align board improvement planning processes.

During the 2007-08 school year, the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch and Strategic Planning Branch investigated various methods to measure achievement and learning for students with special education needs who are in alternative programs. This investigation will continue with stakeholder involvement in the 2008-09 school year. In the interim, special education plans will continue to be amended annually.

Individual Education Plan (IEP) Initiative

In follow up to a collaborative review conducted during the 2006-07 school year, each school board received a detailed individual report in June 2007 that provided feedback on the IEPs they submitted for review. As well all school boards received a report on the provincial common trends.

At the request of school boards during the IEP collaborative review, a voluntary web-based IEP template was developed by the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch, working collaboratively with the Technology and Business Solutions Branch and made available to school boards September 2007.

Training sessions on the use of the template were conducted via teleconference after deployment. Additional training has been provided to boards upon their request. Improvements to the template are ongoing and based on feedback from the users.

Six school boards (including one school authority and provincial and demonstration school) have agreed to pilot the template and provide ongoing feedback on its regular use from December 2007 to June 2009.

The Ministry is in the process of developing a 'read-only' version of the template to be made available to parents by boards. As well, the Ministry is developing a version for the Faculties of Education for the purpose of teacher training. Access to both will be made available shortly.

As part of the ministry's continuing effort to support the development and implementation of effective IEPs and to complement those found in the *Individual Education Plan (IEP) Resource Guide (2004)* samples have been developed. These samples have been developed by writing teams from across the province. The teams used ministry policy and resource documents, the results of the Provincial IEP Collaborative Review (2006/07) and IEP samples provided by school boards and stakeholder groups in June 2008 to inform their work. These sample IEPs available for both the elementary and secondary panels are intended to be a resource to all staff involved in the development and implementation of the IEP.

The samples are written using the provincial electronic IEP template and are being posted on the CODE website, the Ontario Education Resource Bank and the Electronic IEP Template. Additional IEP samples will be made available at a later date.

The samples may be viewed at:

<http://www.ontariodirectors.ca/IEP-PEI/index.html>

On-line Support for Parents and Students in the Development of the IEP

Funding has been provided to the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) to work collaboratively with the Ministry of Education and parents across the province to develop a website that will be a resource to parents and students regarding their consultative role in the development and implementation of the IEP.

The LDAO has established a provincial advisory committee that is representing perspectives of a range of stakeholders to inform the project development. The website is being designed to reflect the needs of both the English and French-language parents and students.

The project commenced January 2008 and will be completed by March 31, 2009.

Dispute Resolution for Special Education Programs and Services

Following recommendations made by the Working Table on Special Education, the resource guide entitled *Shared Solutions: A Guide to Preventing and Resolving Conflicts Regarding Programs and Services for Students With Special Education Needs* was released in October 2007 after extensive consultation with stakeholders. To support the release of the guide, professional development sessions were held throughout the province. Educators, administrators, SEAC members and representatives from the Parent Involvement School Board Committees as well as representatives from community agencies attended the professional development sessions. *Shared Solutions* can be accessed at: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/shared.html> and is also available to be ordered in hard copy from Publications Ontario at www.publications.serviceontario.ca. Additional actions are being explored to further support the release of the guide.

The Provincial Advisory Committee on Formal Dispute Resolution Regarding Programs and Services is co-chaired by Alison Morse, representing parents, and Jean-Luc Bernard, representing educators, and has been meeting since April 2007 to provide advice to the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch on formal processes to resolve disputes arising from special education programs and services and the design of a pilot for these processes in selected school boards. The Committee's mandate has been extended and will conclude once the pilot is completed in June 2009.

Six school boards were selected to participate in the pilot (4 English and 2 French). The pilot boards developed implementation plans following a meeting with Ministry staff in October 2007. Implementation plans from the six selected school boards have been approved, and the selected boards will begin piloting dispute resolution processes. The pilot will run until the end of the 2008-2009 school year. In the spring, the Ministry held a face-to-face meeting with

participating school boards and staff from the regional office. This meeting provided an opportunity for school boards to share their experiences in implementing the pilot project. In addition, the Ministry holds monthly teleconferences with each board. Some of the participating boards presented their pilot projects at the most recent meeting of the Ontario Council of Administrators in Special Education.

