

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION**  
**SPECIAL EDUCATION UPDATE**  
**FEBRUARY 2022**

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## **COVID-19, School Closures, Remote Learning and Key Updates**

### ***The government's response to COVID-19***

- For the 2021-22 school year, the Ministry of Education will continue to focus on supporting the health, safety and well-being of students, families and staff. Based on advice from the Chief Medical Officer of Health, schools were permitted to open for in-person learning with health and safety measures in place for the 2021-22 school year.
- In supporting the return to school and remote learning for students with special education needs, the ministry has provided direction to school boards, invested in summer learning, transition programming and new resources.
- In May 2021, the ministry announced that it will continue to provide ongoing COVID-19 funding supports, with more than \$1.6 billion in resources available to school boards throughout the year, supporting mental and physical health and learning recovery.
- School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON) is providing educators, system leaders and mental health professionals in Ontario's publicly funded school boards with additional culturally responsive resources, tools and coaching to support the mental health and well-being of all students. On August 16th, SMH-ON provided all publicly funded school boards with a Mentally Healthy Back to School Support Package that includes more than 80 resources developed for different audiences, that can be used to help welcome and prepare students for back to school. Resources can be found at <https://smho-smsso.ca/>.

### ***Key Facts***

- On March 25, 2021, the ministry released its memo on 2021 spring and summer learning opportunities, which includes:
  - Nearly \$8.32 million to support students with special education needs in summer program offerings in both credit and non-credit granting courses, this additional funding may be used by school boards for additional staffing resources such as special education resource teachers, and educational assistants;
  - Approximately \$7.6 million to provide summer transition programs for students with high special education needs who may find the return to school challenging, with a focus on closing gaps in skills development, learning, and on establishing classroom routines prior to the opening of schools; and
  - \$11.76 million in funding for struggling readers who are at risk for falling behind due to the COVID-19 pandemic for the remainder of the 2020-21 school year as well as for the delivery of summer programs.
  - \$17 million for in additional in-year and summer Mental Health Supports.
- Grants for Student Needs (GSN) funding for 2021-22 was announced on May 4, 2021 in [Memorandum 2021 B08](#); and further details, such as the [Technical Paper](#)

[2021-22](#) and [Memorandum 2021 SB06: Special Education Grant and Mental Health Funding Changes for 2021-22](#).

- The ministry released a 2021-22 school year planning memorandum on May 4, 2021. Among several other topics, the memorandum noted that:
  - As in 2020-21, school boards have been instructed to plan to operate elementary schools full time in-person. Elementary students should continue to be cohorted with their classmates and homeroom teacher. Specialized teachers, for classes such as French as a second language/English (in French-language school boards), the arts, and health and physical education, are still able to go into classrooms to provide full programming for students. Students may be pulled into smaller groups for supports with students from other cohorts based on local health advice.
  - In secondary schools, school boards have been told to adopt secondary timetabling methods that emphasize cohorting of students as much as possible and to limit the number of student-to-student contacts. School boards will be required to limit schedules to two in-person classes (such as quadmestering) with exceptions for schools where contacts can be limited by cohorting grades or if the overall size of the school is small, making contact tracing manageable. The intention is to plan for full time in-person learning for secondary schools. However, school boards are also asked to have plans in place to pivot to adapted timetables and full remote delivery while still providing students with access to the full breadth of courses.
  - Full guidance on 2021-22 health and safety measures will be communicated to school boards in Summer 2021. This will include guidance on requirements such as masking, hand hygiene, cohorting for clubs and other extracurriculars and screening, as well as the designation of school boards that would need to open with an adapted secondary school delivery model in September.
  
- On May 4, 2021, Ontario communicated its learning recovery and renewal plan for 2021-22. This plan was informed by Ontario data, other jurisdictions and stakeholders, including school board leaders, teachers, principals, parents, students and community partners. In addition to spring and summer investments, the ministry announced that its approach would include:
  - A math pilot on early intervention supports for students with special education needs in Grades 4-6 to support math learning in select school boards. School boards will be invited to apply in the spring.
  - A Remote Learning Guide for Students with special education needs to support students whenever they are learning remotely.
  
- On June 10, 2021, the Ministry of Education announced the release of the new Grade 9 Mathematics course for implementation in September 2021. The new course is part of the government's four-year \$200M math strategy to ensure that all students can build the confidence and skills they need to excel in mathematics.

- This course is available to all students, teachers and parents/guardians on the [Ontario Curriculum and Resources website](#). Initial teacher and parent/guardian resources were also made available and schools were encouraged to share this information with parents/guardians.
  - Along with the curriculum, the ministry released initial resources for educators and parents/guardians, including curriculum overview videos, a key changes document and parent/guardian guide. Sample long-range plans will be available in the coming weeks. Additional resources and implementation supports will be added to the [Curriculum and Resources website](#) in the coming months. Introductory webinars have also been made available.
  - De-streaming Grade 9 is a key component of the Ministry of Education's commitment to moving forward with changes to the education system that seek to address systemic discrimination and help break down barriers for students who are Black, Indigenous, those who live in low-income households and those with disabilities and special education needs, so that all students will have an opportunity to reach their full potential.
- On June 11, 2021, the ministry communicated with the sector to encourage participation in the public consultation on the K-12 Standards Development Committee's (K-12 SDC) Initial Recommendations Report (Initial Report).
    - The mandate of the K-12 Education SDC is to provide recommendations to government on removing and preventing accessibility barriers in the publicly funded education system. The Initial Report is the result of an extensive joint effort of government-appointed representatives from the disability community and the education sector to identify the barriers that students with disabilities face and the measures needed to remove and prevent them. The Initial Report is available for public comment through an online survey at the following link until September 30, 2021: [Consultation: Initial recommendations for the development of proposed Kindergarten to Grade 12 \(K-12\) education accessibility standards | Ontario.ca](#).
  - On June 29, 2021, the ministry communicated to boards that in-person summer learning would be permitted for courses offered in August in addition to the remote learning option.
  - On July 5, 2021, the Ministry of Education provided clarification on school-board operated summer learning camps, noting that included in the government's Roadmap to Reopen and regulations under the Reopening Ontario Act, day camps for children are permitted to operate in a manner consistent with the Ministry of Health's COVID-19 Safety Guidelines for: Day Camps [https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019\\_summer\\_day\\_camps\\_guidance.pdf](https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/2019_summer_day_camps_guidance.pdf)

- To further increase vaccine uptake and support a safe return to school in September, on July 30, 2021, the ministry sent a memorandum to school boards encouraging them to continue working closely with their public health unit(s), community organizations and other key stakeholders to ensure all education workers, students 12 years and older and their families have access to the vaccine should they wish to receive one.
- On August 3, 2021, the ministry shared its detailed Health, Safety and Operational Guidance for schools in 2021-22. This memorandum also addressed key areas such as: ventilation, vaccination and public health supports, testing, health and physical education, student mental health and well-being, continued COVID-19 Funding Supports.
- On August 4, 2021, in preparation for the 2021-22 school year, the Ministry of Education sent a memorandum to school boards, which included information about:
  - Updated ventilation best practice guidance;
  - Details of the investment in and approach to allocating standalone HEPA filter units; and
  - Introduction of a standardized school ventilation report.
- On August 13, 2021, following updated direction from the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH), the ministry communicated with school boards to share updated guidance for the 2021-22 school year. The COVID-19: Health, Safety and Operational Guidance for Schools 2021-22 released on August 3, 2021 was updated to reflect updated guidance regarding:
  - School case, contact and outbreak management; and
  - Sports, health and physical activity;
- On August 18, 2021, the ministry announced a COVID-19 Immunization Disclosure Policy & Testing Requirements. In addition to school board employees, the policy applies to student placements, frequent school visitors (e.g. school nutrition program staff), and other professionals who deliver services in schools. It also applies to student transportation drivers employed by transportation consortia. The policy requires that school boards ensure all school board employees undertake one of the following:
  - Provide proof of full vaccination against COVID-19; or
  - Provide a formal/official documented medical reason for not being vaccinated against COVID-19; or
  - Participate in an educational program approved by the Ministry of Education.
- On August 19, 2021, the ministry issued the revised [Policy/Program Memorandum \(PPM\) No. 151: Professional Activity Days Devoted to Provincial Education Priorities](#). The PPM was revised for the 2021-22 school year to reflect the ministry's directions on PA Days as well as to provide additional considerations and resources pertaining to education priorities.

