

Ministry of Education

Special Education and Mental Health Update

Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education

June 8, 2021

Special Education

In-Person Instruction and Remote Learning

During provincially directed school closures, the ministry has required school boards to make provisions for in-person support for students with special education needs who cannot be accommodated through remote learning. School boards have been asked to seek the input and advice of special education staff working with students in determining which students require in-person supports based on the student's strengths and needs. School boards have the flexibility to determine how to deliver in-person instruction based on local conditions

Where in-person learning is offered, boards must follow strict health and safety practices, including confirmation of daily screening. Staff who support students with complex special education needs and staff in hot spot areas in Toronto and Peel have been prioritized for vaccination against COVID-19. As of May 6, 2021, remaining education staff province-wide were also made eligible to register for vaccination appointments.

Emergency childcare has been extended to education staff who support in-person learning for students with special education needs who cannot be accommodated remotely.

Most students with special education needs have learned remotely through school closures. For these students, boards are expected to:

- Fully leverage the capacity of education workers and board professionals to support remote learning (e.g. behavioural experts, speech language pathologists, and other professionals);
- Continue to involve instructional support staff in planning for student supports;
- Work with labour partners to proactively define roles and responsibilities for staff; and
- Provide remote learning in alignment with Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) No. 164, *Requirements for Remote Learning*.

Ontario COVID-19 Child Benefit

Announced as part of the 2021 Budget, the Ontario COVID-19 Child Benefit provides financial support to families with learners to help with additional costs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Starting on April 26, Ontario began issuing payments of:

- ✓ \$400 for each child or youth up to Grade 12
- ✓ \$500 for each child or youth up to age 21 with special needs

Families who received a payment through the Support for Learners program do not need to apply for this additional payment. Applications were open from May 3, 2021 to May 17, 2021.

This program builds on the success of the ministry's past initiatives to support students and their families during challenging periods, which include:

- ✓ The Support for Parents program, which was designed to assist parents impacted by strikes during central bargaining through one-time financial support.
- ✓ The Support for Families program that provided one-time financial support for families to purchase educational materials during the spring 2020 school and child care closures due to COVID-19.
- ✓ The Support for Learners program that supported children, youth and students in their continued learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2020-2021 school year.

This funding is provided directly to families and guardians and is in addition to any Priorities and Partnerships and Grants for Student Needs funding

PPF Funding Outcomes in 2020-21

Third Party Transfer Payment Agreements

- The Principals' Associations provided **347 subsidies** for the Special Education for Administrators, Autism Focus AQ. Of participants who completed a survey on the course, a vast majority rated the effectiveness, relevance and impact of this learning as high or very high.
- **5,872 educators** enrolled in Geneva Centre for Autism's Online Training Program. **4,377** used the Intro to Autism Modules
- **559 educators** enrolled in the new enhanced synchronous training program offered by Geneva.

School Board Transfer Payment Agreements (*from interim reports*)

- More than **878 teachers** have received subsidies for the Teaching Students with Communication Needs (Autism Spectrum Disorder) AQ
- An **additional two boards signed TPAs** to operate the After School Skills Development Program, bringing the total to 70 province wide.

Summer 2020 – Additional Staffing Supports (\$6.4M)

Of the reports received to date (56 of 76), school boards have reported that in Summer 2020:

- 14,639 students participated in summer program offerings, with approximately 50% of students in elementary and 50% of students in secondary programs.
- 2,584 credit programs and 56 non-credit programs were offered at the secondary level.
- 340 programs were offered at the elementary level.

The majority of additional staffing supports included Special Education Resource Teachers (SERTs) and Educational Assistants as well as professionals including psychologists and social workers at the elementary and secondary levels.

PPF Funding Outcomes in 2020-21 (continued)

Summer Transition Programs (\$7.6M):

- Of the reports received to date (56 of 76):
 - 27,732 students participated in the summer transition program, with approximately 67% of students in elementary and 33% of students in secondary programs.
 - A total of 3,494 programs were offered, 2,498 (71%) at the elementary level and 996 (29%) programs at the secondary level.
- At the elementary level, school boards focused on school visits and introducing students to COVID-19 based protocols including hand washing, social distance learning and becoming familiar with PPE that staff may be wearing. Multi-disciplinary teams were created to support the unique needs of individual students with special education needs related to transitioning back to school.
- At the secondary level, the focus was primarily on the incoming grade 9 cohort. School boards allowed students with special education needs to visit the secondary school. Many of the boards provided workshops for transitions to prepare students better to join the secondary school community.
- Some boards partnered with agencies such as One Kids Place Children's Treatment Centre, Bethesda Children's Services, and Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario to provide Grade 9 students with on-line workshops related to transitions.
- Parent engagement was key to the success of the Summer Learning program. Parents liaised with the teachers, coordinators, SLPs and EAs. Parents also assisted in helping their child navigate the virtual learning environment.

