



Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

To: Program and School Services Committee

Date: 27 March, 2019

Report No.: 03-19-3615

Strategic Directions

- Transform Student Learning
- Create a Culture for Student and Staff Well-Being
- Provide Equity of Access to Learning Opportunities for All Students
- Allocate Human and Financial Resources Strategically to Support Student Needs
- Build Strong Relationships and Partnerships Within School Communities to Support Student Learning and Well-Being

Recommendation

It is recommended that this report “Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)” be received.

Context

The Government of Ontario has provided funding for evidence-based clinical therapy such as intensive Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) through the Ministry of Child, Youth, and Community Services (MCYCS) for students with Autism since 1999. We have seen numerous changes to the funding models, the criteria for eligibility, and the criteria for discharge. Over those twenty years, we have continued to serve students with ASD within our scope of practice in education. Since May of 2007 when the Ministry of Education issued Program Policy Memorandum 140 (PPM 140) instructing boards to use ABA methodology in schools, we have continued to improve supports and services to students with ASD in education and others who may benefit from educational ABA. We continue to provide opportunities for teachers and support staff to understand the principles of ABA, and the impact we have in education in supporting students with ASD to develop independence and the benefits of being in the social environments with typically developing peers that schools provide.

The February announcement of changes to funding for clinical services for children with ASD has generated significant concern and attention from families in our community. While the former Ontario Autism Program (OAP) was criticized for the number of students on a waitlist, families who were receiving direct funding or direct services were able to access support, while those who were on a waitlist anticipated receiving similar services once they moved to the front of the waitlist.

This newly announced funding strategy will see funding directed to individual families to purchase clinical services or support with the concentration of funding focused on children up to age 5. Funding decreases post-age 5 and is further limited by a means-based test for families. The reality of this announcement appears to be that many families will not be in a position to continue to purchase clinical services for their children. Many of these children are receiving such clinical intervention on a full-time or part-time basis and as a result will begin to either increase their time or register in our schools for the first time once the existing OAP expires post-April 1st.

The Ministry of Education announced funding and professional development on Monday March 11, 2019 to support schools given this context. The additional funding per pupil that was announced is the GSN per pupil amount. Whereas students captured by the ONSIS data on March 31, 2019 would normally generate a prorated funding amount, and students registered post-April 1st would normally generate no funding, the Ministry has committed to providing full GSN funding for any student registering in school through this transition process from clinical therapy to school. No further funding is being offered to support students who are already registered and will be transitioning from part time to full time in school.

Further aspects of the Ministry announcement prioritized the importance of behavioural and ABA expertise embedded into existing educational funding, additional funding for the Geneva Centre for professional development support for education, and financial support to subsidize Additional Qualification courses for teachers focused on Autism and ABA strategies. The Ministry has also committed to revising PPM151 which outlines the focus of professional development days for educational priorities to allow for a PD Day annually dedicated to Autism and ABA capacity building.

The significant concerns for families impacted by the funding changes include the ability to purchase clinical services with the limited funds available per student, particularly after the age of 5. The Ministry of Education announcement of additional funding, educational priorities, and professional development will be used to increase system capacity to support the effective use of ABA strategies for all students, including students with Autism. Any work in an educational context must be considered through an educational lens as our educational scope of practice does not extend to clinical therapy for students with Autism. Education will not be able to make up for lost or reduced clinical services for students currently in or waiting to receive clinical services.

We will, however, work within our scope of practice to meet the needs of students with Autism in all of our schools.

Action Plan and Associated Timeline

While this announcement is under the purview of MCYCS and the announced funding neither flows directly to education, nor do boards provide the services these funds are intended to purchase, we recognize the potential impact as students transition from clinical therapy to schools. While we cannot make up for the loss and/or changes to clinical/therapeutic services provided in the community, we are committed to supporting students, families, and staff during this transition and beyond in schools throughout the TDSB.

In collaboration with Surrey Place, our central coordinating agency, we have been able to identify students who are currently transitioning or will soon be transitioning to TDSB schools either from part time to full time, or registering for the first time. Special Education staff will be contacting and supporting families in each school throughout the system through these transitions.

Support for schools and families will include:

- Thoughtful transitions supported by Special Education staff for each student which includes connecting with every family to welcome and initiate the process of: gathering information from the family and treatment centre, scheduling transition meetings, partnering of TDSB Autism staff and supervising therapists from each treatment centre. Such work will remain focused on the individual needs of each student for a successful transition and on-going programming.
- Central Special Education Staff have participated in two full day workshops focused on Autism, Educational ABA, and Skill Development for students with Autism on Friday March 22nd & Monday March 25th.
- Training is being offered over two days in April for classroom teachers and support staff as appropriate in schools receiving students through this process.
- In-school support is being provided by our TDSB Autism team who are committing to working with both families and teachers in each classroom in these identified schools to support the individual needs of each student transitioning.
- Further professional development opportunities for school and system leaders focused on supporting students with Autism and the principles of ABA in education is also being planned for this spring.

On-going support for professional development will include:

- Dedicated PD Day annually to increase staff capacity in support of students with Autism, ABA principles in an educational context, and positive behaviour strategies and reinforcement.

- Subsidized Additional Qualification courses for teachers focused on Autism, ABA principles for education, and behaviour strategies for classroom success.

Resource Implications

Professional development for Centrally Assigned Special Education staff requires a system commitment to disrupting existing schedules to allow staff to participate in two full days of professional development (PD). PD targeting school-based staff requires supply coverage for each teacher attending. Further resource implications include the addition of staff with expertise in Autism and Behavioural Analysis who can contribute to increasing the capacity of staff to support all students, including students with Autism in our schools throughout the board. While each student transition will be considered individually, we do anticipate the potential need for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to support individual students in particular circumstances. Such needs will be revealed through each transition process in collaboration with the family, school, and treatment centre.

Communications Considerations

Information for families who will be transitioning to school as a result of this Autism announcement has been posted on our [website](#). The contact information for the Centrally Assigned Principal responsible for each Learning Centre is provided as a key point of contact to support any family with questions about process and next steps.

Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)

PPM140 – Incorporating Methods of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) Into Programs for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

PPM 156 – Supporting Transitions for Students with Special Education Needs

From

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