- The three mandatory PA days for the 2021-22 school year will address the following topics and can be delivered in an integrated manner:
  - health and safety protocols, mental health and well-being
  - learning recovery and intervention strategies
  - mathematics, including the elementary math curriculum and Grade 9 de-streamed math course
  - anti-racism, anti-discrimination training
  - instructional approaches to online/remote learning
  - anti-sex trafficking and anti-bullying, including cyber-bullying
- To ensure readiness for the 2021-22 school year, the ministry also encouraged school boards to address the following topics prior to the start of student instruction:
  - health and safety protocols
  - mental health and well-being
  - learning recovery and intervention strategies
- In support of the government's immunization disclosure policy for school boards, on August 20, 2021, the ministry shared a guidance document and reporting template with school boards to provide early guidance to inform implementation planning, and in particular, to support the establishment of any necessary data collection and reporting processes.
- On August 24, 2021, the ministry sent out a memorandum regarding a COVID-19: School Testing Pilot Program. This pilot program forms a part of the government's broader testing strategy and is being offered on a targeted basis to Ontario secondary schools. The voluntary program is meant to specifically target staff and students who have been fully vaccinated and are asymptomatic. Targeted secondary schools located in 13 public health units were identified based on local public health context, including vaccination rates and recent historical data on positivity rates.
  - Take-home kits including instruction materials and a laboratory requisition will be made available by the first week of September.
  - The number of kits provided to school sites will be based on an estimated 15% of secondary schools' enrolment.
  - Schools will be responsible for receiving, storing, and distributing take-home self-collection kits.
  - The principal (or school leader/designate) would distribute a kit to everyone in the identified class or cohort as identified and directed by local public health units.
  - Take-home tests can be self-administered or administered by another person (e.g., parent or caregiver) and returned to the school location.
  - Participating staff and students will have access to instructional videos on completing the take-home self-collection kit.
  - Schools will be the drop-off location for completed and packaged specimens and will be provided drop-off boxes. An on-demand courier will pick up specimens from school locations. Completed and properly packaged specimens do not pose a safety risk.

- On August 27, 2021, the ministry shared updates to the school screening tool for the 2021-22 school year. These updates were made to reflect the latest advice from the Ministry of Health for schools, child care and other workplace settings. Key changes to the screening tools include:
  - Refinement of symptoms list to those most commonly associated with COVID-19;
  - Consideration for immunization status so that asymptomatic individuals who are fully immunized (equal to or more than 14 days after receiving their second dose of a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine series or their first dose of a one-dose COVID-19 vaccine series) or who were previously positive within the past 90 days and have since been cleared, are not required to isolate if they are in contact with an individual who is symptomatic or who tests positive for COVID-19, unless otherwise directed by the public health unit.
  - Changes to isolation period so that asymptomatic high-risk close contacts of a case are now required to isolate for 10 days, unless they are fully immunized or previously tested positive, as above.
  - International travel – unvaccinated children under the age of 12 are now exempt from federal quarantine if they travelled in the company of someone who qualified for an exemption from quarantine based on vaccination status. However, they may not attend school or child care for 14 days after their arrival.
  - Rapid testing – the screening tool now includes a question about a positive screen on a rapid antigen or home-based self-testing kit.
  
- On September 1, 2021, the Ministry of Education shared updates to COVID-19 Guidance related to staff masking requirements and class sizes. This includes:
  - Requiring medical masks (surgical/procedural) to be worn by school staff outdoors if two metres of distance from others cannot be maintained. Eye protection is also required if a staff member comes within two metres of an unmasked individual both indoors and outdoors, as per occupational health and safety requirements. At the advice of the local public health unit, schools and school boards may choose to implement additional masking measures based on local circumstances; and
  - Ensuring that school boards plan for class sizes as close as possible to the funded average to avoid even temporary large classes prior to the reorganization date that has been observed in the past particularly in the first few weeks following the start of classes. Specifically, boards are being asked to make every effort to prevent such a scenario by using the additional COVID-19 staffing supports of over \$380 million and deploying teachers that may be on holdback.
  
- On September 13, 2021, the ministry shared a memo providing further instructions regarding rapid antigen testing requirements associated with the Letter of Instruction issued by the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health regarding immunization disclosure policy, and information for school boards to support local verification processes for testing.

- On September 14, 2021, the ministry released a COVID-19 vaccination educational video for individuals who are not vaccinated without a documented medical reason or those who choose not to disclose their vaccination status. The memo also provided details on school-focused vaccination clinics such as providing clinics during instructional hours to support ease of access to a vaccine for all students 12 years old and older, staff and families.
- On September 23, 2021, the ministry provided updates on the rapid antigen screening component of its mandatory immunization disclosure policy. This included an extension of access to pharmacy testing kits until October 1, 2021 for those school boards that may have a shortage of testing kits as the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services (MGCS) continues deploying tests to boards.
- On September 20, 2021, the Ministry of Education released a memorandum on Board Improvement and Equity Planning with Demographic Data (BIEP). The BIEP sets out province-wide goals and performance indicators under four educational priority areas, 1) *Achievement*; 2) *Human Rights and Equity*; 3) *Mental Health, Well-Being and Engagement*; and 4) *Transitions and Pathways*. School boards are also expected to set their own local goals and priorities that involve local communities and are responsive toward their needs.
  - Understanding which students are underserved by Ontario’s education system – and working to address that – is at the crux of the new BIEP process, and therefore all boards are expected to be in the process of collecting voluntary student demographic data by September 2022.
  - The BIEP will be submitted annually commencing May 2022 and will outline the boards’ plan for the coming school year. Boards will also be required to share a parent-friendly version of their plan with board communities. The ministry is welcoming feedback on the BIEP template and process throughout the 2021-22 school year.
- On October 1, 2021, the ministry updated the sector that it was extending the opportunity to participate in the public consultation of the K-12 Education Standards Development Committee (K-12 SDC) Initial Recommendations Report (Initial Report) until November 1, 2021.
- On October 19, 2021, the Ministries of Health and Education issued a joint memorandum regarding an amendment to the Self-Directed Care Program Specifications for the Family-Managed Home Care (FMHC) program to provide an additional temporary option for students who require nursing services to attend school.
  - Eligible clients will be eligible for the FMHC program for nursing services provided as School Health Professional Services in a school if the child’s school and the applicable school board permit the nurse to provide the services in the school. Additionally, nursing services and the medical supplies and treatment equipment necessary to the provision of the nursing services provided as School Health Professional Services in a school are only available to these clients in the 2021-22 school year, and

only in circumstances where Home and Community Care Support Services organizations (the business name of the Local Health Integration Networks) or the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) are unable to provide timely and reliable nursing services in school through traditional care.

- On October 29, 2021, the ministries of Education, Health and Children, Community and Social Services issued a joint memorandum regarding their intent to review and engage with the sector on Policy/Program Memorandum No. 81 (PPM 81), *Provision of Health Support Services in School Settings*.
  - Some of the key objectives of the review are:
    - Strengthening evidence-based practices;
    - Improving access to health and rehabilitation services in schools; and
    - Clarifying roles and responsibilities to address gaps in services.
  - In addition to the review of PPM 81, the memo provided direction on operational considerations such as the Government's:
    - Support for local communities adopting a unified approach to the provision of speech and language pathology services.
    - Continued expectation that school boards work with their local partners to facilitate access to schools by service providers, including those providing school health professional services and CTCs and their delivery partners, as appropriate so that students learning in-person can receive access to support services. Remote delivery of services should only be considered for students learning in person as a last resort.
- On November 1, 2022, the Ministry of Education shared a Remote Learning Guide for Students with Special Education Needs and accompanying tip sheets in English and French. The materials are available on the VLE at <https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/vle>. The guide includes evidence-informed strategies for supporting students with special education needs to learn remotely, and builds on local and international best practices, including many developed by Ontario school boards.
- On November 18, 2021, the ministry wrote to school boards and authorities to provide an overview of the key actions that the ministry, in consultation and partnership with the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH), is taking to help mitigate against any further impact on the health and well-being of school-aged children. This included targeted public health measures and supports, such as the provision of rapid antigen screening kits, to provide another layer of protection, particularly for unvaccinated individuals in elementary schools.

