



### Grade 6 Cohort Special Education, 2008-2016

#### The Grade 6 Cohort 2008-2016

In Fact Sheets 1 to 3, we looked at students who started Grade 9 in Fall 2011. In this Fact Sheet we will examine Special Education programming in elementary school, and its relationship to post-secondary pathways. To do this, we went backwards three years to when these students were in Grade 6 (Fall 2008). Out of 15,504 students in the 2011-2016 Grade 9 cohort 12,955 or 84% could be matched to Grade 6. (The other 2,549 students or 16% entered the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) after Grade 6, and are therefore excluded from this analysis.)

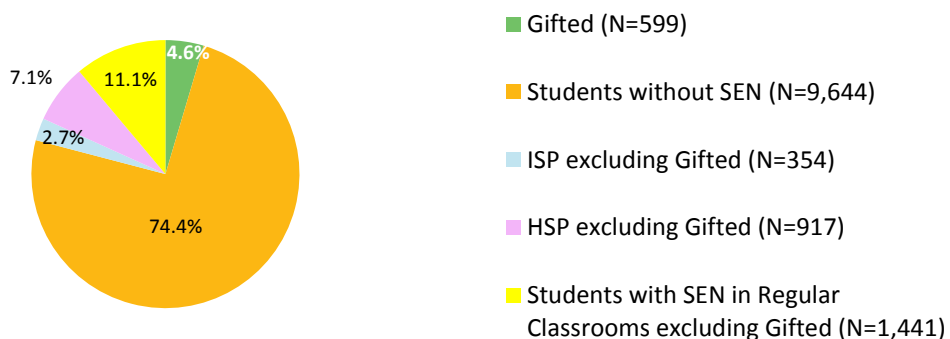
#### Special Education Programming in Grade 6 (2008-2009)

Figure 1 provides the breakdown of students according to special education programming in Grade 6:

- 5% had a gifted exceptionality (since there is little difference in achievement between those in congregated gifted programming and those in integrated classrooms, we have combined these two groups for this analysis);
- 3% of students were in fully self-contained special education classes (called ‘Intensive Support Program’ or ISP in the TDSB);
- 7% were in partially integrated classes (called ‘Home School Program’ or HSP in the TDSB);
- 11% were students with special education needs (SEN) who were in regular (integrated) programming;
- 74% were students without SEN.

Excluding gifted, students with SEN constituted a fifth of all students in Grade 6. The vast majority were either students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) but no exceptionality, called ‘non-identified’ by the Ministry of Education (53% of students with SEN excluding gifted), and students with a learning disabilities exceptionality (27%). More specific information on exceptionalities will be found in the upcoming report on the TDSB Grade 9 cohort.

Figure 1: Students with Special Education Needs in the Grade 9 Cohort (status as of Grade 6 2008-09)



## Key Outcomes: Grade 6 to Post-Secondary

Table 1 follows students as they progress from Grade 6, through the secondary school panel, and into post-secondary.

The first three columns show the proportion of students at the provincial standard (Levels 3/4) in Reading, Writing, and Mathematics. Students with SEN (excluding gifted) have noticeably lower levels of achievement. That being said, it is useful to note that around one in twenty students in ISP, and two to three students in twenty in HSP were at the provincial standard, while close to half of students with SEN in regular classes were at the provincial standard in Reading and Writing.

The previous Fact Sheets already supported many earlier TDSB research studies in outlining the strong relationship of Grade 9 Academic to post-secondary pathways. The fourth column stresses the strong differences according to programming. Nearly all students without SEN or with a gifted exceptionality took Academic courses in Grade 9, as did a majority (51%) of students with an SEN in regular classes. In contrast, one in twenty students in ISP and three in twenty students in HSP took Academic Grade 9 courses.

These differences continued through the end of secondary school study. Almost all (91%-95%) students without SEN or with a gifted exceptionality graduated, as did most with SEN in regular classrooms (78%) and HSP (68%). Only a third (34%) of those in ISP had graduated at this point, although many others were still in the TDSB in Year 6.

The key differences can be seen in the last three columns: students confirming an Ontario university; those confirming an Ontario college; and the combined post-secondary proportion of the two pathways. A direct transition to Ontario post-secondary is the default transition for the vast majority (72%) of TDSB students:

- Students without SEN or with a gifted exceptionality generally transition to university (62%-76%).
- Nearly two thirds (60%) of students with SEN in regular programming in Grade 6 also went directly to post-secondary but their pathways were equally split between college and university.
- Post-secondary was not the direct pathway for most students taking congregated programming in Grade 6: 15% of those in ISP and 43% of those in HSP made the transition, generally into the Ontario community college system. Earlier analysis (Robson et al., 2014<sup>1</sup>) highlighted that for students with SEN, the transition for college was strongest for students in higher-income neighbourhoods.

