

AUTISM ONTARIO

RESPONSE TO

RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE

**TRANSITIONS SUB-COMMITTEE FOR
ACCESSIBLE TRANSITIONS FOR STUDENTS
WITH DISABILITIES IN KINDERGARTEN TO
GRADE 12**



AutismONTARIO
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MISSION

CREATING A SUPPORTIVE AND INCLUSIVE ONTARIO FOR AUTISM

VISION

BEST LIFE, BETTER WORLD, MAKING AUTISM MATTER

ENDS

BECAUSE AUTISM ONTARIO EXISTS:

Individuals and families in their communities are equitably and seamlessly supported across their life course.

Individuals, families and communities have meaningful: Supports, information and connections.

Information/knowledge is created, curated and mobilized that is: Trustworthy, timely and relevant.

C

COLLABORATION

We believe in the power of working side by side with individuals, families and communities to make informed choices about autism.

A

ACCOUNTABILITY

We hold ourselves and others responsible to achieve successful outcomes through high standards of integrity and fiscal responsibility.

R

RESPECT

We value equity, diversity and inclusion, and we listen to understand.

E

EVIDENCE INFORMED

We use and create knowledge to guide our decisions and work.

OUR VALUES

Acknowledgements

Peel Transition Advisory Committee (TAC): Ryan Machete (Lead)

Contributors: Sue McMillan; Suzanne Murphy; Laura Peetoom; Marg Spoelstra; Cathy White

Design: Layne Verbeek

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SUMMARY

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on recommendations for improved transitions for students with disabilities as they moved from stage to stage of their K-12 education in Ontario.

In this document, Autism Ontario has provided point-by-point commentary on the Recommendations we agree mostly strongly with, have suggestions for or question. (See *Transition Recommendations, Point by Point Response*, below.)

Here, we would like to summarize our response.

We are concerned we will never get any further ahead with this conversation until there is measurable and consistent outcome tracking for all pathways within the K-12 education system, not just for secondary schooling, which is the case currently and is only partially helpful.

Currently there are students who have aged out of secondary extension options without a clear next step. More careful tracking and accountability would provide the kind of data required to a) assure that completed programming has been successful and b) clarify post-secondary options.

Consistency, measurability and accountability at every level would build the groundwork required for successful transition out of the K-12 education system and toward meaningful and productive lives for people with disabilities.

After reviewing the entire document, we see the following:

We are concerned we will never get any further ahead with this conversation until there is measurable and consistent outcome tracking for all pathways within the K-12 education system

WHAT IS WORKING CURRENTLY

We can learn from what is already in place and is working.

- PDSB, for example, is moving toward more integrative practices in the secondary programs for students with developmental disabilities: earlier and additional opportunities to learn pre-vocational skills and take part in co-activities (e.g. baking, horticulture) instead of waiting for these students to enter a transition program at age 18 or 19.

- Entry-to-school transitions, especially to kindergarten, are being handled more consistently. Applications to alternate post-secondary programs are online and consistent with the current college application process, no longer separate and inaccessible. An excellent move!

WHAT IS LACKING

The Recommendations reveal the most obvious lacks in the current system.

- Many supports are only being provided virtually.
- There is no tracking mechanism for those that are pursuing an employment or community pathway. Only college and university pathways have a system that provides research teams an opportunity to track successful outcomes.
- There is little to no accountability within K-12 special education. This could be due to there being no mandate from the Ministry to school boards to provide data and documentation of successful outcomes for students in special education. How students experience entry into school and transition from one stage of their schooling to the next sets the tone for their transition out of K-12 and on to life and its many stages. Measurement and retooling at each stage of K-12 will build toward success post-secondary.
- Lack of mandated tracking and accountability renders the IEP, and Transition plans within the IEP, rather toothless — recommendations only, not legal requirements or even firm and clear goals.

WHERE THERE ARE PRESSURES

External factors, which change as society changes, put pressure on current systems.

- Community agencies are seeing waitlists grow as students have returned to school this fall.
- Because of the COVID pandemic many students have missed out on their co-op and experiential learning opportunities; this really impacts their preparedness for transition to the workplace.
- The profile of “newcomers” is always changing. We are now seeing more Afghan families, who have significant mental health issues, often include a family member who can speak English, and have fewer members with disabilities than the previous wave of Syrian refugees did. Different supports are then required.

