

Special Education



OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD



THE ISSUE

Schools are supporting an increasing number of students with complex learning needs.

Every child deserves access to quality education. The ability of school boards to support the increasing number of students with diverse learning needs, including complex safety, behavioral, and medical requirements within the current provincial funding levels is not sustainable. Creating learning environments where every student feels valued and supported, regardless of their abilities or challenges must be a priority.

Education is a human right. However, schools do not have sufficient resources to fully support students with special education needs with the care and attention they deserve. The underfunding of special education adds further pressure on educators and educational support workers, including professional support staff, and can adversely impact academic progress and student well-being.

Special education funding needs to ensure that programs and services can evolve and adapt to effectively accommodate student needs. At the same time, parents and caregivers need to have access to support and guidance in advocating for their children's educational needs within this evolving landscape.

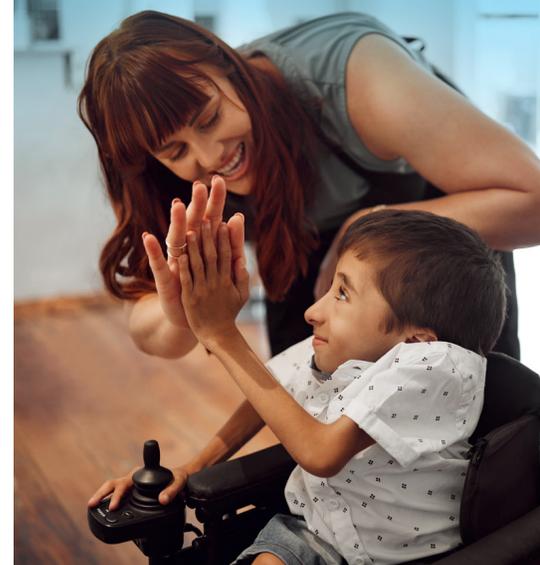
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The estimated provincial funding shortfall the OCDSB is facing to support special education. This money must be found from elsewhere in the school board budget.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address special education needs, the OCDSB recommends:

- 1 Increase funding:** Significant increases in special education funding are required to hire more educational assistants. Bridge funding would also be recommended to shift from a model based on fully self contained classrooms to a more inclusive, community school-based approach. Further targeted investments into reading interventions are also imperative to support students with learning differences.
- 2 Recruitment action plan and professional development:** A provincial action plan is needed to hire more staff to assist students with specialized learning needs. This should be coupled with more opportunities for all educators to access professional development and training (for example, meeting the needs of students with ASD).
- 3 Province-wide coordination:** While school boards need the flexibility to support their local communities, more coordination across the province would help to ensure a consistent standard of practice. This includes materials to better inform parents/caregivers about their child's rights, special education, and how to best support their child.





MORE INFORMATION

The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board is committed to the principle that learning is a developmental process and children proceed through the stages of development at varying rates, using early identification and intervention to identify and address learning needs.

Public education is based upon the principle of inclusion. All students deserve the opportunity to have equal access to opportunities and resources that will allow them to succeed as learners. Proper funding is essential in order to meet our commitment to provide the structures that support the individual student needs and that foster their growth, while encouraging inclusion and building independence.

We offer a continuum of programs and services with placement options ranging from regular class with special education resource support to specialized program class placements and special education schools. We collaborate with parents/ caregivers and district staff to be inclusive of all learners.

Recent updates to the Ontario Curriculum highlight the importance of Social Emotional Learning and its connections to students' feelings of safety, welcoming and belonging. Educational Assistants (EAs) are key para-professionals to help support students in being prepared for learning from a social-emotional and self-regulation perspective.

The OCDSB has used additional funding beyond the special education envelope in order to support students with special education needs, including increasing the number of EAs available to support students. The district is currently serving more students with complex needs, including those with complex mental health profiles, in the regular classroom. Students have had their educational experiences disrupted by the pandemic and unprecedented levels of dysregulation are being noticed.

Additional funding would allow for increases in supports such as teacher professional development, educational assistants, professional support services, access to educational assessments, and physical space requirements.

Equal access to education is a fundamental human right guaranteed under the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and international law. The Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) has affirmed that all students must have meaningful access to education, which includes being provided the supports needed to learn to read. In Eaton v Brant Country Board of Education (Eaton), the SCC also emphasized the importance of inclusive education as an equality right, finding that "... integration should be recognized as the norm of general application because of the benefits it generally provides."

Source: OHRC, Right to Read Report, 2022