A researcher has been hired to evaluate the effectiveness of the formal dispute resolution processes in dealing with issues related to special education programs and services offered to students with special education needs. A survey has been sent to school boards to assist in developing a data baseline from which to measure the effectiveness of the pilot. Also a parent survey has been drafted and distributed to school boards. Surveys are available for parents to complete once they have been through a dispute resolution process. A similar survey is being developed for mediators and facilitators. A face-to-face meeting is being planned for late fall with participating school boards to share effective practices and challenges. Finally, a meeting of the Provincial Advisory Committee is also scheduled for late Fall.

Special Education Program and Financial Review

To date, Phase One and Two reviews have been completed in 11 district school boards (ten English and one French-language). The Assistant Deputy Minister has met with the five Directors of Education involved in Phase One of the review to discuss their involvement in the project. The Minister of Education has received a report outlining the provincial trends that were identified by the school boards reviewed that included successful practices and challenges. A decision regarding a Phase Three of the project, to include additional district school boards, is pending.

Special Education Project - Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE)

The Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) was given \$25 million in each of the 2005/06 and 2006/07 school years to work in partnership with the Ministry of Education and collaboratively with Ontario's school boards to implement Education for All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students with Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6 (2005). The goal of the project was to improve student achievement for students with special education needs and to enhance the capacity of classroom teachers to implement effective instructional strategies to assist all students. CODE was provided with funding in 2007/08 to leverage the program gains made in the previous two years and to ensure the sustainability of new approaches to teaching and learning as demonstrated through these projects.

As part of the final year of the project, CODE will host a CODE Education for All

Leadership Summit that will be held in Toronto on November 17 and 18, 2008. The focus of the Summit will be to bring together district school board staff from across the province to share strategies and results of their work over the past three years. The Summit will feature interactive workshops and displays as well as facilitated opportunities for participants to identify actions to embed the learning generated through the projects.

A full report of the project outcomes for the first two years of the project is available on the CODE website at: <http://www.ontariodirectors.ca/> and will be showcased at a symposium this November.

Ministry Response to the Reference Group on ASD

The government has taken action on all but 5 of the 34 recommendations. The remaining 5 have policy implications, collective agreement implications, or are beyond EDU's area of responsibility. However, EDU is working with other ministries as appropriate. *(Please see attached chart, Government Action on Implementation of Recommendations from the Report of the Ministers' ASD Reference Group.)*

The Ministry funded and provided training in partnership with Geneva Centre for Autism to support implementation, beginning in the 2007/08 school year, of PPM No. 140, *Incorporating Methods of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) into Programs for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)*. Training opportunities were provided for school board teams, principals, and school teams. The Ministry is continuing to provide funding to school boards to support training opportunities for school teams. This summer approximately 1,500 more educators received training including principals, teachers, and teachers' assistants from school board teams, with a particular emphasis on teachers to provide ABA instructional methods in the classroom.

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services are supporting Phase 1 of Collaborative Service Delivery Models (CSDM) for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders in seven sites involving eight school boards, relevant community agencies, and parents in 2007-08 and 2008-09. The models are focusing on:

- Harmonizing Transitions – transition of student information protocol (pre-school to school; primary to secondary); seamless transitions;
- Transitioning Together – grade to grade; semester to semester;
- Individual Student Support Teams for Students with ASD – to collaboratively assess, plan for, and implement strategies to enable students with ASD to be successful in school and in the community;
- Parent Engagement in Diverse Communities;
- Integrating Students with High-Functioning ASD in the Classroom;
- Transitions – primary to junior; intermediate to secondary; and
- Data Collection and Behavioural Intervention Plan – for individual students

with ASD who are struggling.

The eight school boards met with the Provincial Advisory Team, regional office staff from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and staff from EDU Special Education Policy and Programs Branch and MCYS Specialized Services and Supports Branch on September 24, 2008.

The Research Evaluation Team working with the selected boards to identify the research design that meets the needs of each model submitted a preliminary report to the Ministry in August 2008.

