

RESEARCH ADVOCATING FOR GREATER INCLUSION IN THE TDSB

Purpose: This fact sheet is to provide parents, educators, and administrators with an overview of the research informing upcoming changes to the Home School Program and inclusive education practices.

Current status: Over the past few years, the TDSB has been updating its special education program structure to ensure students are provided with the best possible instruction and learning environments. In the Integrated Equity Framework and the TDSB’s Vision for Learning, inclusion of students with disabilities or special education needs has been a key commitment.

Traditionally, special education models of instruction have included withdrawal of students from regular class programming and/or placement in special education classes to provide more intensive instruction opportunities. However, research indicates that removing students from regular class may not be in their best interest. In fact, the empirical evidence supporting a separate special education model is scant, whereas there have been many studies supporting the academic, social and emotional benefits to inclusive placements for students identified with and without special education needs (Mitchell, 2014).

Key research findings pulled from a synthesis of international empirical studies (Mitchell, 2010) include:

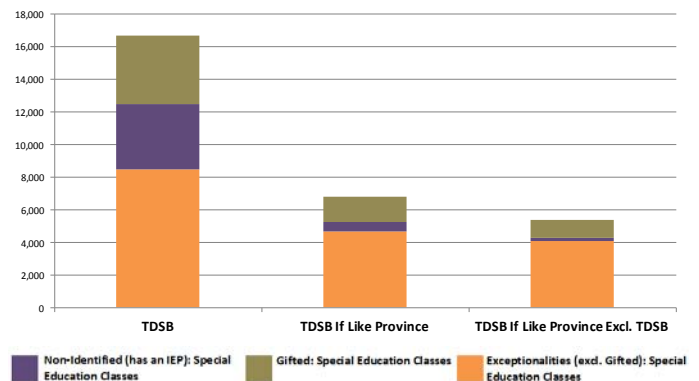
- Clustering students into ‘low-ability’ groups reduces academic expectations
- Students often experience less instruction in ‘lower ability’ classrooms
- A great deal of academic learning occurs through students’ interaction with peers
- Being assigned to a ‘lower ability’ group is often permanent

As the TDSB works to remodel its Home School Program and special education processes, here are some of the rationales for why this work is important and timely.

Rationale: Out of line with provincial proportions of special education classes...

The TDSB has two to three times the proportion of students in special education classes as compared to provincial proportions.

Figure 1: TDSB Students in Congregated Classes: Current Total and Projected Reflecting Ontario Proportions



Source: Brown, Parekh & Marmureanu, 2016.

The first column in Figure 1 represents the number of students currently in congregated placements within the TDSB. The orange portion represents students in Intensive Support Programs, the purple portion represents students who do not have an exceptionality but are in congregated placements (largely Home School Programs or Kindergarten Diagnostic Programs), and the green portion represents students in congregated gifted programs. The second column shows the number of students who would be in congregated settings if the TDSB were to be in line with provincial proportions (a reduction of almost 10,000 students). However, because of the size and scope of the TDSB, the extent of congregation influences provincial figures. Therefore, the third column represents the number of students who would be in congregated settings if the TDSB were in line with provincial proportions – proportions un-influenced by TDSB (a reduction of over 11,000 students from current figures).

...despite being in line with provincial proportions of identifications of exceptionality.

Initial assumptions might be that the TDSB, being located in a highly urban city with increased proximity to specialized care centres, would have a higher incidence of children identified with more complex disabilities than in other boards across the region. However, according to provincial data, this is not so. In fact, the TDSB is in line with many of the provincial proportions of student identifications across exceptionality categories (excluding gifted). The

significant differences lie within the TDSB’s approach to the education and placement of students identified as having special education needs.