- On November 25, 2021, the ministry wrote to school boards and authorities regarding vaccinations for children 5-11.
  - Work with local PHUs to have plans in place to host vaccination clinics in or near schools beginning this calendar year, and to prioritize the use of school space for this purpose;
  - Address local and regional needs by ensuring strong collaboration with parents, students, parent representatives, parent involvement committee chairs and school councils; and
  - Frequently communicate with parents and families and share facts from local PHUs and pointing them towards credible information.
  
- Prior to the winter break, the ministry shared a memorandum with school boards and authorities on December 10, 2021 to provide a brief update related to a number of key commitments, including:
  - Ensuring each student received a rapid antigen screening kit for before the commencement of the winter break period;
  - Not requiring boards to complete daily reporting through the ART during the winter break period until January 3, 2022;
  - Reminding boards to frequently communicate and share resources about vaccine clinics for students 5-11;
  - Sharing updates to the COVID-19 School and Child Care Screening Tool.
  
- On December 30, 2021, based on advice from the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health, the ministry announced updated and additional health and safety measures in schools including, daily on-site confirmation of screening, updated screening tools with more sensitive symptoms lists, ventilation improvements, and provision of high quality personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff and students.
  - To provide time for school boards and staff to plan for these changes, the reopening of schools for students following the break is was moved to January 5, 2022, for school boards scheduled to return on January 3.
  
- On January 3, 2022, the Government of Ontario announced a range of time-limited public health actions to help curb the spread of COVID-19 variants in Ontario. As part of this announcement, starting January 5, 2022, students at all publicly funded and private schools pivoted to teacher-led remote learning until at least January 17, subject to public health trends and operational considerations.
  - School boards are expected to make provisions for in-person support for students with special education needs who cannot be accommodated through remote learning.
  - Most students with special education needs will be learning remotely during this period. In-person learning should be reserved for exceptional cases where students with special education needs cannot be accommodated through remote learning.
  - School boards are best positioned to determine which students with special education needs may require this accommodation.

- On January 4, 2022, the Ministry of Education shared direction and expectations for school boards during the period of time-limited public health actions to help curb the spread of COVID-19 variants in Ontario. This included expectations for remote learning; student supports such as in-person learning for students who cannot be accommodated remotely; learning resources; transportation requirements for students learning in-person; direction on operating child care centres in schools; and continued efforts to promote vaccination of staff and eligible students.
- On January 6, 2022, the ministry announced the reinstatement of a more sensitive COVID-19 symptom list for daily active screening of all students and staff in schools and child care. These updates to the school screening tool are based on the recommendation of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and also include updated testing and isolation guidelines.
- On January 6, 2022, the Minister of Education issued a statement announcing accelerated access to COVID-19 booster shots for education and child care staff.
  - Starting January 7, the provincial mass vaccination clinic at the International Centre in Mississauga supports priority booking for education staff, including educators, custodial staff, administrative staff, and school bus drivers, and child care staff. The clinic operates seven days a week, with specific appointments being made available for education and child care staff from 4:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.
  - For individuals living outside the GTHA, the Ontario government is working with all public health units (PHUs) to plan and provide access to third doses for education and child care staff. Local PHUs will provide further information on how vaccines can be accessed in their communities as it becomes available. School boards have an opportunity to use schools as a site for vaccination clinics together with PHU partners.
- On January 8, 2022, the Ontario Government announced that it was adding 10 Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area health clinic locations for education and child care staff to book appointments for accelerated access to COVID-19 booster shots.
- On January 10, 2022, Minister of Education announced that the government was temporarily expanding access to retired teachers to support in-person learning. This agreement with the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) and Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (OTPP) nearly doubles the number of days a retiree can work from 50 days to 95, until June 30, 2022.
- On January 12, 2022, the Ministry of Education held a briefing confirming the return to in-person learning for all students on January 17, 2022 and to announce the launch of school-based vaccine clinics for youth and staff, along with a significant deployment of rapid antigen tests. These new measures build on the province providing millions of high-quality masks for staff and students and thousands more HEPA filtration units.

- By including new testing options, expanded access to vaccination, and continuous improvement to ventilation, the Government is supporting access to in-person learning with greater stability for students and families. Remote learning will remain an option for those families wishing to access it.
- On January 12, 2022, the ministry sent a memorandum to school boards outlining a variety of updates including:
  - Enhanced health and safety measures and guidance
  - Vaccination clinics for students and staff
  - New guidance for schools/child care and local public health
  - Reporting and monitoring of school impacts due to absenteeism
  - Mitigating against school closures
  - Stabilizing staffing through increasing re-employment of retired staff and providing temporary certificates for eligible first-year teacher candidates
  - Testing supplies and requirements
  - Masking for students and staff
  - Deployment of HEPA filter units to schools

## **Special Education Funding**

### **Special Education Grant (SEG) Investments**

#### ***Key Facts***

- Grants for Student Needs (GSN) funding for 2021-22 was announced on May 4, 2021 in [Memorandum 2021 B08](#); and further details can be found in supporting documents such as the [Technical Paper 2021-22](#), [Memorandum 2021 SB06: Special Education Grant and Mental Health Funding Changes for 2021-22](#) and the [2021-22 Education Funding: A Guide to the Special Education Grant](#).
- The government is committed to ensuring that every student, including students with special education needs, has access to the supports they need to succeed in school.
- This commitment is demonstrated by investments in the Special Education Grant (SEG), which provides boards with funding for programs, services, and/or equipment for students with special education needs. Boards may use the grant only for special education and must set aside any unspent funding to use for special education in a future school year.
- For 2021-22, SEG funding is projected to increase to over \$3.21 billion. The highest amount ever provided in SEG funding, this represents an increase of approximately \$68.6 million, or 2.2 per percent, over 2020-21 SEG funding.
- This 2021-22 increase in SEG funding is a result of the following:
  - Benchmark increases throughout the Special Education Grant (SEG), consistent with other GSN allocations.
  - The transfers of the \$1.44 million Integrated Services for Northern Children (ISNC) and the \$6.1 million After-School Skills Development (ASSD) programs from Priorities and Partnerships Funding (PPF) into the GSN.
  - Increasing Special Incidence Portion (SIP) funding by 5%, as the province has moved SIP to a formula-based allocation for a second consecutive year.
  - Continued support for the Special Equipment Amount (SEA) claim-based

- applications.
  - Projected increases to average daily enrolment (ADE).
- In response to requests from stakeholders to reduce the administrative burden placed on school boards, SIP funding for 2021-22 is being allocated via a formula, rather than the SIP claims process.
  - In 2020-21, the Ministry of Education provided school boards with a SIP allocation based on the higher amount of either their 2019-20 SIP funding allocation, or an average of the previous three years (2016-17 to 2018-19). The Ministry then provided a 5% increase to that higher amount for all school boards. This established every board's final 2020-21 SIP allocation.
  - This school year (2021-22), school boards will be provided with that final 2020-21 amount plus an additional 5% increase.
- For further information regarding special education funding please visit the ministry's [Education Funding page](#).

### **2021-22 Priorities and Partnership Funding Investments**

- In addition to SEG funding, school boards can use other GSN funding and Priorities and Partnerships Fund (PPF) transfer payments funding to meet their responsibility to support students with special education needs. The PPF provides support for a variety of time-limited, high-impact initiatives that directly support students in the classroom.