School Year Planning

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.

Special Education Grant 2021-22

[\(Special Education Grant Guide 2021-22\)](#)

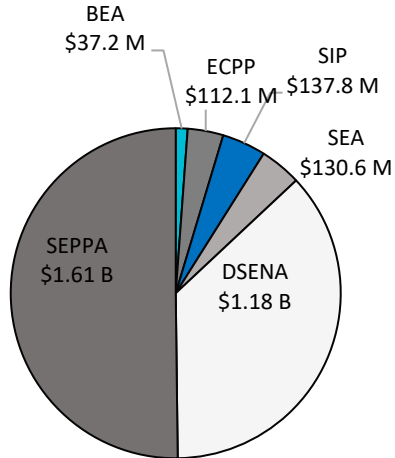
What's New

On May 4th, 2021, the Province announced that the Special Education Grant (SEG) is projected to be over \$3.21 billion for the 2021-22 school year. This represents an increase of approximately \$68.6 million or 2.2 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.
- Projected increases to average daily enrolment (ADE).
- The transfer of the \$1.44 million Integrated Services for Northern Children (ISNC) and \$6.1 million After-School Skills Development (ASSD) programs from the Priorities and Partnerships Fund (PPF) into the GSN.
- Increasing the maximum individual Special Incidence Portion (SIP) claim funding amount to \$28,518.
- Continued support for the Special Equipment Amount (SEA) claim-based applications.

Special Education Grant Funding
2021-22



2021-22 Regular Priorities and Partnerships Funding (PPF) for Special Education

- 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.
- 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, and an additional \$5.88M in third-party investments.

School Board Funding	
Educators Autism AQ Subsidy	\$1.01M
Pilot to Improve School-Based Supports for Students with ASD (ASD Pilot)	\$0.37M
Developmental Disabilities Pilot: Student Transitions	\$0.48M
TOTAL:	\$1.86M

Third Party Funding	
Geneva Centre for Autism – Online Training	\$2M
Geneva Centre for Autism – Synchronous Educator Training	\$2.5M
Principals' Associations AQ & Webinar	\$0.43M
Learning Disabilities Assoc. of Ontario (LDAO)	\$0.75M
Post-Sec Opportunities & Transition Supports for Students who are D/deaf and Hard of Hearing	\$0.20M
TOTAL:	\$5.88M

2021-22 Learning Recovery & Renewal & Spring/Summer Learning 2021

1. **Learning Recovery and Renewal** ([Planning for the 2021-22 School Year Memorandum 2021:B07](#))
 - On May 4, the government announced it was investing \$85.5 million as part of its Learning Recovery and Renewal Plan aimed at addressing the impact of learning disruptions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic over the past two school years.
 - Funding includes:
 - *\$62M - Summer learning, Including Federal Safe Return to Class Fund (see below)*
 - *\$20M - Re-engaging students and reading assessment supports*
 - *\$3.5M - Professional Learning*
 - *Ontario's approach for 2021-22 also includes a math pilot on early intervention supports for students with special education needs in Grades 4-6 to support math learning in up to 20 select school boards. School boards will be invited to apply in the spring.*
2. **Spring and Summer Learning 2020-21** ([Federal Safe Return to Class Fund Memorandum 2021:SB04](#))
 - On March 25, the government announced a series of Spring and Summer Learning initiatives for in-year and summer 2021 special education, reading intervention and mental health supports. Funding includes:
 - *\$8.32M - Summer Staffing Supports: Special Education Needs*
 - *\$7.6M - Summer Transition Program: Special Education Needs*
 - *\$6.7M - Summer Evidence-Based Reading Intervention Programs*
 - *\$5M - In-Year Evidence-Based Reading Intervention Programs*
 - *\$17M - Additional In-Year & Summer Mental Health Supports*

2021-22 Additional COVID-19 PPF Investments

3. Additional COVID-19 Investments ([Planning for the 2021-22 School Year Memorandum 2021:B07](#))

- 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.
- Investments through Priorities and Partnerships Funding (PPF) totalling \$487.9 million include nearly \$49 million for special education and mental health and well-being, as well as equity initiatives.
- Funding includes:
 - *\$16.25M - Special Education Supports*
 - *\$25.25M - Mental Health Supports*
 - *\$1M - Kids Help Phone*

Mental Health

Student Mental Health during COVID-19 Pandemic



School-based Mental Health Services 2020-21

About 300 new mental health workers (FTEs) were hired by school boards using the COVID-19 funding and school board reserves. (*Pulse Survey, March 2021*)

Between September and December 2020:

- about 66,744 students received school-based services (in person or virtually) for mental health challenges,
- about 9,730 students were referred for mental health services outside of the school, to a community mental health organization, and
- about 1,174 students were referred to a hospital for emergency or in-patient mental health support.