Collaborative Service Delivery Models for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders Phase 2 is in the planning stages. Phase 2 is expected to focus upon the transition process for school-aged children who are ready to make the transition to Applied Behaviour Analysis instructional methods provided by educators in school from Intensive Behavioural Intervention delivered by therapists through the MCYS Autism Intervention Program.

The Ministry will provide funding to school boards to support the hiring of ABA expertise in school boards to facilitate transition programs and build capacity for delivery of ABA.

Work is underway to develop a process for the posting on the ministry website of relevant, evidence-based effective practices for students with ASD. The work that is underway is committed to ensuring that the information contained in the website is relevant, accessible, user friendly and meets the needs of educators.

As required by PPM 140, the ministry developed a process to monitor school boards' implementation of applied behaviour analysis (ABA) instructional methods by school boards. For this first monitoring process, all school boards were asked to randomly select 15% of their schools, a combination of elementary and secondary, to complete a school snapshot self-assessment survey on implementation of PPM 140 as at March 1, 2008. This snapshot survey generated a provincial profile on implementation by schools boards that was shared with MACSE and those members of the former Ministers' Autism Spectrum Disorders Reference Group who wish to be involved, at the June 2008 MACSE meeting. MACSE and members of the ASD Reference Group will be consulted on survey process at the February 2009 MACSE meeting.

Training for Teachers' Assistants (TA) who work with Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

In 2006, the government invested \$5 million through Geneva Centre for Autism to provide training for Teachers' Assistants who work or may work with students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Geneva Centre for Autism has established a Project Advisory Group comprised of researchers, practitioners and

key stakeholders to inform the development, implementation, evaluation and public reporting.

It was expected that the funds would be used by Geneva Centre for Autism to design and deliver a training program to up to 5,000 Teachers' Assistants in Ontario who work or may potentially work with students with an ASD. The project was expected to be completed in 2 years (2006-2007, 2007-2008). To date, 7,400 Teachers' Assistants have been trained. In May 2008, Geneva Centre for Autism announced that the current funding will allow training to be extended to at least June 2009. The training includes components for sustainability that will go beyond the planned two years of the project, such as on-line resources for TAs, teachers and administrators.

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and Geneva Centre for Autism work collaboratively on this initiative to ensure that this training initiative compliments and does not duplicate any services provided by the *School Support Program - Autism Spectrum Disorder*, funded by MCYS.

The Student Assessment Project: Kindergarten to Grade 4 - The Ontario Psychological Association (OPA)

The Ministry of Education provided \$20 million to the Ontario Psychological Association (OPA) to reduce current waiting times for students who require assessments and to enhance teachers' capacity to provide effective programs, based on assessment information, for students in Junior Kindergarten to Grade 4. School boards determined their professional assessment needs, along with classroom-based assessment, which may have included: psychological, speech language and occupational therapy. Although the project completion date was scheduled for August 31, 2008, projects are being extended to August 31, 2009.

The OPA established a provincial advisory group that includes: educators; psychologists; occupational therapists; speech/language pathologists; educators; and ministry staff to inform the project work and to develop recommendations to the ministry.

Project results, *Summary of Key Result Areas – Critical Findings*, are posted on the OPA website. Along with this report, *A Promising Practices Guide*, that notes sustainable gains from all of the 75 projects, highlighting 12 in depth, was shared at a provincial conference, *Sharing Promising Practices*, October 15, 2008. MACSE sent four delegates to this conference

Abstracts of all of the 75 projects are also posted on the OPA website.
<http://www.psych.on.ca/?id1=117>

Resource Guide for Elementary Classroom Teachers (Kindergarten to Grade 3) - Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (OSLA)

Since May 2007, the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch has been working with the Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (OSLA) to develop a comprehensive resource guide for elementary classroom teachers (Kindergarten to Grade 3). The resource guide will contain evidence-based and curriculum focused differentiated teaching strategies for improving the academic performances of all students but essentially supportive for students with oral language needs.

The Core Project team (CPT) is comprised of both English and French-language Speech-Language Pathologists. In addition, a Provincial Advisory Team (PAT) was formed with both English and French-language representatives to provide feedback and advice to the CPT on a regular basis. The PAT consists of Speech-Language Pathologists, a Special Education Coordinator and Education Officers. At the advice of the PAT, a Teacher Focus Group comprised of K – Grade 3 teachers, English and French from across the province was formed to review and provide feedback on the resource guide throughout its development. It is anticipated that the resource guide will be available in both English and French, and distributed to all school boards in early 2009.