#### *Regular School Year Pilots and Programs (\$1.86 million)*

- For the 2021-22 school year there is approximately \$1.86 million provided to school boards for non COVID-19 related school year pilots and programs to benefit children and youth with special education needs, as well as their families and educators. These investments include:
  - Educators Autism Additional Qualifications (AQ) Subsidy \$1.01M
  - Pilot To improve School-Based Supports for Students with ASD \$0.37M
  - Developmental Disabilities Pilot: Student Transitions \$0.48M

#### *Additional Third-Party Investments (over \$5.88M)*

- Further to the PPF special education funding for school boards, the Ministry is making the following third-party special education investments:
  - Geneva Centre for Autism – Online Training \$2.0M
  - Geneva Centre for Autism – Synchronous Educator Training \$2.5M
  - Principals' Associations AQ & Webinar \$0.43M
  - Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario \$0.75M
  - Post-Sec. Opportunities & Transition Supports for students who are D/deaf and Hard of Hearing \$0.20M

## Learning Recovery and Renewal & 2020-21 Spring and Summer Learning Opportunities

### *Learning Recovery and Renewal (2021: B07)*

- Over the past two school years, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the delivery of education in Ontario and across the globe. School boards, educators, students and their families have demonstrated resiliency and flexibility in responding to changes in their learning environments and we have come a long way in embracing new ways of teaching, learning and connecting.
- As we look ahead to the 2021-22 school year, the ministry is committed to supporting the health and safety, mental health, well-being and achievement of all students. This includes building on the skills and capacity students and educators have gained, while ensuring that students who experienced learning disruptions are prepared for their future.
- To understand the impact of learning disruptions, the ministry has reviewed Ontario data, looked to other jurisdictions and has heard from stakeholders, including school board leaders, teachers, principals, parents, students and community partners.
- While the COVID-19 pandemic has affected students differently, there are key themes emerging including the need to focus on student mental health and well-being, supports for early reading and math and the re-engagement of students. These themes make up the foundation of the ministry's plan to support learning recovery and renewal.
- The ministry is allocating \$85.5 million to support learning recovery and renewal. This funding includes:
  - \$62 million for summer learning ([2021: SB04 Federal Safe Return to Class Fund: 2020-21 Spring and Summer Learning Opportunities for School Boards, March 25, 2021](#));
  - \$20 million for re-engaging students and reading assessment supports ([2021: B07 Planning for the 2021-22 School Year memo](#)); and
  - \$3.5 million for professional learning
- Funding for learning recovery and renewal is in addition to ministry investments of \$80 million in student mental health supports, over \$40 million in math strategy funding, and over \$3.21 billion in special education funding, as well as additional resources through the \$550.5 million Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG) and other allocations within the Grants for Student Needs (GSN) for the 2021-22 school year.

### *2020-21 Spring and Summer Learning Opportunities (2021: SB04)*

- On March 25<sup>th</sup>, the government announced funding to support school boards on expanded spring and summer learning opportunities.
- As part of this investment, \$44.68M was announced for in-year and summer 2021 special education, reading intervention and mental health supports. This includes:
  - \$8.32M for Summer Staffing Supports: Special Education Needs
  - \$7.6M for Summer Transition Programs: Special Education Needs
  - \$6.76M for Summer Evidence-Based Reading Intervention Programs
  - \$5M for In-Year Evidence-Based Reading Intervention Programs

- \$9M for Additional In-Year Mental Health Supports
- \$8M for Summer Mental Health Supports

**Note:** *These special education, reading intervention and mental health investments in-year and summer learning investment are part of the Learning Recovery and Renewal Plan (\$85.5M).*

### **Planning for the 2021-22 School Year: Continued COVID-19 Funding Supports**

- Since the start of the pandemic, the Ontario government has made over \$1.6 billion in resources available to support the safe reopening and operation of schools across Ontario, including \$763 million in funding through the federal Safe Return to Class Fund.
- Although the evolving public health landscape is difficult to predict, we recognize that the next school year may require similar health and safety measures as those implemented this year. To support the continued safe operation of schools in 2021-22, the ministry will continue to provide temporary ongoing COVID-19 funding supports, with more than \$1.6 billion in resources available to school boards throughout the year. The ministry will continue to work with the Ministry of Health and the Chief Medical Officer of Health to determine when public health measures in schools can be eased or lifted.
- Investments through Priorities and Partnerships Funding (PPF) totalling \$487.9 million, include [\\$49.0 million for special education, mental health](#) and well-being and equity initiatives.
  - \$16.25M for special education supports
  - \$25.25M for mental health
  - \$1M for Kids Help Phone
  - \$6.45M for Equity Initiatives

**Note:** *the \$10.1M Supporting Student Mental Health Allocation in the Mental Health and Well-Being Grant of the GSN for 2021-22 (described in [Memorandum 2021: B08](#)), was initially introduced as a response to COVID investment in June 19, 2020 through [Memorandum 2020: B08](#).*

## **Special Education in Ontario Kindergarten to Grade 12 Policy and Resource Guide (2017)**

### **Key Facts**

- *Special Education in Ontario Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide* was released in August 2017 as a draft in electronic form only.  
[http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/os/onschools\\_2017e.pdf](http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/os/onschools_2017e.pdf)
- The Guide updates and consolidates information currently found in: *Standards for School Board's Special Education Plans (2000)*; *IEP Standards for Development, Program Planning and Implementation (2000)*; *Transition Planning: A Resource Guide (2002)*; *Special Education: A Guide for Educators (2001)*; and *Individual Education Plan (IEP): A Resource Guide (2004)*.
- The document is intended for school and school board administrators but will be of interest to the broader educational community.
- Technical changes were made and posted in Fall 2018 including a HTML version.

## **Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**

### **Key Facts**

- The Ministry of Education (EDU) is committed to supporting successful outcomes for all students, including students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).
- EDU is also committed to working with Ontario's families, educators, school boards, and partner ministries to help students find success inside and outside of the classroom.
- EDU is supporting the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) in implementing the Entry to School program, part of the Ontario Autism Program (OAP). Fourteen community-based service providers from across the province have been selected to deliver the new Entry to School Program that will begin to be implemented in January 2022.
- The Entry to School program will be delivered by OAP community providers and will be a six-month group-based skill-building program for young children on the autism spectrum (three to five years of age), who are entering school for the first time. Eligible children will participate in this program during the six months preceding their school entry. The focus of the program will be on preparing children to enter school. Strong partnerships between community-based OAP organizations and their local school boards will be critical to support families as they prepare to transition to school.

### **Funding**

- Beginning in 2021-22, the \$6.1 million in funding for After-School Skills Development (ASSD) Programs is being transferred into the Behaviour Expertise Amount (BEA) as part of the GSN's SEG funding. This will support the ministry's efforts to streamline funding while also reducing the administrative burden for transfer payment recipients. It enables school boards to plan strategically in implementing the ASSD Programs.
- The BEA allocation focuses on supporting students with autism through providing funding for school boards to hire board-level Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA)

expertise professionals, including Board Certified Behaviour Analysts (BCBAs); and provides training opportunities that build school board capacity in ABA. The BEA Allocation is projected to be \$37.3 million in 2021-22. It is now made up of the following three components:

○ ABA Expertise Professionals Amount	\$25.1M
○ ABA Training Amount	\$6.1M
○ After-School Skills Development (ASSD) Amount	\$6.1M

- In addition to GSN funding, the following \$6.3 million in PPF investments are being provided to support students with autism in 2021-22:
  - A \$1 million subsidy for the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)-specific Additional Qualification course;
  - Continuing to support the Geneva Centre for Autism through a \$2 million investment to provide more online training opportunities for educators, including access to the Registered Behaviour Technician (RBT) course;
  - \$2.5 million to Geneva Centre for Autism in 2021-21 to provide a synchronous virtual training program for educators and education workers;
  - Continuing the \$0.37 million funding the provision of dedicated space on school site for external ABA practitioners to provide direct service to students with ASD in eleven pilot school boards; and
  - \$0.43 million to provide a subsidy to administrators for completing the Additional Qualification course, *Special Education for Administrators (ASD focus)* offered through one of the three Principals' Associations and to support the implementation of a Leadership Webinar Certificate Series in Special Education (ASD focus).

### **Next Steps**

- EDU is continuing to work with MCCSS on the implementation of the new Ontario Autism Program, including the Entry to School Program.

