



Toronto District School Board

# Trends in Toronto District School Board Special Education Data: 2016-2022

Research & Development

Toronto District School Board



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**AUTHOR:** George Tam and Sarah Armson

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# INTRODUCTION

This report provides information on trends in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB)'s special education data from the 2016-17 school year through to preliminary data from the 2022-23 school year. It provides an update to a previous report by Brown, R.S., Parekh, G., & Marmurneau, C. (2016). Similar to the previous report, the sections below examine recent trends regarding special education identifications and placements across the TDSB.

**Part 1** of this report examines changes in special education identifications and placements between the 2016-17 and 2022-23 school years, according to information available in the TDSB Student Information System (SIS).

**Part 2** focuses on the number of students educated in integrated or congregated<sup>1</sup> classes in the TDSB from the 2016-17 school year up to the 2022-23 school year. Both the Intensive Support Program (ISP), in which students spend up to 100% of their day in congregated classrooms, and the Home School Program (HSP), in which students spend up to 50% of their day, are explored.

**Part 3** looks specifically at students with a behavioural exceptionality. This section draws information from two data sources: the Grade 9 cohorts between Fall 2000- Fall 2015, and system-level race data from 2016-17- 2022-23. A cohort tracking study follows a group of students (in this case, Grade 9 students) over a period of four or five years in which most students would complete their secondary schooling. The most recent Grade 9 cohort data available at this time followed students who were in Grade 9 in 2015 through to potential post-secondary confirmation in 2020. This cohort data was used to examine academic outcomes for students with a behavioural exceptionality on secondary indicators including Grade 9 credit accumulation, Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) pass rate, Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) levels 3 or 4 in mathematics, English, science and geography, graduation rate, Grade 9 academic program of study, and post-secondary confirmations. System-level race data was used to examine the composition of students with a behavioural exceptionality by race compared with the overall racial demographics of TDSB's student population.

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<sup>1</sup>The term 'congregated' is employed to describe placements for which students spend between 50% to 100% of their day in a separate, special education class/program.

# PART 1

## CHANGES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS, 2016-17 TO 2022-23

**Part 1** of this report examines changes in special education identifications and placements between the 2016-17 and 2022-23 school years. **Note: the information for the 2022-23 school year is preliminary draft and therefore may change as the data is finalized at a later date.**

In Tables 1a (numbers) and 1b (percentages), all students in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) are listed in one of the following categories:

- Students identified as having a gifted exceptionality with placements in both special education and regular classes;
- Students identified as having other exceptionalities (excluding gifted) with placements in both special education and regular classes;
- Students informally identified as having a special education need and who have an Individual Education Plan (IEP); and
- Students who have not been identified as having special education needs (SEN).

Students placed in congregated special education classes receive substantive programming outside the regular class, between 50% to 100% of their school day.

Table 1a shows changes in identification and placement patterns over the 2016-17, 2018-19, 2020-21 and 2022-23 school years (based on the October 31 enrolment data):

- TDSB's enrolment declined by 9,486 students between 2016-17 and 2022-23.
- Over the same time period, the number of students identified with special education needs (SEN) decreased from 46,350 to 40,577 or by 5,773 students. This resulted in a decrease from 19% to 17% of all TDSB students being identified as having SEN.
- At the same time, the number of students who have not been identified as having a special education need declined from 199,209 to 195,496 (a decrease of 3,713 students). Taken together with declining enrolment, this was an increase from 81% to 83% of all TDSB students.
- A more detailed examination of Tables 1a and 1b shows that while students identified with SEN declined, one special education category increased in enrolment: the number of students identified as gifted placed in regular classes. By 2022-23, there were 294 more gifted students in regular classes – an increase from 1.0% to 1.2% of all TDSB students.

