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

FROM: Ben Levin
Deputy Minister

DATE: October 12, 2006

SUBJECT: **Special Education Transformation Initiatives**

The 2006/07 school year is an exciting one for education in Ontario. I am pleased to provide you with information and direction regarding the transformation of special education in Ontario.

As you know, *Special Education Transformation—The Report of the Co-Chairs with the Recommendations of the Working Table on Special Education* was released in June. The report was co-authored by then Parliamentary Assistant Kathleen Wynne, now our Minister of Education, and Dr. Sheila Bennett, Chair of the Pre-Service Department, Faculty of Education, Brock University. Along with *Education All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Initiatives for Students with Special Education Needs* and the CODE-sponsored Special Education Projects, the Report provides direction for improving student achievement and the increased capacity of teachers to meet the needs of diverse range of learners. The Working Table recommended that the Ministry work with school boards to improve the focus on measurable student outcomes while reducing the administrative requirements where appropriate.

Reducing Administrative Requirements

In the past, some students have faced barriers or delays to accessing special education programs and services because of the paperwork required in the IPRC process. The Ministry is now reminding boards that an IPRC is not required when both the school and the parents agree that the student should be placed in a regular classroom. We believe that this reminder should allow a substantial reduction in the number of IPRCs.

This memo is not intended to override the IPRC process set out in Regulation 181/98. It is intended to assist principals and other board staff to implement the regulation in a way that respects parents' rights while minimizing the administrative requirements.

Parents retain the right to initiate the IPRC process for any reason. Furthermore, it is considered good practice to hold an IPRC when the parents/school/board are considering a placement in a self-contained or partially integrated special education class.

Programs and services are to be provided as soon as possible for students with special education needs. Students with special needs should be offered special education programs and services without undue delay, while waiting for an IPRC meeting or for additional assessments.

Reducing the numbers of IPRCs will allow school boards to redirect their resources to programs and services that will help students to succeed.

Submitting Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for Ministry Review

For all identified and unidentified students receiving special education programs and services, the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Provincial Report Card are essential accountability tools for monitoring and reporting on the student's progress through the Ontario curriculum.

In response to the Special Education Transformation Report, released on June 8th, 2006, the Minister of Education stated her intention to reinforce the connection between a student's Individual Education Plan, the Ontario curriculum and the provincial report card. This connection will provide students and parents with a clearer picture of how the student's progress is being assessed and reported during the school year by the classroom teacher.

In order to determine the system's progress in achieving this goal, the Ministry will review a sample of IEPs this fall. Therefore, all school boards and Provincial and Demonstration Schools are requested to submit to the Ministry the following documents:

Elementary Panel

- 5 IEPs prepared in the 2005-06 school year;
- 5 IEPs **for the same students** prepared in the 2006-07 school year; and
- June 2006 report cards for each of these students.

Secondary Panel

- 5 IEPs prepared in the 2005-06 school year;
- 5 IEPs **for the same students** prepared in the 2006-07 school year; and
- June 2006 report cards for each of these students.

School authorities are invited to participate in the IEP review and may contact their Ministry Regional Office for submission details.

The sample of IEPs and report cards submitted should represent at least two schools and a cross-section of student exceptionalities as well as IEPs and report cards that have been developed for students who have not been identified as “exceptional” by an IPRC. The samples must have the student name and Ontario Education Number (OEN) replaced with an alias or code, so that documents and progress for the same student can be tracked across the given timeframe.

The sample packages should be forwarded to your Ministry Regional Office no later than November 7, 2006.

In a manner similar to the Ministry’s previous IEP review, participants will receive a provincial summary of the findings, as well as an individualized report. The Ministry will use the findings to consider the necessity for a mandatory provincial IEP template, and to determine how the IEP development process might be streamlined, particularly for students receiving “accommodations only”. The review results will also inform future training that the Ministry will provide to school boards on the development and implementation of the IEP.

Other Special Education Initiatives

I would also like to advise you of several additional initiatives that the Ministry is undertaking as part of its transformation of special education.

As noted in the June 8th announcement, the Ministry is embarking on a Special Education Program and Financial Pilot Review to collect information from school boards on the decision-making processes related to the provision of special education programs and funding. The review will begin this fall with a couple of school boards and will be followed in the winter 2007 with two more. The information collected from these reviews will be used to inform future program and funding policy direction.

To reduce administrative requirements further, school boards’ special education plans will be aligned with other Ministry reporting requirements and transformed so they focus on target setting and improvement planning that is related to student achievement and program effectiveness. The amount of information you are asked to provide in these plans will be reduced significantly.

Later in the school year, school boards will receive information on developing informal dispute resolution processes for issues regarding special education programs and services. A resource guide is being developed to provide parents and school boards with recommended approaches on working together to arrive at a shared solution. As an additional support to school boards, a provincial policy on mediation processes for special education programs and services will be developed in consultation with stakeholders, including a process for recognizing the credentials of mediators.

I would also like to inform you that the Ministry has recently established a Reference Group on Autism Spectrum Disorders. Members of the group met for the first time on September 20 and will continue to meet monthly through December 2006. A report will be submitted to the Ministers' of Education and Children and Youth Services in January 2007. I am attaching the news release and backgrounder which provide details about the mandate of the Reference Group.

I want to thank all of you for your commitment, hard work and positive spirit toward working with students who have special education needs. I look forward to your continued support to improve the programs and services for students with special needs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Levin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ben Levin
Deputy Minister

cc. Chairs, Special Education Advisory Committees