(*SMH-ON School Board Scan, May 2021*)



99% of school boards provided specific MH promotion supports for students leaning remotely during the fall of 2020

(*SMH-ON School Board Scan, May 2021*)



Top 3 problem areas for students referred to Tier 2 and Tier 3 services* (September-December 2020)

Elementary students	Secondary students
Anxiety, panic, worry	Anxiety, panic, worry
Depression or low mood	Depression or low mood
Aggression, physical fighting or oppositional behaviours	Attendance issues, skipping classes or truancy

**SMH-ON School Board Scan, March 2021*

Regulated Mental Health Workers

- 99% of DSBs are employing regulated mental health professional staff and most of them reporting very positive results related to the implementation of the new mental health workers in secondary schools: more and better supported students, better supported educators, and new mental health strategies implemented.
- The majority of regulated mental health professionals are trained in a form of structured psychotherapy and in providing services remotely.

2021-22 Mental Health Funding

- Student mental health and well-being is the foundation for learning recovery and renewal.
- In 2021-22 the ministry is providing school boards with more than **\$80 million** in dedicated funding to support student mental health (Learning Recovery and Renewal Memo to school boards, May 4, 2021; [Ontario's Learning Recovery and Renewal Plan for Students | Ontario Newsroom](#))
- **\$55.5M** of the \$80M funding is **on-going mental health funding** and includes the following allocations:
 - *\$25.4M - Mental Health Workers Allocation (MHWs in Secondary Schools)*
 - *\$10.5M - Mental Health Leaders*
 - *\$10.1M - Supporting Student Mental Health Allocation (moved to GSN this year)*
 - *\$6.5M - School Mental Health Ontario*
 - *\$3.0M - Mental Health and Well-being Bundle*
- In addition, the ministry is providing **\$25.3M in COVID-19 funding** to support mental health and to foster the continued learning and well-being of students. This may include employing mental health professionals, professional learning and training, collaboration with community mental health providers to ensure pathways to care for students requiring more intensive supports are available, student engagement opportunities, and the collection, analysis and reporting of student mental health related information

Appendix

School-Based Health and Rehabilitation Services

A memo was sent on December 10, 2020 to school boards to clarify ministry expectations regarding access to schools by community-based health and rehabilitation services providers, in order to make sure they have access to the supports they need to participate in learning.

As part of the return to school direction in the [Guide to Re-Opening Ontario's Schools](#), school boards were expected to work with partners to develop local protocols for school access by regulated professionals, regulated social service professionals and paraprofessionals for the purpose of delivering school-based supports and services. This includes staff involved in the provision of services by Home and Community Care Support Services (HCCSS - formerly LHINs) and Children's Treatment Centres (CTCs).

- School boards should continue to work with their local partners to facilitate access to schools by service providers, including those providing services on behalf of HCCSSs and CTCs.
- Protocols for local partners should outline how space can be set aside for students receiving these services and how, when remote service is appropriate - students can be supported to access remote services to support the equitable delivery of school-based supports and services across boards.
- The needs of students participating in remote learning should be considered in board protocols for remote delivery.
 - Supports and services may be delivered remotely or at other community locations where necessary, for instance - students who remain eligible for nursing and dietetics services (which may be delivered in their homes) and school-based rehabilitation services should be addressed.
 - For in-person delivery, it is possible students may need to have their therapy scheduled during instructional time and school boards are encouraged to make arrangements with the CTCs.
- With respect to remote access for students, The Ministry of Education has entered into an agreement with Ontario Health to make the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN) virtual care platform available to all publicly funded school boards at no cost for one year, from November 1, 2020 until October 31, 2021. The ministry encourages school boards that have not yet done so to sign up for the OTN platform.
 - The OTN platform supports the safety and security of students and other board users and is compliant with PHIPA. The OTN can be used by regulated professionals (e.g., social workers, psychologists, psychotherapists, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists) to provide supports to students remotely.