<b>Table 1a: Changes in Key Special Education Categories 2016-17 to 2022-23: Numbers</b>					
	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2020-21</b>	<b>2022-23*</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Gifted: Special Education Classes	4,423	4,526	4,226	4,283	-140
Gifted: Regular Classes	2,464	2,641	3,150	2,758	294
Exceptionalities without Gifted: Special Education Classes	7,945	6,952	6,109	5,753	-2,192
Exceptionalities without Gifted: Regular Classes	6,571	6,044	5,457	4,411	-2,160
IEP Only	24,947	26,233	26,686	23,372	-1,575
Students without Special Education Needs	199,209	200,229	195,605	195,496	-3,713
<b>Total</b>	<b>245,559</b>	<b>246,625</b>	<b>241,233</b>	<b>236,073</b>	<b>-9,486</b>

<b>Table 1b: Changes in Key Special Education Categories 2016-17 to 2022-23: Percentages</b>					
	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2020-21</b>	<b>2022-23*</b>	<b>Difference</b>
GIFTED: Special Education Classes	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%	0.0%
GIFTED: Regular Classes	1.0%	1.1%	1.3%	1.2%	0.2%
Exceptionalities without Gifted: Special Education Classes	3.2%	2.8%	2.5%	2.4%	-0.8%
Exceptionalities without Gifted: Regular Classes	2.7%	2.5%	2.3%	1.9%	-0.8%
IEP Only	10.2%	10.6%	11.1%	9.9%	-0.3%
Students without Special Education Needs	81.1%	81.2%	81.1%	82.8%	1.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	

Note: IEP Only includes students who have not been formally identified as well as those who have an IEP, but no special education programming. Only students who are recorded as 'Non-Identified' are reported to the Ministry.

\*2022-23 data is preliminary draft

## EXCEPTIONALITIES AND IEP ONLY, 2016-17 TO 2022-23

Table 2 shows changes to the number of students formally identified with an exceptionality<sup>2</sup> as well as students who only have an IEP between 2016-17 and 2022-23. Key findings:

- Nine of the 11 exceptionality categories declined in number; most noticeable were students identified as having a learning disability (a decline of 3,824 students), students who were informally identified and only had an IEP (a decline of 1,369 students) and students with a mild intellectual disability (a decline of 582 students). The decreases of these 9 categories resulted in an overall decrease of students with Special Education Needs, as seen in Tables 1a and 1b.
- Conversely, two of the 11 exceptionality categories increased: autism (an increase of 674 students) and giftedness (an increase of 154 students).
- While the number of students with an IEP Only has decreased, they still make up an increasing proportion of the student population due to declining enrolment. Students who only had an IEP now account for 57.6% of all students identified with special education needs, compared to 53.6% in 2016-17 (a 4% increase).

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<sup>2</sup>Only exceptionality categories with 100 or more students were included.



**Table 2: Exceptionalities and IEP Only, 2016-17 to 2022-23**

	<b>N (2016-17)</b>	<b>% of Students with SEN (2016-17)</b>	<b>N (2018-19)</b>	<b>% of Students with SEN (2018- 19)</b>	<b>N (2020-21)</b>	<b>% of Students with SEN (2020- 21)</b>	<b>N (2022-23)</b>	<b>% of Students with SEN (2022- 23)</b>	<b>N Change</b>	<b>% Change</b>
<b>Learning Disability</b>	7,784	16.9%	6,423	13.8%	5,083	11.1%	3,960	9.8%	-3,824	-7.1%
<b>Giftedness</b>	6,887	14.9%	7,167	15.4%	7,376	16.2%	7,041	17.4%	154	2.5%
<b>Mild Intellectual Disability</b>	1,810	3.9%	1,596	3.4%	1,419	3.1%	1,228	3.0%	-582	-0.9%
<b>Behavioural</b>	730	1.6%	649	1.4%	573	1.3%	402	1.0%	-328	-0.6%
<b>Autism</b>	2,336	5.1%	2,562	5.5%	2,781	6.1%	3,010	7.4%	674	2.3%
<b>Developmental Disability</b>	1,102	2.4%	1,097	2.4%	1,110	2.4%	993	2.4%	-109	0.0%
<b>Physical Disability</b>	276	0.6%	251	0.5%	207	0.5%	205	0.5%	-71	-0.1%
<b>Language Impairment</b>	139	0.3%	108	0.2%	87	0.2%	62	0.2%	-77	-0.1%
<b>Deaf and Hard of Hearing</b>	279	0.6%	267	0.6%	271	0.6%	252	0.6%	-27	0.0%
<b>OTHER</b>	60	0.1%	43	0.1%	35	0.1%	52	0.1%	-8	0.0%
<b>Total Exceptionalities</b>	<b>21,403</b>	<b>46.4%</b>	<b>20,163</b>	<b>43.3%</b>	<b>18,942</b>	<b>41.5%</b>	<b>17,205</b>	<b>42.4%</b>	<b>-4,198</b>	<b>-4.0%</b>
<b>IEP only</b>	<b>24,741</b>	<b>53.6%</b>	<b>26,394</b>	<b>56.7%</b>	<b>26,686</b>	<b>58.5%</b>	<b>23,372</b>	<b>57.6%</b>	<b>-1,369</b>	<b>4.0%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>46,144</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>46,557</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>45,628</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>40,577</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>-5,567</b>	

