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**MEMORANDUM TO:**

Directors of District School Boards/School Authorities  
Executive Directors of Preschool Speech and Language, Infant Hearing, Blind-Low Vision, Healthy Babies Healthy Children and Special Needs Resourcing Programs  
Executive Directors of Children's Mental Health Agencies  
Chief Executive Officers of Community Care Access Centres  
Chief Executive Officers of the Local Health Integration Networks  
Executive Directors of Children's Treatment Centres  
Executive Directors of Regional Autism Service Providers  
Consolidated Municipal Service Managers/  
District Social Services Administration Boards  
Executive Directors of Children's Developmental Services Agencies

**DATE:**

February 11, 2015

**FROM:**

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**RE: Services for Children and Youth with Special Needs during the Special Needs Strategy Proposal Development Period**

The purpose of this memo is to outline the expectations of the ministries of Children and Youth Services, Community and Social Services, Education and Health and Long-Term Care for services for children and youth with special needs during the Special Needs Strategy proposal development period.

**Background:**

The four ministries are working with service providers and district school boards/school authorities to implement the Special Needs Strategy to improve services for children and youth with special needs in Ontario guided by the following vision: “An Ontario where children and youth with special needs get the timely and effective services they need to participate fully at home, at school, in the community, and as they prepare to achieve their goals for adulthood.”

First steps of the Special Needs Strategy include putting in place:

- A new standard developmental screen for preschool children;
- Coordinated family-centred service planning for children and youth with multiple and/or complex special needs; and
- An integrated approach to the delivery of rehabilitation services (speech-language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy).

As part of the implementation of the strategy, service providers and district school boards/school authorities in each of the 34 special needs service delivery areas will develop and propose, for the ministries’ approval:

- A local process for coordinated service planning for children with multiple and/or complex special needs, including recommending a single existing transfer payment agency to be the agency responsible for coordinating service planning in their service area; and
- An approach to delivering speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy in their communities so that children and youth with special needs and their families experience a single and seamless program of rehabilitation services from birth to the end of school.

In response to feedback from local proposal development tables, the deadlines for these proposals have been extended. Proposals are now due to the ministries by June 15, 2015 (for Coordinated Service Planning) and October 30, 2015 (for the Integrated Delivery of Rehabilitation Services). Following the ministries’ review and approval of submissions, the ministries will work with local service providers and district school boards/school authorities to support the implementation of the approved models.

The ministries are also working with a scientific work group and Provincial Consultation Group to develop an approach for piloting, implementing and evaluating provincial developmental screening for children from birth through age 6 years. The ministries are targeting 2017 for provincial implementation of the screen. More information will become available about this process as it is developed.

**Service Expectations:**

This is a transformative strategy that involves collaboration across the children’s services, community services, health and education sectors at both the local and ministerial levels.

Currently children and youth with special needs receive a range of services to support their development and participation in school and in the community. We are aware that as local proposal development for the Special Needs Strategy has begun, some questions and concerns have been raised regarding the status of these existing services. **As District School Boards and agencies/organizations work together in local communities to develop proposals for the Special Needs Strategy, we expect that existing service capacity and service levels for children and youth with special needs and their families be maintained.**

It is the ministries' expectation that you will continue to work together at the local level to provide stability and continuity of service for children and youth with special needs in their homes, schools and communities throughout the proposal development period and beyond.

**Proposed Changes to Existing Mandates and/or Service Models:**

Proposed changes to how children and youth with special needs receive services related to coordinated service planning and/or rehabilitation services will be included as part of the submissions due to the ministries in 2015. These proposals are subject to the review and approval of the ministries.

Changes to any agency/organization/School Board's existing service levels, mandates, catchment areas, funding levels, etc. as proposed in any service delivery area's submission will take place only following dialogue with, and approval by, the ministries.

**Further Information:**

The Special Needs Strategy website is continually being updated with information on the strategy. The website includes frequently asked questions and answers as well as contact information for local proposal development tables.

The website can be accessed at: <http://specialneedsstrategy.children.gov.on.ca/>.

Specific questions about the Special Needs Strategy can be sent via email to: [specialneedsstrategy@ontario.ca](mailto:specialneedsstrategy@ontario.ca)

Thank you for your support in implementing this important initiative for Ontario's children and youth. We trust that this information will support you as you continue to deliver services and supports to children and youth with special needs during the coming months. We look forward to continuing to work with you as we make our province's vision for children and youth with special needs a reality.

Our shared focus continues to be improving outcomes and the service experience for children and youth with special needs and their families.

<original signed by>

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- c. Special Needs Strategy Reference Group
- Members of the Special Needs Strategy Provider Table
- Members of the Special Needs Strategy Developmental Screen Provincial Consultation Group