---

<sup>1</sup> Robson, K. L., Anisef, P., Brown, R. S., & Parekh, G. (2014). The Intersectionality of Postsecondary Pathways: The Case of High School Students with Special Education Needs. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie*, 51: 193–215. doi:10.1111/cars.12044

**Table 1: The Grade 9 Cohort 2011-2016,  
Students with Special Education Needs Grade 6 (2008-09) and Status up to Grade 12 (2015-16)**

Subgroups (Grade 6 Status)	Levels 3-4 EQAO Grade 6 Reading	Levels 3-4 EQAO Grade 6 Writing	Levels 3-4 EQAO Grade 6 Mathematics	Grade 9 Academic	Graduated	Confirmed University	Confirmed College	Confirmed Post-Secondary
Gifted (N=599)	98.2%	93.0%	96.8%	99.3%	94.7%	75.5%	4.8%	80.3%
Students without SEN (N=9,644)	78.3%	78.5%	74.6%	86.7%	90.6%	62.2%	16.2%	78.4%
ISP excluding Gifted (N=354)	5.6%	5.6%	4.2%	4.2%	33.6%	2.5%	12.1%	14.6%
HSP excluding Gifted (N=917)	14.5%	16.1%	11.9%	13.7%	67.7%	9.3%	33.4%	42.7%
Students with SEN in Regular Classrooms (excluding Gifted) (N=1,441)	41.3%	43.4%	33.8%	51.4%	78.4%	30.3%	29.5%	59.8%
<b>All Students in Grade 6 (2008-09) and Grade 12 (2015-16) (N=12,955)</b>	<b>68.6%</b>	<b>68.8%</b>	<b>64.8%</b>	<b>76.0%</b>	<b>86.3%</b>	<b>53.9%</b>	<b>18.2%</b>	<b>72.1%</b>

**Gender:** Table 2 illustrates pronounced gender differences. Students with SEN were so much more likely to be male, that students without SEN were 4% more likely to be female compared to the full TDSB population (52% female rather than 48%). While all SEN categories have a higher proportion of male students, HSP was two-thirds male (66%) while ISP was almost three-quarters male (74%). The exceptional focus on male students amongst Grade 6 special education programming requires further study.

**Table 2: The Grade 9 Cohort 2011-2016, Gender**

Subgroups (Grade 6 Status)	Female	Male
Gifted (N=599)	42.6%	57.4%
Students without SEN (N=9,644)	52.1%	47.9%
ISP excluding Gifted (N=354)	26.3%	73.7%
HSP excluding Gifted (N=917)	33.6%	66.4%
Students with SEN in Regular Classrooms (excluding Gifted) (N=1,441)	41.7%	58.3%
<b>All Students in Grade 6 (2008-09) and Grade 12 (2015-16) (N=12,955)</b>	<b>48.5%</b>	<b>51.5%</b>

**Race:** Table 3 shows quite pronounced racial differences in terms of elementary school special education programming. Students who self-identify as Black, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Southeast Asian were less likely to have a gifted exceptionality, while students who self-identify as White and East Asian were much more likely to have a gifted exceptionality. Students self-identifying as Black and Latin American are more likely to have SEN (excluding gifted) while East Asian, South Asian, and Southeast Asian students were less likely.

**Table 3: The Grade 9 Cohort 2011-2016, Racial Groups**

Subgroups (Grade 6 Status)	Black	East Asian	Latin American	Middle Eastern	Mixed	South Asian	Southeast Asian	White
Gifted (N=578)	2.6%	27.3%	1.4%	1.7%	8.1%	8.5%	1.4%	49.0%
Students without SEN (N=9,211)	10.4%	16.8%	1.7%	4.9%	7.9%	26.3%	4.6%	27.2%
ISP excluding Gifted (N=246)	30.1%	6.1%	2.8%	4.1%	7.7%	18.3%	2.0%	28.0%
HSP excluding Gifted (N=821)	21.2%	8.8%	2.6%	6.3%	8.6%	16.9%	3.2%	31.3%
Students with SEN in Regular Classrooms (excluding Gifted) (N=1,327)	22.2%	8.4%	2.3%	6.0%	8.2%	18.6%	3.7%	29.8%
<b>All Students in Grade 6 (2008-09) and Grade 12 (2015-16) (N=12,183)</b>	<b>12.4%</b>	<b>15.6%</b>	<b>1.8%</b>	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>8.0%</b>	<b>23.8%</b>	<b>4.2%</b>	<b>28.8%</b>

#### **Special Education Needs and Socio-economic Status**

Tables 4 to 6 show strong relationships between SEN programming and socio-economic factors. Students with a gifted exceptionality were more likely to come from backgrounds of comparative advantage. In contrast, students with SEN, and most noticeably those in HSP and ISP, were more likely to come from backgrounds of greater challenge.