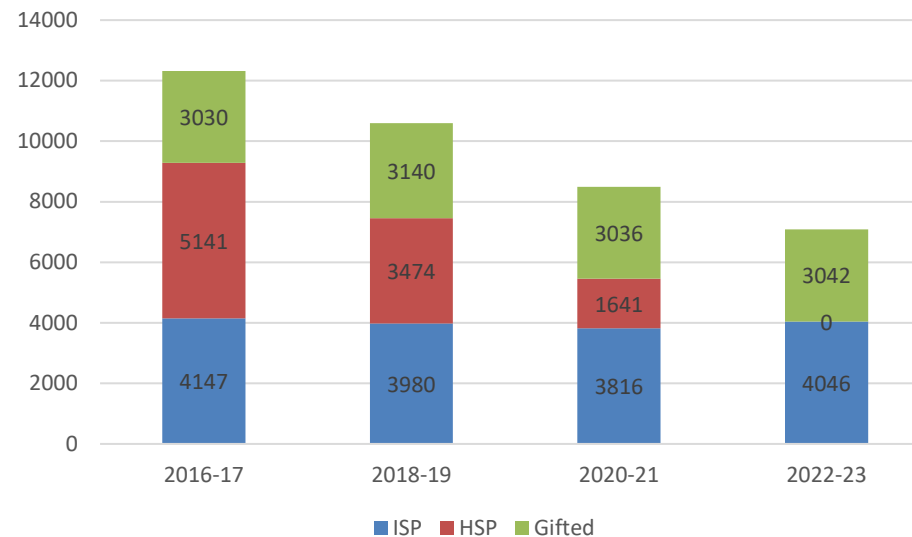
## PART 2

### COMPOSITION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IDENTIFIED WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS AND PLACED IN CONGREGATED CLASSES

The TDSB enrolment data has school-level programming including HSP, gifted, and other special education congregated programs (e.g., programs dedicated to students identified with learning disabilities, developmental disabilities, and autism) which are collectively called Intensive Support Programs or ISPs. This data is not reported to the Ministry, but we can use it to show program patterns over time.

Figure 1 and Table 3 show the number of students in these programs from Fall 2016 to Fall 2022. In Fall 2016, HSP had an enrolment of over 5,000 students. As part of a shift towards more inclusionary practices, the TDSB has phased out of HSP as of 2022-23 (Special Education Plan, 2020, p. 85). As a result, by Fall of 2022, there were no more students in HSP. Excluding HSP, since 2016-17 the number of students in gifted programs and ISPs has remained fairly stable, with a slight increase in gifted and a slight decrease in ISPs.

**Figure 1: Composition of Elementary School Students with Special Education Needs in Congregated Classrooms<sup>3</sup>**



<sup>3</sup> Source: TDSB Student Information System

	<b>2016</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2022*</b>
<b>Gifted</b>	3,030	3,140	3,036	3,042
<b>HSP</b>	5,141	3,474	1,641	0
<b>ISP</b>	4,147	3,980	3,816	4,046
<b>Students in Spec Education</b>	12,318	10,594	8,493	7,088
<b>Total TDSB Population</b>	171,689	173,614	169,467	163,700

\*2022-23 data is preliminary draft

<sup>4</sup>Source: TDSB Student Information Systems

## PART 3

### STUDENTS WITH A BEHAVIOURAL EXCEPTIONALITY

In Parts 1 and 2, the evolving trends within special education across the TDSB between October 31, 2016 and October 31, 2022 were examined. In Part 3, we look specifically at the behavioural exceptionalities both in terms of race and secondary outcomes. First, in order to examine the behavioural exceptionalities by race, overall system-level race data was compared with race data from students with a behavioural exceptionalities for the 2016-17 – 2022-23 school years. This comparison would indicate whether any racial groups are overrepresented in this exceptionalities. Second, in order to look at performance on secondary indicators, data from the Grade 9 cohorts between 2000- 2015 was used. A cohort tracking study follows a group of students (in this case, Grade 9 students) over a period of four or five years in which most students would complete their secondary schooling. In this report, the most recent Grade 9 cohort data available tracked students from Grade 9 in 2015 through to potential post-secondary confirmation in 2020.

