

From: Ministry of Education (EDU) <MinistryofEducation@ontario.ca>

Sent: Tuesday, April 21, 2020 7:32:35 PM

Subject: Continuity of Learning for Students with Special Education Needs and Mental Health Supports

Memorandum To: Directors of Education
Superintendents of Special Education
Secretary-Treasurers of School Authorities

From: Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister

Subject Continuity of Learning for Students with Special Education Needs and Mental Health Supports

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your flexibility and willingness to work together to support our students during the current school closure period. I am writing to provide guidance to school boards with respect to supporting the mental health and wellness of students, and to information about school board support of students with special education needs.

The Ministry of Education is committed to supporting continuity of learning and supports for all students, including students with special education needs. As part of their implementation planning activities, boards are expected to include specific approaches to supporting students with special education needs.

Identification, Placement, and Review Committees (IPRCs)

Boards are expected to continue to conduct annual reviews by IPRCs as set out under Ontario Regulation 181/98. Boards should consider options for conducting IPRC meetings remotely. Please note that per the regulation, a parent can give written notice dispensing with the annual review. In the event that there is an appeal of an IPRC decision, boards should also consider options for holding appeal board hearings remotely.

Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

To support access to learning for students with special education needs, IEPs should continue to remain in effect as continuity of learning strategies are implemented. In situations where existing accommodations, modifications, or alternative programming are not feasible, boards should work collaboratively with students and families to determine workable solutions on a case by case basis.

Assistive Technology and Other Special Education Equipment

As you know, the ministry allocates Special Equipment Amount (SEA) Per Pupil Amount (PPA) funding to school boards to be used for the purchase of assistive technology such as computers, software and computing-related devices, among other items, for use by students with special education needs. School boards are encouraged to provide continued access to assistive technology and other special education equipment to support students with special

education needs learning at home. In situations where this access is not feasible, schools and teachers are encouraged to work with students and families to determine workable solutions on a case by case basis.

The ministry recognizes that the present school closures may impact boards' ability to submit its 2019-20 SEA claims by the May 29, 2020 deadline. As a result, the submission deadline for 2019-20 SEA claims has been extended to June 30, 2020. Boards will also be able to carry-over any SEA claims that have been initiated and cannot be completed by this new deadline and submit them as part of their SEA Claims submission for the 2020-21 school year.

Special Education Advisory Committees (SEAC)

Ontario Regulation 463/97 was recently amended to provide boards with greater flexibility in how a board and its committees meet when schools are closed pursuant to an order made by the Minister of Education under s. 5(1) of the *Education Act*. We encourage boards to review these amendments when considering approaches to meetings. School boards are encouraged to leverage the expertise of their SEACs as they plan for continuity of learning for students with special education needs.

Leverage the Capacity of Professional Staff Remotely

The ministry expects school boards to leverage the capacity of professional and para-professional staff and Educational Assistants remotely where possible recognizing the context of prevailing contractual, regulatory or legislative requirements. Where possible these staff should be available to provide consultation and other supports to teachers and/or families.

Care, Treatment, Custody & Correctional (CTCC) Programs

Access to education for students attending CTCC programs should follow the same protocols put in place for students attending publicly funded schools. Boards are encouraged to support student access to individual supports needed for them to succeed. In situations where certain individual accommodations may not be feasible, the ministry encourages boards and their teachers to work with students and families to determine solutions on a case by case basis.

The ministry encourages system principals to communicate with custody/detention facilities to determine the best way to maintain continuity of education for students in these facilities. The ministry is also in contact with the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) to determine how facility staff can help support continuity of learning with consideration to the safety and security of youth and staff as well as other considerations relating to the operational needs of a facility.

Specialized Health Support Services and Special Needs Programming

MCCSS funds a range of services and supports for children and youth with special education needs, including children and youth with autism. These services and supports are often delivered by local agencies and organizations, such as Children's Treatment Centres, or in the form of direct funding for families to purchase services from fee-for-service providers. Some community-based services will be suspended or experience disruptions and delays during this period. Some service providers already provide services remotely, and others may choose to pursue this as an alternative method of service delivery (for example, by telephone or through online applications), where appropriate.

Families can contact their children's service providers directly for updated information about what services may be available to them at this time. Links to publicly funded local service providers can be found at:

<http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/specialneeds/index.aspx>.