## **Education and Community Partnership Program (ECP)**

### **Key Facts**

- ECPs are provided for children and youth who are unable to attend the regular school setting due to their primary need for care, treatment or because of a court order to serve a custody or detention sentence.
- ECPs are voluntary, partnership programs developed between school boards and government-approved facilities such as custody and correctional facilities, mental health agencies or hospitals.
- The Ministry of Education (EDU) funds costs related to the education component of the program. The education component is delivered by teachers employed by the district school board.
- The Ministries of Children, Community and Social Services, Health, and Solicitor General fund costs related to the care, treatment or youth justice component of the program.
- 59 school boards are involved in the delivery of ECP Programs. There are no new ECP programs in the 2021-22 school year.

### ***Funding***

- In September, the Ministry approved funding amounts for 2021-22 ECPPs in the amount of \$100,071,673.
- The Fall revised forecasts were posted to EFIS in November 2021. A number of changes were made to the back end of the applications in order to facilitate the roll up of data for funding and policy purposes. EDU regional offices are requesting boards submit applications in mid-January 2022.
- As part of the Future Pandemic Response Fund, the Ministry of Education provided school boards with ECPPs, with a one-time investment of \$1.4 million in the 2020-21 school year to fund technology and technology-related costs due to the COVID-19 pandemic to support continued student learning. Final reports were due October 30, 2021. Approximately half of the final reports have been received so far.

## **Developmental Disabilities Pilot: Student Transitions**

### ***Key Facts***

- Pilot to support select school boards to explore successful practices in transitioning students with developmental disabilities to work using an intensive job-placement program.

### ***Funding***

- \$478,000 for the 2020-21 school year.

### ***Next Steps***

- The Ministry of Education received approval to run two-year pilot (Year Two pending funding) supporting select school boards to explore and implement Project SEARCH.
- Project SEARCH transition-to-work model is a one-year employment preparation program for students with developmental disabilities who are in their final year of high school. It is a collaborative model that requires cooperation between school boards, businesses/site hosts and community partners.
- There are more than 600 Project SEARCH sites worldwide, licensed through Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center in Ohio.
- Currently there are two lead boards (who are already implementing Project SEARCH) and fourteen (14) boards that are exploring whether this is a viable model in their communities.
- SESAB has held two meetings/learning sessions for participating school boards. In January, ministry staff met individually with boards for updates on their progress thus far.

## Supporting Students with Learning Disabilities

### **Key Facts**

The ministry continues to support students with learning disabilities through the following:

- Policy Program Memorandum 8 (PPM8): *Identification of and Program Planning for Students with Learning Disabilities*, 2014
- On October 3, 2019 the OHRC launched a public inquiry to find out if students with reading disabilities have meaningful access to education as required by the Ontario *Human Rights Code*.
- The OHRC has been reviewing a number of areas, including:
  - **Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** Whether Universal Design for Learning, an approach to education that meets the diverse needs of every student, is being applied within Ontario's reading curriculum and in classroom teaching methods
  - **Mandatory early screening:** Whether all students are being screened for reading difficulties in Kindergarten (or in Grade 1, where a child does not attend public school for Kindergarten) using scientific evidence-based early screening tools
  - **Evidence-based reading intervention programs:** Whether students who have been identified as having reading difficulties through early screening or psycho-educational assessment have access to timely, scientific evidence-based reading intervention.
  - **Accommodation:** Whether students who have been identified as having reading difficulties through mandatory early screening or psycho-educational assessment have access to timely and effective accommodation and assistive technology
  - **Psycho-educational assessments:** The role of psycho-educational assessments and whether students have access to timely and appropriate psycho-educational assessments where needed (in addition to mandatory early screening for reading difficulties).

### **Funding**

- The current COVID pandemic has exacerbated challenges for students who are struggling with reading, including those with learning disabilities. The ministry has invested:
  - \$11.76M to provide evidence-based reading intervention programs for struggling readers who are at risk for falling behind due to the COVID pandemic (2020-2021 school year); and
  - \$20M for re-engaging students and early reading assessment supports (2021-2022 school year).
- The ministry shared a list of Effective Reading Intervention Programs with all school boards. The list was developed with participation of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) researchers who were involved in the ministry's intensive reading intervention pilot, which was implemented in eight school boards from 2016-2017 to 2020-2021.

- For several years the ministry has been providing funding to the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) to develop a range of online resources and conduct Summer Institutes for Educators to further enhance the understanding of evidence-based and research informed instructional strategies in the field of LDs. For 2020-22 school years LDAO has been provided with a total of \$1.5 million in funding

### ***Next Steps***

- In 2021 the ministry shared a memo with the sector requesting the completion of a survey about the reading intervention programs and assessment tools currently used in school boards across the province, as well as approaches to professional assessments. This information will help inform future policy decisions.
- The ministry looks forward to receiving the final report and recommendations of the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Right to Read Inquiry into services provided to support students with learning disabilities (LD) or at risk of learning disabilities related to reading. The report is expected to be released in early 2022.
- We anticipate that what we have learned the research and key findings and materials developed from the LD pilot projects will help to inform the Ministry's response to the Inquiry.

## **Mental Health**

### ***Key Facts***

- The government has made a commitment to build:
  - a comprehensive and connected mental health and addiction system across the lifespan; and
  - a system that supports careers, promotes well-being and prepares every student for the future.
- Student mental health and well-being is a top priority for the government. Good mental health is fundamental to a student's ability to learn, succeed, and reach their full potential at school and in life.
- On October 25, 2021 the Ministry of Education announced the formation of the Mental Health Branch within the Student Support and Field Services Division.
- In Ontario, school-based services are reported as the most prevalent setting for students with a mental health issue to initially seek help.
- COVID-19 has impacted all students and their families. The pandemic has expanded existing inequalities and greatly impacted students from equity seeking groups (e.g., racialized, low-income, LGBTQI2S, and students with disabilities). This has made circumstances even more challenging and it has meant that many more families and students face new vulnerabilities.
- Prioritizing student mental health is critical to addressing these inequities and supporting the learning recovery of all students.
- Pre-pandemic child and youth mental health concerns were significant. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing concerns by increasing anxiety, distress, problematic substance use and eating disorders.
- Schools will continue to provide mental health promotion supports to all students and offer timely clinical interventions for students that require school-based mental health services.

- The ministry continues to position student mental health and well-being as a core element of the re-entry to school plans .
- The ministry, through its implementation partner, School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON), will continue to provide professional learning opportunities, ongoing coaching support and a suite of evidence-based resources to all publicly funded school boards in the province.
- On August 16, 2021, SMH-ON released the *Mentally Healthy Back to School Support Package* for all school boards to help welcome and prepare students for back to school. The resources which are available in English and French on the [SMH-ON website](#) have been developed for different audiences including system leaders, school leaders, all school staff, educators, parents/caregivers and students to assist in protecting, promoting and advancing mental health and well-being in schools. The package has more than 80 resources including:
  - Student Mental Health Action Kit
  - Educator Resource Guide to Support Student Mental Health and Well-Being
  - Health & Physical Education Lesson Plans (grades 1-8)
  - First 10 Days
  - Mentally Healthy Classroom Reflection Tool
  - Supporting a Mentally Healthy Return to School
  - Supporting the Mental Health and Well-Being of Students Who Will Return to School Remotely
- On January 19, 2022, SMH-ON provided all publicly funded school boards with a “Back to School Supports Package” that includes a variety of resources to help prepare for a mentally healthy return to school following the winter break. The package includes the following resources:
  - Start Well: Five Days of Ready to Use Activities to Connect, Calm and Start Your Day
  - By Your Side: A Message to Parents/Caregivers
  - Grab and Go Tools

### **Funding**

- Ontario is investing \$3.8 billion over the next 10 years to develop and implement a comprehensive and connected mental health and addictions strategy.
- The ministry is providing school boards with more than \$80M in dedicated funding to support student mental health in 2021-22. More than \$35M of this funding can be used to respond to local priorities such as employing new mental health professionals, providing professional learning and training for educators and mental health professionals, collaborating with community mental health providers for students requiring more intensive services, student engagement opportunities in the area of mental health, and the collection, analysis and reporting of student mental health related information.
- The Ministry of Education continues to fund the approximately 180 new mental health workers (FTEs) in secondary schools that were initially hired by district school boards in 2018-19. The purpose of this investment is to continue to have regulated mental health professionals (e.g., social workers, psychologists and psychotherapists) with specialized training in student mental health in secondary schools providing promotion, prevention, early identification, assessment and direct

mental health services to students; enhanced and timely access through referrals to community mental health services for students in crisis; and support for students, families, as well as classroom strategies for educators.