IMPROVEMENTS THAT CAN BE MADE NOW

Given the most obvious needs of the current system, there are mechanisms that can be put in place immediately.

- Give guidance counsellors more training on the assessments required for post-secondary transition. Special educators also need more training in transition planning but it is not necessary to go that deep with secondary school subject teachers.

- Improve liaison with post-secondary institutions. Increase collaboration with external agencies/parents/student/school/work/post-secondary institutions. Consistency is key: use consistent documentation and clear and consistent definitions pertaining to disability across post-secondary institutions.
- Improve planning and increase co-op opportunities for students who intend to go directly to work from high school. Increase funding for job coaching.
- Include measurable goals in transition plans. Assessment and evaluation tools (surveys, retention numbers) should be named and used for accountability measurement.
- Set up regional working groups, such as Peel Transition Advisory Committee (TAC). Ensure Indigenous participation at all levels.
- Eliminate barrier-erecting processes such as interviews and external assessments (e.g., formal diagnoses for every IEP).
- Hire and equip transition facilitators with specialized training/experience in specific disabilities.

WHAT TO MANDATE

Ontario's Ministry of Education can exercise its leadership in more tangible, board-level ways.

- Mandate that IPP providers such as My Blueprint have up-to-date information on all pathways. This includes community programs, post-secondary programs such as CICE, and employment-support service providers.
- Generalization pages in the IEP should be mandatory and documented with data from home, school and community.
- Accommodations in the IEP should be categorized specifically as intervention, casual, request only, or permanent. Interventions should include fading plans that are monitored to ensure "intervention" doesn't become "permanent" and not replicable in other environments
- Schools should take into account family income when wait-listing assessments and access to PSSP supports. Those who cannot afford any alternative support/assessments should have priority.

TRANSITION RECOMMENDATIONS: POINT BY POINT RESPONSE

3. *Make available to school boards, resources that support instruction for teaching the learning skills outlined in the report card, as these skills are directly linked to student achievement, and help students understand how they learn best and what supports they might require to access their learning.*

Agreed. Could something specific be suggested, as well? For example, a profile and advocacy course that students co-create in order to better understand their learning profile and how to advocate effectively. This would be beneficial to the parents too.

4. *In partnership with school boards, design an integrated transition planning approach with service providers and other partners who deliver services for students with disabilities so that multiple plans with similar and/or distinct goals are merged into **one document**.*

What will this “one document” look like? Who will own it? IEP Transition Plan is the default but there is neither consistency nor ownership; currently boards have too much latitude. A common document would be best co-developed by MCCSS and MOE.

- Third-party protocols and processes can contribute to barriers
- Develop/Adapt/Implement a consistent platform/program such as My Blueprint or Career Cruising appropriate for transition planning for students with disabilities
- Provincial Advisory Committee could be responsible for creating and sharing this across province with regional transition advisory group/committees
- Ensure diverse (newcomers, cultural, language, indigenous, abilities) perspectives are considered when developing a province wide Individual Pathway Planner (IPP)
- Link IPP with IEP to ensure legality

5. *Ensure consistency across boards in designing and implementing evidence-based transitional practices and processes with early intervention services across Ontario.*

Yes; and track progress by paying attention to outcomes!

6. *Ensure that all evidence-based transition practices and processes include a comprehensive system of services and supports for students with disabilities transitioning into Kindergarten.*

Agree, but need to review the preschool goals and determine how they line up with school practices. For example, needs-based programming/accommodations such as ABA may be unsupported in or not carried over to school, which causes regression of skills and loss of parent confidence in the school system.

7. *Mandate school boards to design strengths-based curriculum resources, assessment methods, and professional development for educators about assessing the resiliency needs of all students, including students with disabilities that will promote and enhance their mental health and well-being.*

Agreed; and this recommendation would benefit from specific suggestions. Students should have the opportunity to show what they are good at and not just be obliged to meet checklist items. Implement discovery-based skills exploration — a sort of “maker space” for assessment in earlier grades, in which assessments are based on discovery. In addition, specify that

- Teachers have training on IPPs
- Credit-bearing courses get better supports

8. *Mandate that school boards design curriculum resources that focus on the development of learning skills including executive functioning skills (for example, emotional and physical self-regulation, working memory, self-monitoring, organizational planning and prioritizing, and task initiation).*

Mandate mental-health first-aid training for all staff and share the cost amongst Ministries. For example:

