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MEMORANDUM TO:

Directors of District School Boards
Provincial Associations
Executive Directors of Preschool Speech and Language, Infant
Development, Infant Hearing, Blind-Low Vision and Special
Needs Resourcing Programs
Executive Directors of Children's Mental Health Agencies
CEOs of Community Care Access Centres
Executive Directors of Children's Treatment Centres
Executive Directors of Regional Autism Service Providers
Consolidated Municipal Services Managers
District Social Services Administration Boards

DATE:

May 6, 2010

FROM:

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SUBJECT: Services for Students with Special Needs / Special Education Needs and the Early Learning Program in Year One, 2010-11

Full-day learning for our youngest students is a key part of the government's plan to strengthen education in Ontario. The ministries of Education, Children and Youth Services, and Health and Long-Term Care are working closely to support children with special needs/special education needs to participate in the Early Learning Program (ELP). We are writing to you as partners in providing services for students with special needs / special education needs. Our shared goal is to ensure that students and families get the support they need to fully participate in the ELP. It is the government's expectation that you and your community will continue to work together to provide stability and continuity of service for students who enrol in the ELP for the 2010-11 school year.

We are aware that questions and concerns have been raised regarding supports for students with special needs who are transitioning to the ELP. For Year One (2010-11), we are asking school boards, parents and community service agencies to continue to work together, as partners, to meet the needs of students with special needs / special education needs in the ELP. As individual issues arise, we are asking all parties to utilize existing effective collaborative partnerships and service delivery models to best support the needs of students and families.

The ELP consists of a full school day of learning for four- and five-year-olds, as well as an optional fee-based integrated extended day for those same students. The ELP will improve reading, writing and math skills, provide a smoother transition to grade 1, and help students develop the social and academic skills necessary to succeed in school and beyond. For more information pertaining to the ELP please visit the ministry website at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/earlylearning/>

District school boards, in collaboration with municipal service providers and community service agencies, are preparing for implementation of Year One of the ELP for the 2010-11 school year. Approximately 15 per cent of schools will be participating in Year One providing up to 35,000 spaces for four- and five-year olds, including students with special needs / special education needs.

Services for Students with Special Needs / Special Education Needs and the Early Learning Program 2010-11

School boards have the responsibility to provide special education programs and services to students with special education needs; this responsibility extends to include those students enrolled in the ELP, including the extended day component.

Currently, four and five year olds, depending on their age and special need, receive services that support their development and their participation in school from a variety of

providers, including schools and community service agencies and through a number of programs that operate under different policies. For Year One of the ELP, 2010-11, there will be no policy changes made for these programs. Therefore, we are asking school boards, community-based agencies and parents to continue to work together as partners to ensure that children with special needs / special education needs can participate in the ELP and that enrolment in the ELP will not affect their eligibility for and receipt of services. Continuity of service means that children will receive services within current program and eligibility criteria.

Individual issues may arise that will require locally determined solutions, so we are asking all partners to utilize existing effective partnerships and service delivery models to achieve our access goals. As currently exists, there will continue to be local variability in delivery of services as a result of student needs and community resources and/or existing community arrangements.

On an individual basis, some students with special needs / special education needs may also need to continue receiving the community services they had been accessing prior to school entry. To provide stability for these students and their families in these individual cases, community partners, including school boards, will need to continue to work together to facilitate access to services and the ELP based on the best interests of the student.

Some examples of effective local practices include (but are not limited to):

- Alternative hours of operation in community programs so that students in the ELP may access these services;
- Implementing a transition plan to allow students time to adjust to school;
- Accommodating students to attend a modified school day to allow them to be successful at school;
- Providing space at the school for community partners to deliver services.

Attached for your information are Year One Guiding Principles to assist in the consideration of local solutions for the delivery of services to four- and five-year olds with special needs / special education needs who enrol in the ELP.