**Table 4: The Grade 9 Cohort 2011-2016, Parental Presence**

Subgroups (Grade 6 Status)	Two Parents	One parent	Others
Gifted (N=575)	89.9%	9.9%	0.2%
Students without SEN (N=9,156)	82.8%	15.6%	1.6%
ISP excluding Gifted (N=241)	68.5%	26.6%	5.0%
HSP excluding Gifted (N=813)	68.9%	27.4%	3.7%
Students with SEN in Regular Classrooms (excluding Gifted) (N=1,319)	74.5%	23.1%	2.4%
<b>All Students in Grade 6 (2008-09) and Grade 12 (2015-16) (N=12,104)</b>	<b>81.0%</b>	<b>17.2%</b>	<b>1.8%</b>

**Table 5: The Grade 9 Cohort 2011-2016, Parental Education**

Subgroups (Grade 6 Status)	Secondary School	College	University	Don't know
Gifted (N=573)	3.3%	8.0%	78.7%	9.9%
Students without SEN (N=8,950)	10.4%	15.4%	50.0%	24.2%
ISP excluding Gifted (N=226)	9.3%	14.6%	25.2%	50.9%
HSP excluding Gifted (N=777)	11.3%	18.3%	25.0%	45.4%
Students with SEN in Regular classrooms (excluding Gifted) (N=1,258)	11.4%	15.0%	36.1%	37.4%
<b>All Students in Grade 6 (2008-09) and Grade 12 (2015-16) (N=11,784)</b>	<b>10.2%</b>	<b>15.1%</b>	<b>47.8%</b>	<b>26.9%</b>

**Table 6: The Grade 9 Cohort 2011-2016, Parental Occupation**

Subgroups (Grade 6 Status)	Professional	Semi-professional	Skilled clerical and trades	Unskilled clerical and Non-remunerative
Gifted (N=537)	49.0%	32.8%	11.2%	7.1%
Students without SEN (N=7,618)	26.7%	28.4%	24.3%	20.7%
ISP excluding Gifted (N=172)	13.4%	23.8%	27.3%	35.5%
HSP excluding Gifted (N=604)	11.6%	20.9%	32.5%	35.1%
Students with SEN in Regular Classrooms (excluding Gifted) (N=989)	19.1%	26.7%	29.3%	24.9%
<b>All Students in Grade 6 (2008-09) and Grade 12 (2015-16) (N=9,920)</b>	<b>26.0%</b>	<b>27.9%</b>	<b>24.6%</b>	<b>21.5%</b>

### Neighbourhood Income

Students were classified into thirds or tertiles based on the average income of where they lived. As seen in Table 7, students with special education were not evenly distributed according to neighbourhood income. Those in the lowest tertile of income were less likely to be in the gifted program than students in the highest income tertile. Indeed the majority (54%) of students with a gifted exceptionality were to be found in the highest income neighbourhoods. In contrast, students in the lowest income tertile were more than twice as likely as those in the highest income tertile to be in ISP (48% compared to 21%), while students in the lowest tertile were almost twice as likely to be in HSP compared to students in the highest income tertile (41% compared to 26%).

**Table 7: The Grade 9 Cohort 2011-2016, Neighbourhood Income\***

Subgroups (Grade 6 Status)	Tertiles of Median Income, 2013 Environics		
	Lowest tertile	Middle tertile	Highest tertile
Gifted (N=599)	14.9%	30.9%	54.3%
Students without SEN (N=9,639)	31.8%	33.5%	34.7%
ISP excluding Gifted (N=354)	47.7%	31.4%	20.9%
HSP excluding Gifted (N=916)	41.2%	32.5%	26.3%
Students with SEN in Regular Classrooms (excluding Gifted) (N=1,441)	38.7%	32.4%	28.9%
<b>All Students in Grade 6 (2008-09) and Grade 12 (2015-16) (N=12,949)</b>	<b>32.8%</b>	<b>33.1%</b>	<b>34.0%</b>

\*Derived from postal code of student residence in Grade 6

### Conclusion

For many TDSB students with SEN (excluding gifted), both graduation and post-secondary access have now become realistic goals. Graduation by five years and direct access to post-secondary are now the most frequent pathways for students with special education needs in regular (integrated) classrooms in Grade 6. Given that these students now account for the majority of students with SEN excluding gifted in the elementary school panel, this is an important and reaffirming finding.

However, for students who were in congregated special education classes in Grade 6 (ISP and HSP), the long-term outcomes appear much less favourable. For most ISP students, neither five-year graduation nor five-year direct access to post-secondary took place. Most HSP students graduated but did not directly transition to post-secondary. It is likely that more of these students will graduate after six or seven years of secondary school. Many will then continue into post-secondary, usually through the Ontario community college system. Yet access to post-secondary, now expected as a prerequisite for most new jobs, will continue to be a challenge for many of these students.

Previous TDSB research (Parekh et al., 2016<sup>2</sup>) found that even among the higher-achieving students in HSP, taking Academic courses in Grade 9 – the primary pathway to both college and university – has been a limited option. This study has outlined the considerable gender, racial, socio-economic, and neighbourhood differences between students with and without SEN, but in particular, amongst students in HSP and ISP.

There are currently several initiatives within the TDSB that are looking closely at congregated programming (in particular, HSP) as well as the Grade 8-9 transition. It is to be hoped that these initiatives will result in more positive transition patterns in the future.

<sup>2</sup> Parekh, G. et al. (2016, May). *Programs of study and the dangerous discourses around (dis)ability: Lessons from a project in de-streaming*. Paper presented at Congress 2016 at the University of Calgary, Calgary, AB.