Web Based Teaching Tool (WBTT)

The Web Based Teaching Tool (WBTT) is administered by the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO), with funding from the Ministry of Education. The WBTT provides teachers with early screening tools and intervention strategies to help detect students in JK through Grade 2 who may be struggling with learning and thus may be at risk for later school difficulties.

As of June 2008, the WBTT was being used by 1453 teachers in English language schools and 1021 teachers in French language schools across 51 Ontario school boards and 25 school authorities. During 2007-08, approximately 30,000 students were screened using WBTT leading to the initiation of about 12,000 (remedial) interventions of which about 6000 were reported as completed.

Data from the 2006-2007 evaluation demonstrated a strong link between WBTT use by a teacher and the activation of supports for students who are struggling. Students in JK and SK were twice as likely to receive extra support/resources when compared to students who have not been screened through the WBTT program.

A WBTT School Administrator Site (SAS) has been developed and is being implemented provincially this fall. At the request of participating school boards, WBTT staff and the ministry are continuing to explore ways of integrating WBTT

data with other student data (e.g. OnSIS, EQAO, report cards, etc).

Research into Inclusive Education Practices in Secondary Schools

Funding is being provided to Integration Action for Inclusion in Education and Community to work collaboratively with the Ministry of Education and selected school boards to study and document successful practices for the inclusion of students with disabilities in all aspects of their secondary school education. The project commenced in December 2007 and will be completed by March 31, 2009.

Safety at School for Students with Special Education Needs

In June, 2007, *Bill 212—The Education Amendment Act* (Progressive Discipline and School Safety) was passed, amending the sections of the *Education Act* dealing with behaviour, discipline and safety. Several Policy and Program Memoranda, related to a provincial code of conduct and school board codes of conduct, bullying prevention and intervention, progressive discipline, school board programs for students on long term suspension and expulsion followed. The Special Education Policy and Programs Branch was consulted during the development of these amendments and policy program memoranda.

The Special Education Policy and Programs Branch is currently developing a Resource Guide to support educators in elementary and secondary schools in Ontario to apply the safe schools provisions of the *Education Act* and the current amendments and policy program memoranda, to students who have special education needs. The intent of the document is to address the particular strategies that will benefit students with special education needs and ensure their achievement of positive outcomes in schools. Areas such as the application of mitigating factors, making accommodations for students with behavioural needs, parental involvement, and responding to incidents will be included.

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

This act will set enforceable standards in the areas of: customer service, transportation, information and communications, employment and built environment. The implications of the emerging standards (especially of the information and communications standard) for school board special education services are potentially significant. A public consultation on the draft information and communication standard is planned for this fall. (Watch the MCSS website or the website of the Accessibility Directorate Office at <http://www.accesson.ca/ado>)

Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE)

MACSE last met on June 11 and 12, 2008.

Council Chair highlighted Council's activities since the February meeting. Highlights included the following:

- A letter of acknowledgment sent to Council Chair by the Minister of Education regarding the Service Coordination Logic Model.
- An invitation from the Ontario Psychological Association (OPA) to four members of MACSE to attend a one-day conference on October 15, 2008 - each of the Standing Committee Chairs are to nominate one member from their committee to attend the conference.
- The completion of the 2007-2008 Annual Report to the Minister of Education.

Council discussed and was provided with information in the following key areas:

- Special education demographics;
- Achievement in closing gaps in student outcomes;
- *Education for All* (K-12);
- Individual Education Plans (IEPs);
- Collaboration of services;
- Informal dispute resolution;
- Enhanced accountability;
- Evaluation of funding approach;
- review of Section 23 education programs in care and treatment facilities;
- update on the status of the safe schools initiative; and
- consultation on the implementation of the Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) methods;

The next MACSE Council meetings are scheduled for 2009 on February 18th & 19th and June 10th and 11th.

MACSE Minutes can be obtained by contacting Council Secretary, Mark Agius, at mark.agius@ontario.ca

MACSE Web site:

http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/abcs/acse/acse_eng.html