



Research Report

**SPECIAL EDUCATION / SPECIAL NEEDS
INFORMATION IN THE TDSB, 2005-6**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research and Information Services worked with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Data Warehouse, Special Education, and Student Information Services to develop a common reporting process, and to resolve discrepancies around Special Education information. Periodic updates were provided to a committee of Special Education and administrative staff. The committee requested the data be used to provide the picture of Special Education in the TDSB as it existed in 2005-6, within the limitations of administrative data.

Who are Students with Special Needs?

Students with Special Needs have unique strengths and needs (behavioural, communication, intellectual, and physical) that may require more specialized or intensive programs and supports.

How are Students with Special Needs Identified?

They are identified in three ways. 1) Under the formal the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (**IPRC**). Students are identified into one or more of 14 'exceptionalities'. 2) Students may not be formally identified through the IPRC process, but are identified through the School Support team and receive programming through Special Education. These students are called "**Non-identified**". These students should have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) (although some do not). 3) Some students are identified by their teachers and the School Support Team, and have a **current IEP**. They are receiving direct assistance through the classroom, rather than programming in Special Education.

How Many Students with Special Needs are in the TDSB?

In 2005-6, 37,847 students out of 274,052 (**14% of TDSB students**) were identified as students with Special Needs:

- 2,652 students (1.0%) were in **IPRC Gifted - Special Education Classes** (that is, they had been IPRC'd as Gifted, and were taking 50% or more of their classes in Special Education).
- 1,037 students (0.4%) were in **IPRC Gifted - Regular Classes** (that is, they had been IPRC'd as Gifted, and were taking the majority of their classes in the TDSB regular day classrooms).

- 9,826 students (3.6%) were in **IPRC Non-Gifted - Special Education Classes** (that is, they had been IPRC'd as one of the 13 non-Gifted Exceptionalities, and were taking 50% or more of their classes in Special Education).
- 6,525 students (2.4%) were in **IPRC Non-Gifted - Regular Classes** (that is, they had been IPRC'd in one of the 13 Non-Gifted exceptionalities, and were taking the majority of their classes in the TDSB regular day classrooms).
- 11,672 (4.3%) were **Non-identified** students (i.e. not IPRC'd but receiving Special Education programming during the 2005-6 school year).
- 6,135 students (2.2%) had Individual Education Plans (**IEP's**) and were receiving direct assistance in the classroom, rather than programming in Special education. Most students with IEP's receive programming from Special Education; these are the exceptions.

It should be noted that some reporting of "Special Needs" (e.g., EQAO) excludes IPRC'd Gifted students, since the achievement characteristics of those students are so different from other Special Needs students.

Different Definitions of Special Needs: A Blind Spot?

Currently, information on TDSB students with Special Needs is reported to two sources: the provincial testing authority, EQAO, which reports results of Special Needs students in the TDSB and the rest of the province; and the Ministry of Education, to which the Special Education department reports information. Unfortunately, the two have somewhat different definitions of what they mean by "Special Needs". EQAO looks at students who are IPRC'd, and also students who have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Special Education looks at students who are IPRC'd, and also students who are not IPRC'd, but who have Special Education programming - the 11,672 "Non-identified Special Needs" students above. There appears to be a bit of a blind spot in the student systems, in part because the IEP information is entered by the teachers or administrators in the schools, while the IPRC/Non-identified information is entered by people in the Special Education department. Approximately 6,000 students with Special Needs are missed using the Ministry definition, while 3,000 students with Special Needs are missed using the EQAO definition.

Selected Key Findings from 2005-06

- While there are 14 Ministry exceptionalities, the majority of the TDSB's IPRC'd students were in five exceptionalities: Gifted, Learning Disability (LD), Mild Intellectual Disability (MID), Developmental Disability (DD), and Behavioural.
- Students without Special Needs were equally male and female (50% male 50% female). However, nearly two thirds of Special Needs students (64%) were *male*.
- The formal IPRC process is for the most part an *elementary school process*. In 2005-6 only 3% of new Gifted exceptionalities and 10% of non-Gifted exceptionalities occurred in secondary. The majority of new exceptionalities were identified between Grades 3 and 6. Most IPRC'd students received exceptionality designations only after already possessing the less formal Special Needs recognition (Non-identified and/or IEP).
- Students with Special Needs were *less likely* to be born outside Canada (19%) than students without Special Needs (31%).
- When we looked at a variety of achievement results, we found that Gifted students achieved at a much *higher level* than the TDSB average; however, all non-Gifted students (IPRC, Non-identified, local IEP) achieved at a much *lower level* than the TDSB average. Figure 2 shows the outcomes for EQAO's Grade 6 Mathematics assessment, administered in May 2006.
- Many students who received full-time Special Education programming in Grade 8 were integrated into regular secondary classes when they enter Grade 9. However, many of these students *remained high risk*. We will have to follow these students over time to know their long-term fate.