

# Section R: STAFF DEVELOPMENT



[We value your feedback! Please click this feedback link to leave your comments on the Special Education Plan. All feedback must be received by February 28, 2026.](#)

## ***Purpose of the Standard***

*To provide details of the board's professional development plans for special education staff to the ministry and to the public*

The TDSB is a learning organization that believes that capacity building is key to ensuring equity of outcomes for all students. Focusing on capacity building helps to ensure coherence and alignment of special education and inclusion practices across the district, which allows us to better serve students with special education needs and disabilities. Our staff development model provides on-going opportunities for staff at all levels to engage in professional learning and training in multiple ways, including through job-embedded, self-directed and mandatory sessions.

## **Professional Learning Plan**

Differentiated professional learning is determined by the goals in the TDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP), local School Improvement Plans (SIPs) and data/evidence collected through a variety of sources.

Staff at all levels as well as union and association partners provide input into areas for learning. The TDSB Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) receives information on staff development through the Leadership Report, and they also provide recommendations on areas of focus for staff professional learning.

Staff are engaged in several types of professional learning opportunities throughout the school year to help them better serve students with special education needs and disabilities. These learning opportunities include compliance training such as the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), Supporting Children with Prevalent Medical Conditions, and mandatory learning such as the Individual Education Plan (IEP) Strategy and Chairing Identification and Placement Review Committee (IPRC) Meetings. Other professional learning opportunities are school-specific, based on the goals of the School Improvement Plan (SIP). New Special Education Teachers participate in professional learning opportunities through the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) and also participate in additional topic-specific learning sessions. The Special Education and Inclusion Department, in collaboration with the Leadership and

Learning Department, also provides professional learning opportunities specifically targeted to new teachers and newly-appointed administrators. Any staff member may also engage in self-directed learning based on professional and personal growth goals.

Over the next two years, we will focus on the following five areas for professional learning:

1. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP);
2. Inclusion (anti-ableism), Equity (anti-oppression) and Well-Being;
3. Learning Conditions;
4. Universal Design for Learning, Differentiated Instruction and Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy; and
5. Trauma-Informed Practices and Cultural Safety.

## **Areas of Learning Focus**

### **The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: [Calls to Action](#) (43, 62 & 63 specifically for education) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [UNDRIP](#) (Article 14 specifically for education) are frameworks to engage in building respectful, reciprocal, relevant and responsible relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit students, parents/legal guardians, families, and communities. Within the context of what is known as Canada, the effects of the Residential School System and [intergenerational trauma](#) impacts many survivors' families and possible engagement with school. The processes and procedures associated with Special Education and Inclusion should be done in ways that are trauma-informed and culturally safe, considering how social and historical contexts, as well as structural and interpersonal power imbalances, shape experiences within schools.

A belief in Indigenous Education is that everyone has gifts to share. When serving students with special education needs and disabilities, it is important to remember that each student has gifts, and that educators have responsibilities for co-creating and enhancing the conditions for those gifts to be shared, honoured and affirmed. To enhance the conditions in classrooms and special education, the [4R Framework](#) of respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility (Kirkness and Barnhardt) is a tool that supports educators to work in good relationships with First Nations, Métis and Inuit students, parents and legal guardians.

## **Inclusion, Equity and Well-Being**

The transformational actions being taken to support inclusion are interconnected to equity, anti-ableism and well-being. Special Education and Inclusion staff continue to implement a strategic and coordinated approach to lead to the thoughtful and intentional systemic change and the cultural shifts necessary to make a difference in schools and classrooms as it relates to serving students with special education needs, disabilities and intersecting identities.

Students are more successful when they are engaged in their learning. A focus on providing educators opportunities to deepen their understanding of how to effectively affirm and be responsive to the identities, lived experiences, strengths, interests, and gifts of students is required to ensure equity of access and equity of learning outcomes for all students. Professional learning will lead to anti-oppressive, anti-racist, anti-ableist and inclusive practices, and consequently, increased opportunities to all pathways for all students.

## **Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and Programming**

Professional development continues throughout the year to support schools with developing and implementing effective IEPs that are personalized and precise to a student's specific strengths and areas of need. In addition, the Special Education and Inclusion Department staff will continue to work with school staff to look at IEPs with intentionality in alignment with the goals of the K-1 IEP Strategy and the Grades 2- 12 IEP Review.

Intentional work is being implemented to address recommendations by SEAC to ensure that parents/legal guardians, and where appropriate, students are informed and included in every step of the development and implementation of the IEP.

## **Learning Conditions**

Learning conditions and the operating environment of a classroom support a dynamic interrelationship between students, staff, and teaching and learning.