This section begins with an examination of the behavioural exceptionalities by race using system-level data from 2016-17 to 2022-23. It then moves into the Grade 9 cohort data beginning with the overall number of Grade 9 cohort students who received a behavioural exceptionalities from 2000-2015 and then looking at outcome measures including Grade 9 credit accumulation, EQAO level 3 or 4 in English, mathematics, science and geography, Grade 9 academic program of study, OSSLT pass rate, graduation rate, and post-secondary confirmations.

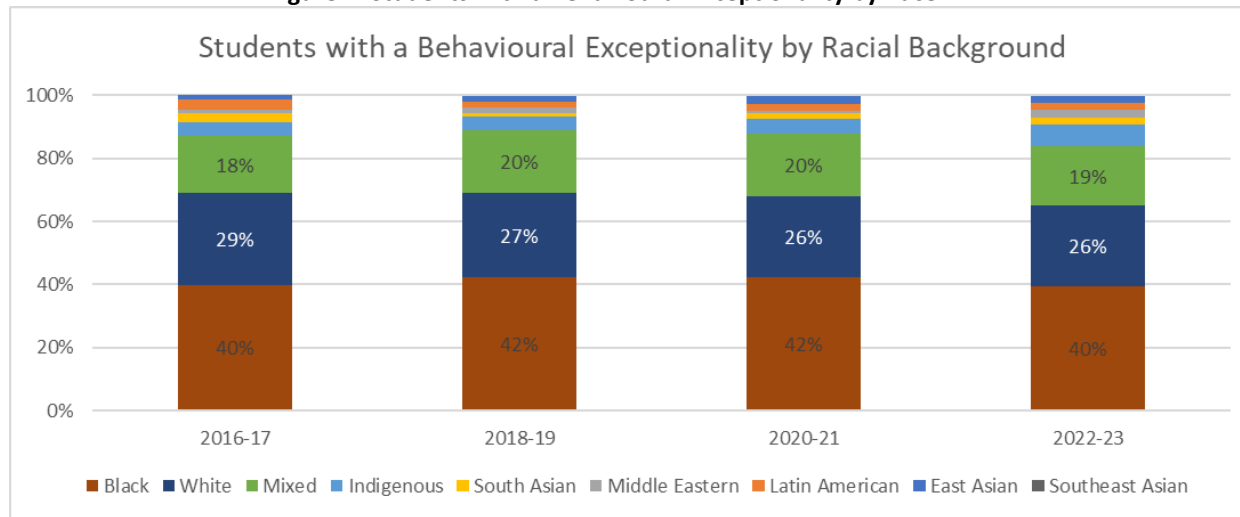
### STUDENTS WITH A BEHAVIOURAL EXCEPTIONALITY BY RACE

Figures 2 and 3 show a breakdown of students who received a behavioural exceptionalities by race as well as all students by racial background for 2016-17 – 2022-23.

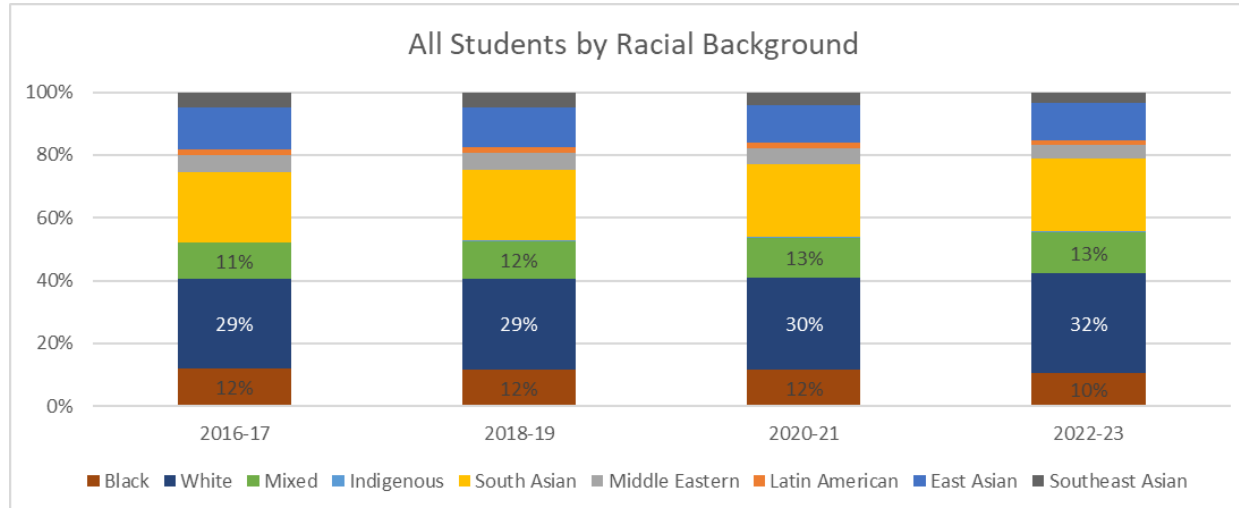
Key findings:

