

Special Education Audit Summary

Date	December 8, 2008
To	SEAC
From	Karen Forbes Senior Supt – Special Education & Section Programs
Subject	<i>SPECIAL EDUCATION: REPORT ON THE AUDIT</i>
Purpose	<p>To provide to Trustees and Senior Team an overview of the Special Education: Report on the Audit conducted by the office of the Auditor General of Ontario.</p> <p>(Please note this briefing has been prepared using the draft version provided to the School Board prior to the release of the final report. The final report will be available immediately after being tabled at http://www.auditor.on.ca. Although, few, if any changes are expected between the draft and final reports, any differences between the draft and the final versions presented to the provincial government will be summarized for you in a subsequent briefing note once the final report has been reviewed).</p>
Content Summary	<p>On Monday, December 8th, at 1 p.m. <i>the 2008 Annual Report</i> by the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario was forwarded to the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Honourable Peter Milliken, of the Ontario Provincial Parliament for tabling in the House. One of the reports that will be contained in the Annual Report is the <i>Special Education: Report on the Audit</i>.</p> <p>The scope of the audit included examining the Ministry of Education's systems and procedures for overseeing the delivery of special education programs and services by school boards. The audit team visited three sample school boards of which the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) was one, as well as the Simcoe County District School Board, and the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board for the purpose of reviewing their delivery of special education programs and services. The audit objective was to assess whether the Ministry of Education (Ministry) and selected school boards had adequate procedures for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• assessing the extent to which special education programs and services met the needs of students with special education needs; and• ensuring that programs and services complied with legislation, regulations, and policies regarding special education and were delivered economically and efficiently.

The auditors interviewed staff and reviewed documentation from selected divisions of the Ministry. From all three boards of education, they interviewed principals, special education teachers, classroom teachers, and supervisory staff and reviewed documentation related to services provided to a sample of students with special education needs. A psychologist and several members from the TDSB's Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) were interviewed. A number of parents answered a brief questionnaire and comments from other members of the public were received. Programs for gifted students were not reviewed in the audit because of the difference of the needs of gifted students from those of other students with special education needs.

A summary of the more significant observations is included in the report and includes the following:

- provincial test results and the audit indicate that progress has been made since special education was last audited in 2001;
- the proportion of Individual Education Plans (IEPS) completed by the due date has improved from 17% in 2001 to almost 50% in this audit. Availability of student information has also improved and a number of information system initiatives are underway in the sample boards, including those being developed by the TDSB. However the information currently collected for students with special needs is not yet sufficient to support effective planning and service delivery, program oversight and the identification of effective practices;
- the IEPS for students with special education needs working towards modified curriculum expectations varied in quality with respect to learning goals and expectations. Learning goals and expectations were generally measurable for literacy and numeracy but were often vague for other subjects. As a result, schools could not measure the performance gap of students with special education needs and regular curriculum expectations and assess whether progress between reporting periods was appropriate;
- Identification, Placement, and Review Committees (IPRCs) do not adequately document the rationale and evidence they relied on for the significant educational decisions they make. As a result, information for use at annual IPRC reviews and for IEP preparation is not available. Additionally, boards are limited in identifying areas for systemic improvement in IPRC procedures;
- there was a lack of sufficient evidence to demonstrate compliance with the requirement in regulation 181/98 of the Education Act to consult with parents in connection with IPRCs and IEP preparation. Ministry expectations in this regard were not sufficiently detailed;
- the IPRC meeting process and professional assessment requirements are resource intensive. The Ministry must compare the contribution to student outcomes made by the IPRC process to that made by additional direct services provided by special education teachers and identify the strategy that results in the greater benefits to students;
- parents and students are not adequately informed about the performance

of students who are being assessed against modified and alternative expectations because of the design of the provincial report card;

- there were a few examples where teachers glossed over performance issues in report cards resulting in parents potentially being misled about their child's performance;
- the required planning form for the transition from secondary school to work, community living, or further education was being completed by schools. However, there was no documentation on actions completed or with what degree of success. There was no documentation on the work done to manage the transition of students with special needs from school to school or from elementary to secondary school; and
- the Ministry does not require school board to develop procedures to assess the quality of the special education services and supports at their schools or whether school comply with legislation, regulations and policies. None of the audited schools board had such procedures.

The remainder of the report presents detailed audit observations in the areas of:

- Identification and Placement;
- Individual Education Plans;
- Reporting on Student Performance & Progress;
- Transition Planning;
- Monitoring Program Effectiveness, Quality, and Compliance;
- Completeness of Student Records and Information for Research
- Specialized Equipment; and
- Other Matters.

For these eight areas, the following recommendations are outlined:

Recommendation 1

To ensure that students with special education needs are identified in a timely manner, the Ministry of Education should work with school boards to establish procedures to monitor the effectiveness of schools' early identification practices and take corrective action where they have not been effective.

Recommendation 2

To help ensure that Identification, Placement, and Review Committees (IPRCs) provide information that is useful to teachers, assist subsequent IPRCs in understanding past decisions, and facilitate the review and improvement of procedures, the Ministry of Education should require IPRCs to properly document their proceedings, including:

- the rationale for their decisions and a record of the evidence that was submitted to the IPRCs and the evidence the IPRCs relied on in reaching each of their decisions regarding exceptionalities, placement, and strengths and needs; and
- in the event that they decide to place a student in a special education class, a description of the supports and services needed by student that could not rea-

sonably be provided in a regular classroom is provided.