Students who would have otherwise received school health professional or school health personal support services on school premises may be eligible for home care services. In recognition of the extended school closure, Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) are working with families with children who are eligible for home care.

Services offered by Provincial and Demonstration Schools

The Provincial and Demonstration Schools have specialized knowledge and expertise that can support the broader educator population. The Provincial and Demonstration Schools Branch (PDSB) Resource Services Department can continue to support school boards that have students who are Deaf, hard of hearing, blind, low vision, deafblind or who have severe learning disabilities. Additionally, PDSB is a resource for boards that have students who use American Sign Language (ASL) and Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) and can provide support on how this may work in a virtual environment. PDSB's Resource Services Teachers are OCT-qualified teachers who provide educational consultative services, for example, recommendations regarding the setting up of programs, including equipment needs. Additional support to boards with students who are blind and low vision is available from the Alternate Educational Resources Ontario (AERO) department and W. Ross Macdonald School.

For services for English/ASL students who are Deaf or hard of hearing please contact Jeanne Leonard, Superintendent, Provincial and Demonstration Schools Branch at Jeanne.Leonard@ontario.ca. For services for English/ASL and French/LSQ students who are blind, low vision, deafblind or who have severe learning disabilities or for French/LSQ students who are Deaf or hard of hearing please contact Ginette Faubert, Superintendent, Provincial and Demonstration Schools Branch at Ginette.Faubert@ontario.ca.

Supports to Educators

The Ministry of Education is offering facilitated remote/virtual learning for educators through a series of webinars, including on how to support students with special education needs remotely. In addition, the ministry will be posting resources for parents and teachers on supporting students with special education needs. Educators can visit <https://www.d2l.com/k-12/ontario/> to register for webinars.

As well, the registration deadline for the Ontario Educator Online Autism Training Program offered through the Geneva Centre for Autism has been extended until June 30, 2020.

Mental Health Supports

Boards are encouraged to continue providing mental health supports to students remotely. This could include students who have been receiving prevention and intervention services in schools by mental health staff, and those students who come to the attention of staff during the school closure period as needing additional support. Boards could provide remote services through their existing school mental health professionals including newly funded mental health workers

in secondary schools. It is recognized that the nature of support may change as the response to the COVID-19 outbreak evolves.

School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON) will continue to provide boards with guidance, resources and implementation coaching support. SMH-ON is connecting with boards, community partners, and experts in virtual care to identify effective practices and training/tools for providing mental health supports remotely. SMH-ON has prepared a number of resources that may be helpful for parents/families, students, and educators to consider during school closures. These resources can be found on the SMH-ON website at <https://smho-smsso.ca/>. Specific supports designed for school-based mental health professionals will be shared through a private community of practice.

As you know, active discussions are ongoing with labour and management partners in the education system, with a focus on working together, sharing ideas and finding solutions. We know that boards are working incredibly hard and collaboratively with their senior teams, principals and vice-principals, teacher federations and education worker unions in implementing continuity of learning plans for all students, including those with special education needs. This collaborative work locally will remain essential in the days and weeks ahead. We will continue to work through all aspects of the government's education sector response by engaging with the various working groups that have been established with boards and with labour partners. We also expect boards to leverage ongoing partnerships at the local level as plans to support all students are implemented.

The ministry is committed to ongoing communication with boards regarding issues that may arise over the coming weeks and will be organizing follow-up conversations with superintendents of special education. Should you require any additional information or have any questions please contact Jeff Butler at jeff.butler@ontario.ca.

Learn about how the Government is supporting people, businesses and families during COVID-19 by visiting www.ontario.ca/coronavirus

Again, thank you for your cooperation and willingness to work together to support our students.

Sincerely,

Nancy Naylor

c: Executive Director, Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'ontario (ACÉPO)
Executive Director, Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques (AFOCSC)
Executive Director, Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association (OCSTA)
Executive Director, Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA)
Executive Director, Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE)
Executive Director and Secretary-Treasurer, Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO)
General Secretary, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)
General Secretary, Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA)
General Secretary, Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF)
Chair, Ontario Council of Educational Workers (OCEW)
Chair, Education Workers' Alliance of Ontario (EWAO)
Co-ordinator, Canadian Union of Public Employees – Ontario (CUPE-ON)
Chair, Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education