- Black and White students made up the majority of students with a behavioural exceptionalities.
- Black students make up only 10-12% of the student population, but account for 40-42% of students with a behavioural exceptionalities

**Figure 2: Students with a Behavioural Exceptionality by Race**



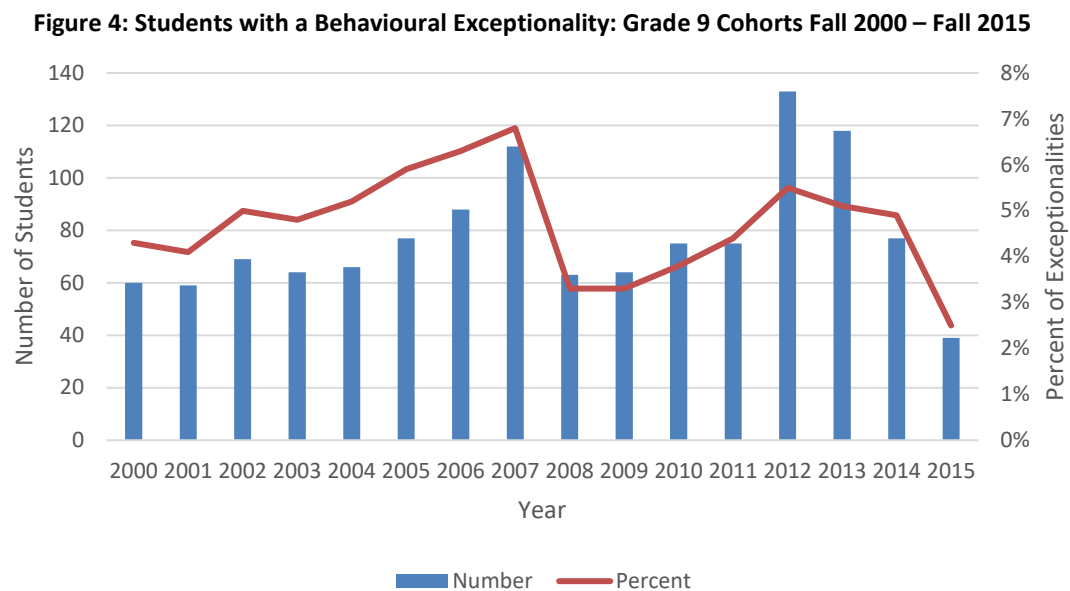
**Figure 3: All Student by Racial Background**



## STUDENTS WITH A BEHAVIOURAL EXCEPTIONALITY: Grade 9 Cohort Data

Figure 4 shows the number of Grade 9 students from Fall 2000–Fall 2015 who received a behavioural exceptionalality. Key findings:

- From 2000 to 2007, there was an increasing number and proportion of Grade 9 students who received a behavioural exceptionalality.
- After a significant decline in the number and proportion of Grade 9 students with a behavioural exceptionalality for 4 successive cohorts (2008-2011), there was a large increase in students with a behavioural exceptionalality in the 2012 Grade 9 cohort.
  - While the 2012 Grade 9 cohort had the largest overall *number* of students with a behavioural exceptionalality since the 2000 cohort, the *proportion* of behavioural compared to other exceptionalities was lower than the high seen in the 2007 Grade 9 cohort.
- The most recent Grade 9 cohort (Fall 2015) had the lowest number and proportion of students with a behavioural exceptionalality.