Supporting Students with Autism

The Ministry of Education announced two new funding initiatives in January 2021 to support the professional development of education workers and educators working with students with autism. These will continue in 2021-22 and include:

- \$2.5 million to deliver online courses and live synchronous training opportunities for teachers and educational assistants in all 72 of Ontario's district school boards.
- \$0.4 million to provide administrators subsidies to take Special Education for Educators (ASD focus) Additional Qualification course and to provide other venues, such as webinars, to build the capacity of school leaders to support students with autism.

For over a decade, Ontario has invested in Geneva Centre for Autism to implement a wide range of programs and training opportunities for educators to support implementation of [Policy and Program Memorandum No. 140, Incorporating Methods of Applied Behavior Analysis \(ABA\) into Programs for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders \(ASD\)](#).

In the spring of 2019, EDU announced new and increased funding to support students with ASD. These funding initiatives continue to be implemented over the 2021-22 school year, including:

- A total of \$37.2 million toward the Behaviour Expertise Amount (BEA) allocation, as part of GSN funding. The BEA allocation provides funding for school boards to hire board-level Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) expertise professionals, including Board Certified Behaviour Analysts (BCBAs), and to provide training opportunities that will build school board capacity in ABA. This also incorporates the newly transferred \$6.1M in funding for After-School Skills Development (ASSD) Programs.
- \$1 million for the Teaching Students with Communication Needs (Autism Spectrum Disorder) additional qualification course (PPF funding).
- \$2 million for ABA-based online training for educators through the Geneva Centre for Autism (PPF funding).
- Continuing the dedicated space component of the Pilot to Improve School Based Supports for Students with ASD for 11 school boards, for a total of \$0.37 million (PPF funding).

2020-21 Safe Return to Class Fund Investments & Other Provincial Investments

- ✓ On August 25, 2020, the federal government announced the provision of up to \$2 billion dollars through the Safe Return to Class Fund.
- ✓ This included a maximum total allocation of \$763.4 million for Ontario, that has been provided in 2 Phases (August 2020 and February 2021).
- ✓ In total, including the [February 1st, 2021 announcement](#), school boards have access to over \$1.6 billion in resources to support the safe reopening of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The government's investments include additional support for more teachers to support smaller class sizes, special education, mental health, technology-related costs, cleaning and safety measures, improved ventilation and HVAC system effectiveness, administrative staff to oversee virtual schools, and flexible funding to support a range of activities based on school board priorities.
- ✓ In response to this reopening and the COVID-19 pandemic, during the 2020-21 school year \$53.9 million has been provided to help boards better meet the needs of students with special education needs and support their mental health. This includes the Safe Return to Class Fund and provincial investments.
- ✓ This \$53.9 million consists of the following investments:
 - a) \$10M mental health supports (announced June 19);
 - b) \$10M additional mental health supports (August 4);
 - c) \$10M additional special education supports (August 4);
 - d) \$12.5M additional special education and/or mental health supports(August 26);
 - e) \$1.4M for the Education and Community Partnership Program (ECP) to fund technology and technology-related costs due to the COVID-19 pandemic (November 26); and
 - f) \$10 million to support of student mental health, including funding for Kids Help Phone to support children and youth across the province (January 7).

Education and Community Partnership Programs (ECPP)

ECPPs are voluntary, collaborative programs between school boards and facilities such as hospitals, children's treatment centres or custody detention facilities. These programs provide education to students that cannot attend regular school due to their primary need for treatment, care or due to a court order.

There are 60 boards offering 550 ECPPs in the 2020-21 school year. No new programs are being accepted for the 2021-22 school year.

On Tuesday, May 4, the ministry released the 2021-22 Guidelines and application materials for the 2021-22 school year. The SB memo was sent to Directors of Education and all materials are posted on the Ministry's EFIS website. Available funding for the 2021-22 school year remains at \$112M (pending approval of the GSN regulation).

This year, a new streamlined application process is in place for programs that had no changes from the previous year.

- Boards could indicate there were no program changes and the application automatically updated approved salaries and benefits from last year, adding 1% in alignment with collective bargaining agreements. No additional information was required to be completed by boards.
- Other changes/clarifications in the ECPP Guidelines include:
 - New language around requirement for remote learning option for ECPP students when in-person is not available (e.g., public health emergencies) and language around re-entry/transition periods.
 - Designated School - Language clarified that boards must designate a school as the credit granting institution. Umbrella names are not acceptable if they do not maintain the student's confidentiality in the ECPP (i.e., all programs under that umbrella name are only ECPPs).
 - New language reiterating that treatment and education must be provided daily.
 - More detail on what should be included in the memorandum of understanding including a checklist.
 - An appendix with an Education and Transition Plan Checklist