Table 1: Elementary and Secondary School Students with Special Education Exceptionalities as of October 31, 2014 (2014-15 Preliminary)

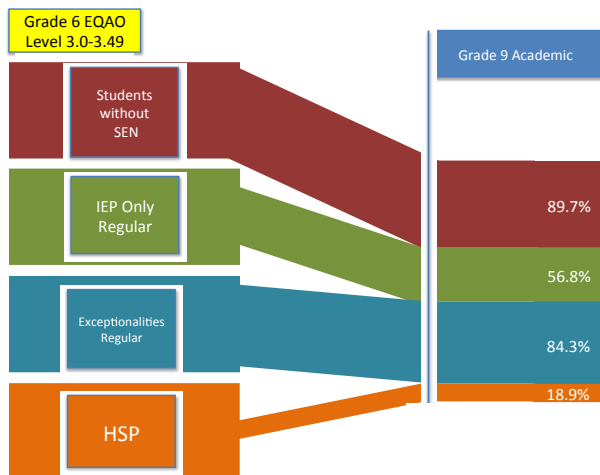
Exceptionality	Percent of Students with an Exceptionality TDSB	Percent of Students with an Exceptionality Ontario
Autism	9.3%	11.2%
Behaviour	4.0%	4.8%
Blind/Low Vision	0.3%	0.4%
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	1.2%	1.1%
Deaf/Hard of Hearing/Pre-school	0.1%	0.0%
Developmental Disability	5.0%	5.1%
Giftedness	30.4%	15.8%
Language Impairment	0.8%	5.6%
Learning Disability	37.7%	40.5%
Mild Intellectual Disability	9.7%	7.8%
Multiple Exceptionalities	0.1%	6.1%
Physical Disability	1.5%	1.4%
Speech Impairment	0.0%	0.2%
Total Exceptionalities	100%	100%

Source: Ministry of Education; Brown, Parekh & Marmureanu, 2016.

Direct pathway to non-academic programming

Furthermore, recent studies have shown that placement in the Home School Program is often a direct pathway to non-academic programming in high school, even in cases when students are achieving at or beyond the provincial average.

Figure 2: Home School Program Direct Pathway to Non-Academic Programming

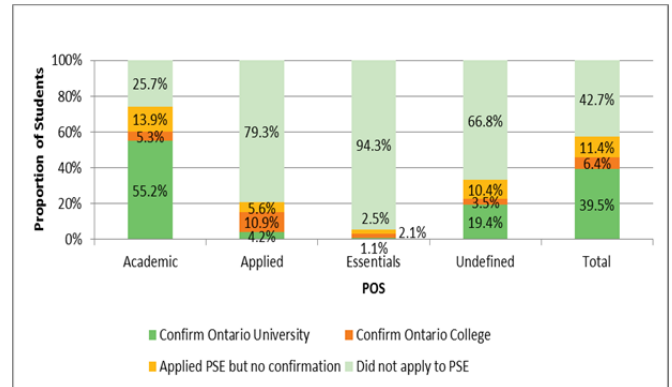


Source: Parekh, Brown & Conley, 2016.

Importance of post-secondary education

Many longitudinal studies show that access to post-secondary (university or college) is critical to increasing long term health and economic independence (Pew Research Center, 2014; Irwin, 2015; Fonseca & Zheng, 2011; Kearney et al, 2015; Ballingall, 2015). However, unless students take the majority of their courses in the academic/university pathway, access to post-secondary is increasingly limited.

Figure 3: Ontario Post-Secondary Education (PSE) Confirmations across Program of Study (POS), 2011–12 (Year 4)



Source: Parekh, 2013.

In 2011-12, after four years of high school, close to 4/5 of students taking the majority of their grade 9-10 courses at the applied level did not apply for any post-secondary education.

Gender, race, and class implications

Students identified as having special education needs and placed in special education programs are disproportionality male, racialized, and students living in poverty (Brown & Parekh, 2010/2013). This trend is particularly true for students in the Home School Program (Parekh, Brown & Conley, 2016). Similar trends of disproportionality are also evidenced within secondary school pathways (Academic, Applied, and Locally Developed) (Parekh, 2013). While we have known that post-secondary access is critically connected to secondary school pathways (Brown, 2010), research is now emerging demonstrating the close connection between elementary and secondary programming. Using the perception of ability/disability to guide the organization of students leads to inequitable outcomes, particularly across lines of race, gender, and class.