Recommendation 3

To help ensure that parents are informed about and involved in the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) process and that IPRCs have all the information necessary to make informed exceptionality and placement decisions, the Ministry of Education should require that school boards retain evidence, such as copies of letters to parents, that parents were informed about the IPRC process and that their input was sought on their child's strengths and needs before the original IPRC meeting.

Recommendation 4

To help ensure that school boards maximize the benefits from special education expenditures, the Ministry of Education should compare the contribution to student outcomes made by the current resource-intensive formal identification process to the contribution that additional direct services – such as more special education teachers – would provide and determine the extent to which formal identification should be used.

Recommendation 5

To help ensure that teachers take all information relevant to students' education into account when preparing Individual Education Plan (IEPs), the Ministry of Education should:

- provide schools boards with guidance on the type of information they should obtain from parents to help in preparing IEPs; and
- encourage school boards to ensure that information useful in preparing IEPs – such as summaries of information obtained from consultations with parents and psychologists and other professionals, strategies and accommodations tried by previous teachers, the results of educational diagnostic tests, and minutes of in-school support team meetings – is available to and used by the preparers.

Recommendation 6

To help ensure that schools properly monitor the progress of students with special education needs and identify effective practices, the Ministry of Education should provide schools with guidance on:

- how to measure the amount of students' progress in acquiring knowledge and skills, and use this information to assess the effectiveness of the teaching strategies and accommodations and make changes where appropriate; and
- monitoring the progress of students with special education needs against an appropriate benchmark – which would be, in many cases, regular curriculum expectations – and assessing whether changes in the gap between students' current levels of achievement and regular curriculum expectations are appropriate.

Recommendation 7

To help ensure that teachers, parents, and students with special education needs have a common understanding of the learning goals and expectations for the com-

ing school year, and to assist in monitoring the students' progress:

- the Ministry of Education should update *The Individual Education Plan (IEP): A Resource Guide* so that it:
 - provides examples of specific learning goals for all subjects, as it has done for language and mathematics; and
 - clarifies its expectations regarding explanations of differences between the learning expectations in an IEP and those of the regular curriculum; and
- school boards should ensure that schools set measurable learning goals and measurable learning expectations in IEPs.

Recommendation 8

To help ensure that students with special education needs receive timely support as outlined in their Individual Education Plan (IEPs), the Ministry of Education should compare procedures and practices at a sample of school boards where the IEP deadlines are routinely met with those where they are usually not met, and include examples of timelines and effective practices in the IEP guide.

Recommendation 9

To help ensure that parents and students understand how students are performing when they are being assessed against modified and alternative expectations, as opposed to regular curriculum expectations:

- the Ministry of Education should:
 - reconsider the suitability of the standard provincial report card for reporting on the performance of students who are working toward modified expectations;
 - provide examples of the type of performance reports it expects school boards to use for students working toward alternative expectations; and
 - provide guidance to assist teachers in assessing the performance of students who are working toward reduced expectations for the current grade's curriculum; and
- school boards should ensure that report cards provide parents and students with meaningful assessments of student performance relative to learning goals and expectations.

Recommendation 10

To help ensure that transitions of students with special education needs from school to school, from elementary to secondary school, and from secondary school to work, community living, or further education, are effectively managed, the Ministry of Education should:

- require that schools prepare plans for all transitions – not just transitions from secondary school – and report on the completion and, where applicable, the degree of success of each action in the transition plans; and
- provide more guidance on planning and managing the transitions of students who are working toward modified expectations.

Recommendation 11

To help ensure that schools comply with legislation, regulations, and policies, and to improve the quality of special education programs, the Ministry of Education

should assist school boards in establishing periodic quality assurance and compliance inspection procedures.

Recommendation 12

To help improve the effectiveness of special education programs, the Ministry of Education should:

- identify the information that is required to support evidence-based program delivery models (for example, information about the circumstances and educational programs – type, timing, and amount of services and supports – of students with special education needs, as well as the results the students achieve); and
- assist school boards in establishing processes to collect, maintain, and use this information to guide programming decisions.

Recommendation 13

To help ensure that specialized equipment purchased for students is provided to them within a reasonable time, meets their needs, and is acquired economically, the Ministry of Education should:

- include a service expectation in its guidelines for Special Equipment Amount claims, and require school boards to ensure that their processes achieve this expectation, with respect to the time between the date a professional recommends that a student be provided with specialized equipment and the date it is ready for use by the student;
- assess the level of savings that might be available from the purchase of group licences for computer software; and
- require that boards assess the effectiveness of the equipment that they purchase.

Recommendation 14

To ensure that the Special Incidence Portion grants are correctly calculated, the Ministry should reconcile the funding provided to each board's actual claims annually.

The Special Education Department will be reviewing the Audit Report and determining next steps to respond to some of the concerns that are within our domain.

If you have any questions and/or comments, please contact Karen Forbes at 416-397-3025.

Summary