- Additional funding was provided to school boards for students requiring continued access to school-based mental health services during summer 2021.
- Since June 2020, the ministry is offering school boards free access to Ontario Health's virtual care platform (OTN) to be able to provide services to students remotely. The latest extension of the agreement signed with Ontario Health is ensuring the continuation of services until October 31, 2022.
- Since June 2020, more than 500 regulated school-based health professionals (e.g., social workers, psychologists, psychotherapists, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists) used the virtual care platform to provide services to students remotely. About 8,000 virtual health care visits (clinical) have been conducted between June 2020 and December 2021.

### ***Next Steps***

- Continue working with SMH-ON and school boards to facilitate implementation of the *Back to School Support Package* launched in January 2022.
- EDU is working closely with other ministries including the Ministry of Health (MOH) to support the effective alignment of both sectors in the broader provincial system of mental health to ensure the best use of provincial mental health resources.
- Throughout the 2021-22 school year, the ministry expects school boards to continue to implement a tiered approach to mental health that will support the mental health and well-being of all students and target intensive help to those who need it most and/or who have been most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **UPDATES FROM OTHER MINISTRIES**

### **Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services**

#### **Investment in Rehabilitation Services and the Preschool Speech and Language Program**

- In the 2021 Budget, the Ontario government announced new investments to support children and youth with special needs to live happier and healthier lives.
- The government has committed to new funding of \$240 million over four years, beginning in 2021–22. This investment will ensure that more children and families have access to critical services when they need them and build additional service capacity in early intervention and rehabilitation services, and the Preschool Speech and Language (PSL) program.
- The funding will support Children’s Treatment Centres (CTCs), PSL lead agencies and their local partners to build capacity and address waitlists for assessments and speech and language pathology, occupational therapy and physiotherapy services for children and youth in the PSL program and in CTC community- and school-based rehabilitation services.

As part of this investment, the ministry is also working with CTCs and other partners to implement SmartStart Hubs as a clear entry point to services that use a provincially-consistent approach to inform earlier and appropriate connections to local services, and streamline functional assessments and service delivery based on an understanding of children’s strengths, goals and needs.

#### **Regulation of Applied Behaviour Analysis**

##### ***Key Facts***

- On [August 13, 2019](#), Ontario announced its intention to strengthen the oversight of behaviour analysts who provide Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), and that the professionals would be regulated through an existing college under the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991*.
- On June 3, 2021, the Legislature passed the *Advancing Oversight and Planning in Ontario’s Health System Act, 2021*. This legislation will regulate ABA as a new profession under the College of Psychologists of Ontario, beginning with behaviour analysts in supervisory and assessment-focused roles.
- Behaviour analysts provide services to a wide range of clients, including children, youth and adults with developmental disabilities and autism, those with mental health challenges or behavioural difficulties, seniors with dementia, and those in substance abuse treatment, brain injury rehabilitation and rehabilitative programming in correctional facilities.
- Currently in Ontario, if there are issues with services, clients and families have limited mechanisms to make a complaint about a provider because the majority of clinicians are not regulated and do not have a local governing body to handle complaints or discipline.

- Regulation of ABA will result in:
  - Consistency in ethical and professional standards to promote a higher level of trust between families and practitioners.
  - Clearly defined educational and ongoing quality assurance requirements for clinicians to improve consistency in treatment.
  - A mechanism for families to report complaints about providers to reduce the risk of harm.
- Behaviour analysts are not currently regulated in any Canadian province or territory; however, Ontario, Saskatchewan and British Columbia have online lists or registries of qualified behavioural service providers for children and youth with autism.
- In the United States, there is a growing trend to regulate behaviour analysts. Thirty-one states have licensed behaviour analysts, while a further four states have proposed licensing legislation for behaviour analysts.

### ***Next Steps***

- The College of Psychologists is developing proposed regulations to implement the new legislation for government approval. These regulations will set expectations for professional standards and educational requirements for ABA providers across the province. This will support families in finding qualified providers and making complaints about providers, if necessary.

## **Autism Spectrum Disorder Diagnostic Hubs**

### ***Key Facts***

- The five regional Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) diagnostic hubs were implemented in January 2017 to support timely access to diagnostic assessments for autism and to increase capacity to diagnose autism across the province.
- As part of the February 3, 2021 autism announcement, the government announced a \$3.8M one-time increased investment in diagnostic hubs in 2021-22, in addition to \$5.5M in annual funding for the hubs, to improve families' access to an assessment for their child by reducing waitlists and wait times, resulting in families being able to register for the Ontario Autism Program and access services as quickly as possible.
- With their funding, ASD diagnostic hubs are required to:
  - Conduct diagnostic assessments by partnering with other organizations and professionals;
  - Develop and implement a provincially-consistent screening and tiered-assessment approach;
  - Increase the number of health professionals in local communities able to conduct ASD diagnostic assessments by offering training and capacity building; and,
  - Connect families with the appropriate services in their communities as quickly as possible following a diagnostic assessment.
- The five regional hubs are:
  - Children's Treatment Network (Central Region)
  - Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (East Region)
  - Child and Community Resources (North Region)
  - Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital (Toronto Region)

- Hamilton Health Sciences / Ron Joyce Children's Health Centre (West Region)
- Since November 2019, the hubs have been offering training opportunities to support health care professionals in local communities to build their expertise in autism diagnosis, including screening for early signs of autism and training on specific diagnostic assessment tools.

### **Next Steps**

- The hubs continue to provide diagnostic assessments and are also working collaboratively to implement capacity-building initiatives across the province.

### **Implementation of the new Ontario Autism Program (OAP)**

- **Foundational Family Services** were launched in August 2020 and are available to all families registered in the OAP. These evidence-informed services aim to build a family's capacity to support their child or youth's learning and development. Services include family and peer mentoring, caregiver workshops, brief targeted consultations, transition supports, and family resource and clinic days.
- **Caregiver-mediated early years programs** launched in June 2021. These programs are time-limited services for young children (12-48 months of age) to help them learn new skills and meet individualized goals in the areas of social communication and play, and to build the capacity of caregivers to support their children. Eligible families began to receive invitations in June 2021, and service delivery began in summer 2021. Service providers are offering the following six caregiver-mediated early years programs:
  - Early social interaction/social communication emotional regulation and transactional supports (ESI/SCERTS)
  - Joint attention, symbolic play, engagement and regulation (JASPER)
  - Pivotal response treatment (PRT)
  - PLAY project
  - Project ImPACT
  - Social ABCs
- **Independent Intake Organization (IIO)** will be accountable to MCCSS for the oversight and administration of key elements of the OAP provincially and within each of the five MCCSS defined regions. Key responsibilities will include, but are not limited to, intake and registration, waitlist management, employing and training Care Coordinators, allocating and reconciling funding, and establishing an integrated and coordinated network of service providers. As announced on December 3, 2021, the process to select an organization to assume the role is complete and this function will be delivered through a partnership led by Accerta Services Inc., with McMaster University, Autism Ontario, and HealthCare 365. In spring 2022, families will be contacted to connect with the IIO to support their entry into Core Clinical Services. As confirmed by the ministry on December 3, 2021, children will enter core clinical services in the order that they registered for the Ontario Autism Program.
- **Urgent Response Services** will be time-limited services available to any child or youth registered in the OAP, who meet defined criterion. These services will provide a rapid response to a specific, identified need to prevent further escalation or risk of harm to the child/youth, others and/or property. 11 lead organizations have been

identified through a regional based proposals process to manage, deliver and coordinate the delivery of the OAP Urgent Response Service (URS). In September 2021, identified lead organizations submitted formal proposals to the ministry to implement and deliver URS in each of the five MCCSS-defined regions. The ministry will provide more information about this program and how families will be able to access it in early 2022.