Planning Entry to School

Research shows that transition to school for students with special needs / special education needs will be more successful when careful planning and coordination has taken place. Plans need to be responsive to changes in the child's needs, family, community or resources.¹

Parents, community service agencies, school boards, organizations, and professionals have been working collaboratively to facilitate a successful transition to school process for all students, including those with special needs / special education needs. *Planning Entry*

¹ Ministry of Education, *Planning Entry to School, Introduction, Principles Guiding the Planning Process, and Effective Planning for All Children* Pages 5-9

to School: A Resource Guide, developed by the Ministry of Education in 2005, describes effective practices to assist during the planning processes and can be found at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/planningentry.pdf>

Example of Effective Practices: Connections for Students

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) and the Ministry of Education (EDU) have been working closely to improve supports for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) through *Connections for Students*. This model is an example of the current effective collaborative service delivery practices across the province.

The *Connections for Students* model is being implemented by all school boards and Autism Intervention Program (AIP) providers throughout the province. The Connections model promotes effective working relationships and shared approaches to achieve seamless transitions from intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) services provided through the MCYS funded AIP to applied behaviour analysis (ABA) instructional methods in school.

AIP providers and school boards implementing *Connections for Students* have identified a wide range of benefits of the model which include:

- better alignment of Individual Education Plans (IEPs), transition plans and progress reports supports students in acquiring, generalizing and maintaining their learning;
- clear and understandable transition planning reduces parent and student anxiety;
- clearer guidelines and expectations for family involvement in the process of transitioning for their children;
- increased collaboration among regional autism service providers, school board staff and parents/guardians throughout the transition process provides a greater opportunity to establish joint goals with more opportunity for joint planning for students; and
- clear delineation of the team members' responsibilities helps team members to understand their roles and responsibilities so that each member utilizes their professional knowledge in an intra-disciplinary approach to support the child's transition to a school setting in a seamless manner.

Evaluation

There will be an evaluation of the ELP in Years One and Two. In addition a review of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's School Health Support Services Program is currently underway, conducted by Deloitte and Touche, with recommendations expected by July 31, 2010. The results of the review and the evaluation will inform future direction for policy development for children with special needs/special education needs. Our ministries will continue to work closely with leaders in the education, health, child care, children's services, and municipal sectors as we move forward.

Thank you for your support in implementing this key government initiative for Ontario's children. We trust these guidelines will support you as ELP is introduced across the province and we look forward to working with you as we make our province's vision for early learning for four- and five- year olds a reality that includes students with special needs / special education needs.



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cc: Local Health Integration Networks

EARLY LEARNING PROGRAM STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS / SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS

YEAR ONE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Introduction

The shared goal of the ministries of Education, Children and Youth Services, and Health and Long-Term Care is to ensure that students and their families get the support they need to fully participate in the ELP.

Parents/guardians, school/school board personnel, and relevant community service agencies will need to continue to work together and, as partners, to identify existing effective practices based on the guiding principles and within existing policies, to support local implementation, in the following areas:

1. **Who** will provide services;
2. **How** services will be delivered (model);
3. **When** services will be delivered; and
4. **Where** services will be delivered.

Guiding Principles

1. Transition planning supports the participation of students in the ELP, including smooth transition and delivery of services for students with special needs / special education needs who enrol in the ELP. Transition planning should:
 - a. take place for students with special needs / special education needs and include students who are already receiving services within their community or who are on a waitlist to receive services within their community;
 - b. occur early; and
 - c. be coordinated by a designated individual.
2. Collaboration among parents/guardians, school/school board personnel, and relevant community service agencies facilitates the provision of services to the students with special needs / special education needs and minimizes potential barriers to service delivery.
 - a. Parents/guardians and relevant community service agencies should be invited by school / school board personnel to participate in transition and service planning.
 - b. Collaboration should focus on the individual needs of students and supporting seamless service delivery.

3. Decisions regarding service delivery consider the best interests of the student and the family in areas such as:
 - a. Continuity of service;
 - b. Expedient service;
 - c. Optimizing outcomes;
 - d. Supporting the child's participation in the ELP; and
 - e. Supporting the continuum of special needs / special education needs.

4. Ongoing review of the services provided focuses on meeting the needs of the student. This review:
 - a. involves the family and all relevant partners;
 - b. includes both formal and informal communication; and
 - c. takes place throughout the school year.

As with all students, the school principal (team leader) is responsible for the special education programs and services students receive in the school. The principal is also responsible for sharing these guiding principles with all partners and for encouraging all relevant individuals to work within them.