



Ontario Catholic School
Trustees' Association

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November 4, 2019

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chairpersons and Directors of Education
- All Catholic District School Boards

FROM: Beverley Eckensweiler, President

SUBJECT: **The Ontario Autism Advisory Panel Report**

Overview:

On Wednesday October 30 2019, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services released the final report of the Autism Advisory Panel. The panel co-chairs were Dr. Marie Bountrogianni (former Dean of Continuing Education, Ryerson University) and Margaret Spoeistra (Executive Director, Autism Ontario) with 18 other participants from the education, medical and autism community. The education sector representative was Anne O'Brien, Director of Education with the Durham Catholic District School Board. The mandate of the advisory panel was to provide recommendations to the government on an approach to autism services in Ontario that is responsive to the needs and long-term outcomes for children and youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder ("ASD"). In addition, the advisory panel was to provide recommendations on the design of a new, multiple sector, needs-based Ontario Autism Program within an annual budget of \$600 million.

Recommendations Impacting the Education Sector and School Boards

The panel made specific recommendations to align services offered through the Ontario Autism Program with those offered by the Ministry of Education. The following is a summary of the key recommendations¹:

- Establish an education advisory committee ("committee") on autism by the end of 2019 with stakeholders from the education, health and social services sectors, including parents. The panel would provide advice on the most effective means to meet the needs of children and youth with ASD. It would also make specific recommendations to the Ministry of Education on policies, programs and professional development;

¹ The full report can be accessed at http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/specialneeds/autism/AutismAdvisoryPanelReport_2019.pdf

- The committee should also design best practice guidelines to address how school boards implement special education policy and regulations impacting students with ASD to ensure consistency across the province;
- Review the implementation of O. Reg 181/98 related to the IPRC process to ensure school board compliance with the regulation;
- Review school board compliance with Individual Education Plan standards;
- Phase out the practice of using seclusion rooms;
- Review policies and procedures related to classroom removal and exclusions;
- Develop guidelines to ensure parents are aware of all special education programs and services at their local school and board;
- Design strategies to ensure students with ASD are not negatively impacted by e-learning and class size policy changes;
- Develop protocols to facilitate collaboration between autism service providers and schools, including continuing the Connections for Students program;
- Review PPM 140, 149 to eliminate barriers to community-based service agencies, included evidence-based standards for the use of ABA educational practices provided by regulated health professionals;
- Expand the Pilot to Improve School-Based Supports for Students with ASD with a focus on more dedicated space;
- Expand the number of mental health workers and education assistants;
- Improve professional learning and training supports for educators and professionals including reviewing Ontario's initial teacher education and additional qualification programs;
- Enhance the content of training supports and courses related to the development, implementation and monitoring of IEP's, behaviour safety plans;
- Review school board policies to promote consistency and continuity of EA's working with students with ASD;
- Review PPM 81 on the provision of health and support services in schools to ensure rehabilitation programs delivered by community agencies meet the government's goals of cross-ministerial integration for improved services.

Next Steps

The various ministries involved in delivering programs and services to children and youth with ASD are currently reviewing the recommendations. The new autism program will be implemented in April 2020.

OCSTA will continue to liaise with the Ministry of Education to determine which recommendations affecting boards may form part of the approach to programs and services for students with ASD.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact Steve Andrews, Director of Legislative and Political Affairs at sandrews@ocsta.on.ca