- **The entry to school program** is launching in March 2022. Eligible families will receive invitations to register for the program beginning in January 2022. The program is a six-month group-based skill-building program for young children registered in the OAP, aged 3 to 6 years, who are entering kindergarten or Grade 1 for the first time and is focused on preparing them to enter school. Following the group-based program, children will receive transition supports as they enter school, to support a successful school transition. Families and educators will be able to access consultation services from entry to school program staff, upon request, during a child's first six months in school.
- Beginning in March 2021, children and youth from across the province, representing a diverse sample of OAP registrants started to receive requests from the ministry to participate in Core Clinical Services. This includes children and youth of different ages, genders, and geographic areas from across the province. The ministry continues to issue requests and enroll families in Core Clinical Services as they respond. As of January 7, 2022, the ministry has brought 672 families into Core Clinical Services. The feedback received from families on their experience will be critical in helping the ministry evaluate and refine the process. By fall 2022, Ontario will bring 8,000 children and youth into Core Clinical Services.
- Based on a child's individual support needs, families will have access to a broad range of Core Clinical Services and supports such as applied behaviour analysis, speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, and mental health services. Families of children with existing behaviour plans will have the option to enter Core Clinical Services in the order that they registered in the Ontario Autism Program, or extend their plans until spring 2023, at which time they will begin to transition into Core Clinical Services.
- In July 2021, the ministry announced a plan to build service capacity to deliver the needs-based OAP in Ontario. The Autism Workforce Capacity Action Plan, part of the province's \$600 million annual investment in the program, encompasses a mix of short and long-term initiatives, including the following:
  - Transition funding and other supports for publicly-funded children's service providers;
  - A new grant program to support capacity-building activities led by public and private children's service providers and community organizations. As announced on December 3, 2021, the government is awarding 79 grants to build and retain the workforce, including behaviour analysts, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, and mental health clinicians;
  - Investments in skills and training for more than 7,000 clinicians, including Indigenous Cultural Competency Training and mental health training; and
  - Support for three pilot projects to build capacity in Northern Ontario.

- Eligible families on the OAP waitlist who submitted their registration form and supporting documentation by March 31, 2021, will receive Interim One-Time funding to purchase eligible services and supports.
  - Additionally, eligible families who received an initial interim one-time funding payment may be eligible to receive a second payment of \$5,000 or \$20,000 based on their child's age as of April 1, 2021. Accepting this funding will not impact a family's eligibility for the needs-based program and their position on the OAP waitlist will be maintained.

### **Next Steps**

- Implementation of the needs-based autism program is underway and ongoing throughout 2021-22 and 2022-23.

### **Virtual/Remote Service Delivery in Response to COVID-19**

- Many service providers are offering services through telephone or video applications where appropriate, building their capacity to deliver services remotely, or may be considering other remote and virtual service delivery options.
- Agencies have been encouraged to explore opportunities to implement alternative service models during this time, where appropriate for children and families.
- Service providers continue to take pragmatic and innovative approaches to keep children and youth safe and families supported, including delivering services through innovative modalities such as virtual tele-practice and remote services, to avoid or minimize service disruptions to children and families, all while following the guidance of local public health authorities.
- Empowered Kids Ontario (EKO) played a key role in supporting agencies across Ontario to prepare for virtual service delivery, including the development of a comprehensive Virtual Care Resource Guide and checklist.

### **Temporary Changes to Direct-Funding Programs in Response to COVID-19**

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services announced a number of updates for the Ontario Autism Program:
  - An [extension for the amount of time families have to spend childhood budget and interim one-time funding](#) and submit their expense form by up to six months, if necessary. Families now have up to 18 months to spend their childhood budget and submit their expense form.
  - The ministry extended the March 31, 2020 deadline for families to submit their OAP registration form and supporting documents to be eligible for interim one-time funding. The ministry continued to provide interim one-time funding to all new applicants whose registration forms and supporting documents were submitted by March 31, 2021.
  - Additionally, to support children and youth on the autism spectrum and their families, the ministry provided greater clarity about what expenses are eligible under the Ontario Autism program for childhood budgets and interim one-time funding for the duration of the COVID-19 outbreak. The current list of eligible expenses for the OAP allows for a broad range of services and supports, to support the clinical needs of children with Autism. This includes evidence-based behavioural services, other therapies and services (e.g., Speech

- language therapy, Occupational therapy, and Physiotherapy), additional autism services and supports (e.g., curriculum-based interventions, life skills and social skills training programs, employment supports, and parent and caregiver capacity building and training), respite services, family service planning and support (e.g., interpretation and translation services, individualized family service planning), travel, and technology.
- For families receiving funding under the OAP – Direct Funding Option, resources approved for a child’s existing behaviour plan can be used flexibly to support families to access eligible services through remote or virtual service delivery during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- The ministry temporarily expanded the list of eligible expenses for families accessing the Special Services at Home (SSAH) and Enhanced Respite for Medically Fragile and/or Technology Dependent Children (MFTDC) programs to allow families to use funding for goods and services that may make it easier for them to stay at home and practice physical distancing.
  - These programs provide funding for families to purchase respite services and/or opportunities for personal growth and development for children and youth. The [temporarily expanded list of eligible expenses](#) includes the following categories of goods and services:
    - sensory items to alleviate anxiety/stress;
    - technology items to help children and youth with special needs to remain connected and/or engage in e-learning;
    - Items to support home-based recreation and fitness activities such as:
      - craft and hobby supplies
      - home-based fitness and sports equipment that children and youth would otherwise access through day programs or community-based programs;
    - personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies;
    - essential service fees such as grocery and pharmacy fees; and
    - behavioural support plans and related interventions.
  - These changes are temporary and the existing program terms and conditions will continue to apply upon the government providing notice.
  - For the Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities (ACSD) program, families who have already received pre-approval for ACSD expenditures may temporarily, for the duration of the pandemic period, use pre-approved ACSD funding to purchase items/services from the expanded list of admissible expenditures without pre-approval from the ministry. For example, if a family is temporarily not using their funding for a pre-approved expense such as transportation, they can use that funding for the expenses outlined above.
  - The government of Ontario is also providing a temporary wage enhancement for direct support workers who care for vulnerable people of all ages, including children and youth, in residential, community and home settings. The temporary wage enhancement has been extended to March 31, 2022.
  - If families employ or buy services from a worker(s) to care for their children or youth with special needs using funding from one or more of the Ministry of Children,

Community and Social Services (MCCSS)-funded children's direct funding programs, these worker(s) may be eligible for a temporary wage enhancement.

- Eligible workers provide support with daily living tasks and personal care (such as feeding, changing) and ensuring the safety and welfare of children and youth with special needs. This includes workers who provide respite services. This care may be provided in-person, or virtually/online (for example, where a support worker engages in activities with the child online to provide the caregiver with respite).
- To be eligible, the worker must be doing some or all of the following in their work with a child or youth with special needs:
  - providing personal care (such as feeding, dressing, personal hygiene, toileting, managing medication),
  - providing necessary supports required to access and participate in community activities, and/or
  - observing, planning daily living routines, supervising and monitoring safety risks.
- Families can apply for funding from the ministry to pay eligible worker(s) \$3 per hour on top of their existing hourly wages, for all hours worked within the eligibility period. Families can request funding for eligible workers that worked (or will work) any time during the eligibility period. Families can apply for the wage enhancement funding by completing and submitting an online application. Wage enhancement payments are retroactive to October 1, 2020.

## Ministry of Colleges and Universities

### **Key Facts**

- Universities, colleges and Indigenous Institutes, as direct providers of educational services, have a legal duty to accommodate persons with disabilities under the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, (AODA) 2005*.
- The Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) provides targeted funding through special purpose grants to assist publicly-funded colleges, universities and Indigenous Institutes to meet their legislative obligations. These supports are intended to supplement institutions' general operating costs in support of students with disabilities.