A quality learning environment optimizes students' independence to access learning opportunities and resources that is pivotal for long-term success for students.

When implementing effective classroom learning conditions (teaching strategies, assessment, evaluation, third teacher, flexible seating, student voice, culturally relevant, responsive and safe resources and pedagogy, etc.) educators must:

- Consider students' intersecting identities and lived experiences
- Use resources and pedagogy that foster a healthy self-identity by affirming, respecting, and promoting cultural knowledge
- Build on students' experiences in ways that promote well-being and belonging

- Consider the teacher/staff member as a learner
  - What biases or barriers (systemic, attitudinal, other) have been identified and dismantled?
  - Does data shared by the teacher of student assessment and evaluation indicate evidence of Universal Design for Learning, Differentiated Instruction and Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy principles?
  - Is there an opportunity for ongoing professional learning?

**Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** means designing innovative ways to make curriculum accessible in any learning situation/context, for individual learners with different backgrounds, learning styles and abilities.

Principles of UDL focus on adapting teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment to suit the learner rather than the other way around. It means creating flexible materials and methods before they are offered to students and understanding that the kinds of support needed by one student can be beneficial for all the students (necessary for some, but good for all). For example, if one student needs colour coding as a method of organizing notes, all students in the class may find this strategy helpful. UDL means planning learning opportunities that will extend the learning of all students, whatever their level of achievement, and helping each student reach their potential (Rose & Meyer, 2002).

**Differentiated Instruction (DI)** is based on the idea that because students differ significantly in their strengths, lived experiences, interests, learning styles, and readiness to learn, instructional approaches need to be adapted to match these differing characteristics and to provide multiple learning paths for students. The learning content, process, products and environment can be differentiated in any learning situation to support student learning to achieve greater success (Tomlinson, 2004).

Instructional interventions are monitored by the classroom teacher. When a student begins to show signs of persistent learning difficulties or advanced abilities, full understanding of how a student learns is needed to decide the best ways to use the student's strengths to address areas of need. This is achieved through a review of classroom support strategies, educational assessments and consultation with parents/legal guardians and/or students.

Information is gathered and reviewed by teachers through development of an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) and through consultation at a variety of In-School Support Team (IST) and School Support Team (SST) meetings. With parental permission, information from existing professional assessments and/or community-based resource people is also collected and reviewed. Teachers and staff use this information to create a learning plan that is differentiated to best support the student's unique learning needs.

**Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP)**, as per the Ontario Ministry of Education, refers to an inclusive education system in which students must see themselves reflected in the curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader

environment, so that they can feel engaged in and empowered by their learning experiences. Students need to experience teaching and learning that reflect their needs and who they are.

Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP) recognizes that all students learn in ways that are connected to background, language, family structure, and social or cultural identity. By knowing 'who our students are', educators can tailor programs and practices to better meet the needs of their diverse student populations and to ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed.

**Trauma-Informed Practices** help educators understand how trauma can impact student learning, behaviour, emotional regulation and overall well-being. School climate and culture can improve through trauma-informed practices and principles of cultural safety by taking proactive steps rather than reactive and punitive measures. Students can develop skills to build resilience, strategies to respond to dysregulation, and the ability to attend to learning. Knowledge of these practices can also support the development of positive relationships between students, staff and parents/caregivers/guardians.

## **TDSB's Budget Allocation Dedicated to Staff Development in Special Education**

The Special Education and Inclusion Department allocates specific funds to support professional learning and to build the capacity of all TDSB staff in the area of Special Education and Inclusion. This will ensure alignment and coherence with regard to special education practices and processes across the district, and promote shared responsibility and shared accountability for improved outcomes for students with special education needs and disabilities.

## **Cost-Sharing Arrangements with Other Ministries or Agencies**

When appropriate, the TDSB enters into agreements to facilitate staff development. Several agencies and institutions have partnered with the TDSB including, but not limited to, the Ontario Ministry of Education, Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, Hospital for Sick Children, Turning Point Youth Services, Massey Centre, Geneva Centre for Autism, Children's Treatment Network, and Kinark Child & Family Services.

## **Communication of the TDSB's Special Education Plan and Professional Development Opportunities**

TDSB staff are made aware of the Special Education Plan and professional learning opportunities through various communication tools, including:

- Memos
- Monthly Special Education and Inclusion newsletter for all staff

- TDSB internal and external websites
- MyPath
- System Leaders' Weekly
- DirectLine
- PA Day learning sessions for support staff
- Staff, department and Family of Schools meetings

The Special Education and Inclusion Department receives input from staff directly, through their supervisors and in conversations with unions and associations around areas for learning, and the department creates and facilitates sessions to align with these learning needs.