## SECONDARY INDICATORS FOR STUDENTS WITH A BEHAVIOURAL EXCEPTIONALITY

Table 4 shows levels of achievement in secondary indicators for students with a behavioural exceptionality aggregated from Fall 2000 – Fall 2015 using Grade 9 cohort data. The data was aggregated due to low student populations for each individual year. Overall, the table shows that students with a behavioural exceptionality had lower levels of achievement across all indicators.

**Table 4: Secondary Indicators for Students with a Behavioural Exceptionality**

Levels 3/4 in Grade 9 English	
All Grade 9 Students (N=283,940)	<b>Grade 9 Students with a Behavioral Exceptionality (N=1,148)</b>
54%	<b>18%</b>

Grade 9 Academic Program of Study	
All Grade 9 Students (N=283,987)	<b>Grade 9 Students with a Behavioral Exceptionality (N=1,148)</b>
72%	<b>11%</b>

Graduation or 30+ Credits	
All Grade 9 Students (N=304,234)	<b>Grade 9 Students with a Behavioral Exceptionality (N=1,195)</b>
68%	<b>26%</b>

Levels 3/4 in Grade 9 Mathematics	
All Grade 9 Students (N=283,925)	<b>Grade 9 Students with a Behavioral Exceptionality (N=1,148)</b>
48%	<b>16%</b>

Grade 9 Credits (8+)	
All Grade 9 Students (N=279,097)	<b>Grade 9 Students with a Behavioral Exceptionality (N=1,114)</b>
79%	<b>26%</b>

Post-secondary Confirmations	
All Grade 9 Students (N=315,001)	<b>Grade 9 Students with a Behavioral Exceptionality (N=1,239)</b>
53%	<b>11%</b>

Levels 3/4 in Grade 9 Science	
All Grade 9 Students (N=265,144)	<b>Grade 9 Students with a Behavioral Exceptionality (N=1,087)</b>
53%	<b>14%</b>

Grade 10 OSSLT (Pass)	
All Grade 9 Students (N=259,641)	<b>Grade 9 Students with a Behavioral Exceptionality (N=895)</b>
74%	<b>25%</b>

Levels 3/4 in Grade 9 Geography	
All Grade 9 Students (N=228,962)	<b>Grade 9 Students with a Behavioral Exceptionality (N=960)</b>
59%	<b>16%</b>

# SUMMARY - DISCUSSION

## THE CURRENT PICTURE

The data presented in this report reveal some positive trends within special education across the TDSB, as well as areas where challenges persist. The overall number of students identified with special education needs (SEN) has declined since 2016-17. A decrease in the number of students in most special education identification categories is responsible for this decline. On the other hand, the giftedness and autism exceptionalities increased in number and proportion, while the proportion of students with an IEP Only also increased.

An overview of the number of students in congregated special education classes shows that, in line with the Board's decision to phase out HSP (Special Education Plan, 2020), the number of students in HSP has decreased from over 5,000 in 2016-17 to 0 in 2022-23. Conversely, the number of students in ISP and gifted classrooms has remained fairly stable.

An analysis of system-level race data from 2016-17- 2022-23 as well as Grade 9 cohort data for the Fall 2000-2015 cohorts (which tracked Grade 9 students across high school from Grade 9 to graduation year 2) indicated that while the number and proportion of students receiving a behavioural exceptionality is declining, Black students remain overrepresented. Despite making up only 10-12% of the overall student population, Black students make up approximately 40% of the population of students with a behavioural exceptionality. Further, Grade 9 cohort data looking at secondary indicators for students with a behavioural exceptionality also showed that these students experienced significantly lower outcomes than the overall Grade 9 student population. Students with behavioural exceptionalities were less likely to achieve 8+ Grade 9 credits, to pass the OSSLT, to have a Grade 9 academic program of study, to achieve a level 3 or 4 in Grade 9 English, mathematics, science and geography, to accumulate 30+ credits for graduation, or to confirm an application to post-secondary. These lower secondary indicators suggest inequitable outcomes for students with behavioural exceptionalities, which are disproportionately Black students. The Board should further examine the behavioural exceptionality to better align with the goals of the TDSB's Multi-Year Strategic Plan (2018) and Special Education Plan 2022-2023 (2022).



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