### **Funding**

- In 2020-21, the government provided \$74.3 million to assist public colleges, universities, and Indigenous Institutes in meeting their legal requirements to provide academic accommodations to students with disabilities. The government also provide support directly to postsecondary students with disabilities through the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP).
- Through OSAP, the ministry provided almost \$3 million in 2020-21 to help students with their disability-related educational costs (e.g., services and equipment such as braille displays and assistive listening devices).
- The ministry is also providing funding to support accessibility for students with disabilities who attend Indigenous Institutes through a new Indigenous Institutes Accessibility Fund for Learners Grant.
- In 2021-22, the government invested a total of \$28.45 million in mental health supports for postsecondary students This included an additional \$8.7 million as announced in the Fall Economic Statement on November 4, 2021. This funding provides direct grant support to all publicly-assisted colleges, universities and Indigenous Institutes, and will for the first time provide allocations for l'Université de l'Ontario Français (UOF) and Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM). The funding also supports the Good2Talk/Allo j'écoute postsecondary mental health helpline and the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health in the provision of mental health resources to students and institutions alike.
- In 2021-22, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities also announced that it was providing an additional \$3 million over three years to support the David C. Onley Initiative (DCOI). The DCOI initiative will build the capacity of postsecondary institutions across Ontario to prepare students with disabilities for their transition into the workforce. This investment will help extend supports to more students through the creation of an online toolkit.
- The Ministry of Colleges and Universities also funds the Ontario Postsecondary Access and Inclusion Program (OPAIP) which provides funding to Ontario colleges and universities for project activities that support access to postsecondary education and focuses on three main objectives:
  - **Outreach:** Encouraging eligible students to appreciate the value of Postsecondary Education (PSE).

- **Access/Transition:** Helping eligible students with admission to PSE programs and transition into PSE studies, as well as employment.
- **Retention:** Ensuring students enrolled in PSE continue to succeed and graduate.
- In addition, through OPAIP PSE institutions provide supports to students facing barriers in accessing and transitioning to postsecondary education and employment. Supports are also provided to help these students continue and succeed with their studies and to help them be prepared for the in-demand jobs of today and tomorrow.
- In 2021-22, the ministry informed postsecondary institutions that it was providing \$11.37 million annually in 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24 or \$34.11 million in total over three years in OPAIP funding through a call for proposal process.
  - The ministry received proposals from 45 publicly assisted postsecondary institutions for over 500 projects. While not all projects will be funded, all 45 institutions are receiving OPAIP funding.

## **Ministry of Health**

### **Home and Community Care Modernization**

#### **Key Facts**

- On February 25, 2020 the Deputy Premier and Minister of Health, the Honourable Christine Elliott, introduced Bill 175, the *Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act, 2020* in the legislature. Bill 175 received Royal assent on July 8, 2020 and will be proclaimed into force at a later date.
- The *Connecting People to Home and Community Care Act, 2020* integrates home and community care into broader health system legislation, by leveraging existing authorities in the *Connecting Care Act, 2019* for its funding and oversight. This approach recognizes that home and community care is part of an integrated system.
- The legislation lays the groundwork for the integration of home and community care into Ontario Health Teams over the coming years.
- The regulations required to support this new framework will include programmatic elements of the home and community care program, including the scope of services, eligibility provisions, oversight of care, and a Bill of Rights. Like the *Home Care and Community Services Act, 1994*, the new regulations will include requirements regarding school health professional services and school health personal support services.
- The Ministry of Health (“the ministry”) has engaged with stakeholders about the regulations:
  - The ministry originally posted a summary of proposed regulations to the government’s Regulatory Registry from February 25 to April 14, 2020.
  - During Summer 2020, the ministry engaged with home and community care stakeholders to seek additional input on the regulations.
  - Between May – July 2021, the ministry completed a second round of engagement with stakeholders.

- Between August 27 and October 15, 2021, the ministry also posted to the government's Regulatory Registry a regulatory impact analysis inviting feedback from stakeholders on the regulatory burden.
- The ministry is carefully planning health system transformation to preserve continuity of home and community care while working toward improvements. This planning will continue to be done in collaboration with patients, caregivers, workers, employers, associations and unions.

## **Ontario Health and Home and Community Care Support Services Organizations**

### ***Key Facts***

- On April 1, 2021, non-patient care functions of the Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs), such as health system funding and planning functions, transferred to Ontario Health. As a result, Ontario Health has assumed responsibility for community services funding agreements with health service providers, including hospitals and community services providers.
- The mandate of the LHINs has been narrowed to direct patient care. To reflect this change, the LHINs now operate under a new business name – Home and Community Care Support Services. These continue to be Crown agencies.
- Patient care functions including home care services including School Health Support Services, long-term care home placement services, and referral to community services, remain in place with Home and Community Care Support Services. Patients and families will continue to access care through the same contacts.
- Home and Community Care Support Services will continue to employ care coordination staff and deliver home and community care services – including in schools – as responsibility for providing and arranging those services is transitioned to Ontario Health Teams and other points of care over the coming years. This transition is expected to take place in a gradual, phased manner.
- Planning for the eventual and carefully phased integration of home and community care services into Ontario Health Teams will involve engagement with system partners. As home and community care transitions to Ontario Health Teams, continuity of care for patients and caregivers, will be a priority to ensure there is no disruption to patient care.
- Effective July 1, 2021, Joe Parker is the new Board to lead Ontario's Home and Community Care Support Services organizations. Cynthia Martineau is the Chief Executive Officer. These appointments will ensure strong leadership to support continuity of high-quality home care services and partnership in modernizing home and community care.

### **Ontario Health Teams**

- The Ontario government is building a connected health care system centred around patients, families and caregivers. These changes will strengthen local services, making it easier for patients to navigate the system and transition between providers.
- Ontario Health Teams (OHTs) are being introduced to provide a new way of organizing and delivering care that is more connected to patients in their local

communities. Under Ontario Health Teams, health care providers work as one coordinated team - no matter where they provide care.

- There are currently 50 OHTs that have been approved by the ministry, and more teams across the province are working to become approved.
- Home and Community Care Support Services will be a stable platform for transitions of home and community care services to OHTs over the coming years. Once this process is complete, it is anticipated that these organizations will be wound down.

### **School Health Support Services During COVID-19**

#### ***Key Facts***

- During the 2021-22 school year, the Ministry of Health and Home and Community Care Support Services organizations will support students by providing access to school health services both in school and for remote learning.
- Last year, the Ministry of Health provided guidance to Home and Community Care Support Services organizations regarding the delivery of school health professional services. The guidance was delivered in a memorandum that emphasized the following parameters for the delivery school health professional services during the pandemic:
  - It is the Ministry of Education's expectation that school boards should work with partners to develop local protocols for school access by regulated health professionals, regulated social service professionals and paraprofessionals for the purpose of delivering school-based supports and services.
  - Eligible students registered for in-person learning continue to be eligible to receive school health services.
  - Eligible students can also receive school health services while engaging in remote learning. The Ministry of Health has outlined parameters to support the delivery of care outside of schools.
  - Some families have elected to transition to home schooling and will need to engage with Home and Community Care Support Services to establish services for home-schooled students.
  - All services will continue to be provided in alignment with public health guidance.

These parameters still apply during the 2021-22 school year.

## **Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility**

### **Development of an Accessibility Standard for Education under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)***

#### ***Key Facts***

- The Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility (MSAA) has the lead to establish an accessibility standard for education under the AODA, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (EDU) and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU).
- In February 2018, two separate Education Standards Development Committees (ESDC) were established to support the development of the standard; one committee to focus on the Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) sector, and a second committee to focus on the postsecondary education sector.
- The K-12 ESDC includes people with disabilities, as well as individuals from organizations from the affected sectors.
- In March 2021, the K-12 ESDC submitted its initial report to Minister Cho (MSAA).
- The K-12 ESDC's Initial Report was posted on June 1 and an online public consultation was held from then until November 1, 2021.
- The SDC then resumed meetings to consider the public feedback they received on the initial report and held its final meeting on January 5, 2022.

#### ***Next Steps***

- The ESDC is now finalizing its final recommendations report for submission to the MSAA Minister.