- <https://cmhapeeldufferin.ca/events/mental-health-first-aid/>
- https://www.sja.ca/en/first-aid-training/mental-health-first-aid-basic?gclid=CjwKCAjw_L6LBhBbEiwA4c46ukEnwbzwJO0zk42Af341xSrhZq5mvTwqtmXoySBTZy03VfK_6-xDCBoCoNAQAvD_BwE

9. *End the practice of prematurely streaming students with disabilities as well as students from cultural, linguistic and economically disadvantaged communities, into courses or academic streams that limit options and pathways to postsecondary education and employment.*

- PDSB has already de-streamed grades 9 and 10.
- Non-credit-earning students should have individualized curriculum.
- Ensure administrators stop using the phrase “We don’t modify, we accommodate.” This is widely accepted and excludes a large portion of students from accessible education at the secondary level.

10. *Collaborate with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) and other relevant ministries to ensure that schools receive information about community and provincial supports, such as those available through Developmental Services Ontario (DSO) and the Ontario Disability Supports Program (ODSP). Such information shall include details about eligibility criteria and application processes.*

Include translation into several languages.

11. *Require school boards to make the information indicated in recommendation ten available to school staff and students with disabilities and their families beginning in Grade 7 through the individual education plan process.*

Disagree: Should be “through IEP to IPP”.

We need to strengthen the already-mandated Individualized Pathway Plan in Pathways for All. IPPs are rarely created in grade 7 as mandated. They typically are only used in grade 8 for course selection.

District School Boards shall:

*12. Create a Transition Facilitator/
Navigator position ...*

Obviously! Agree with all points from (a) to (g) and suggest the following as well:

- Survey how many Transition Facilitators (or similar, whatever they are called) are in each board across province; then, allocate funding for these positions in each board based on population or number of students with IEPs

For example, in PDSB, two Transition Facilitators support 1000 transition meetings with student and families per year. The DPCDSB Transition Facilitator supported approximately 350 meetings with families/students per year.

13. Ensure that co-operative education programs include accommodations and supports for all students as needed, including transportation to and from placements and support staff at placement as needed.

Mandate data collection and fading strategies be a part of the co-op curriculum. Co-op experiences need enhancement and need to fall under a school-based co-op department and not be managed as an “add-on” that is subject to staff’s goodwill. Co-op teachers should have specialized training (perhaps special education training) and understand and carry out legal requirements that keep students, employees and employers safe. Non-credit co-op situations should have equal care and attention.

15. Offer learning strategies courses in secondary school that are responsive and aligned with the individual education plans of participating students.

Secondary schools may argue that this already exists (in GLE, etc.). GLE subjects can be tailored to meet specific needs of students; how do we prioritize and improve these? Co-created learning strategies courses could be an option — certainly having students take ownership of how they learn. Definitely agree with Recommendation 16, below. Most students have never seen their IEP and psych assessment. Make that part of their course. See Recommendation #16 as well.

17. *Work with teachers to review curriculum and learning expectations (in literacy, social studies, etc.) that highlight the development of self-advocacy/self-awareness/resiliency skills.*

- Offer opportunities for generalization.
- Remove “drop downs’ about advocacy in electronic IEP-generating programs; Advocacy should be listed as the goal and strategies to support that goal be identified.

18. *Deliver professional development for educators about students disclosing their disability and how to help them identify and access available supports in secondary and postsecondary education, the workplace and in social situations.*

Accommodations need to be co-constructed with students so that they learn advocacy skills from early age (beginning of IEP development) and that they get used to the language around advocacy.

19. *Support instruction development for educators and students about the lived experiences of students with disabilities, the impact of their disability, how it might affect their need to request disability-related services, and how to identify and request specific and reasonable accommodations.*

This should be an enhancement of the All about Me and IPP already mandated.

21. *Ensure that principals, guidance counsellors and high school teachers are informed about assessment requirements, including updated assessments (for example, psycho-educational), for postsecondary institutions.*

- Require IPP (My Blueprint) to have a flagging system for students with an IEP and direct-link to student services at each institution.
- Some schools/boards do not have capacity for formal assessments; increase resources/funding for these. Explore potential for cost sharing with post-secondary institutions.

23. *Ensure that students and their parents/guardians are given current information about why updated assessments are required prior to or when entering postsecondary education.*

Share funding options for assessments with families/students and communicate with families and student what is the outcome if assessment are not completed.

26. *Ensure that students with an individual education plan only that includes a transition plan, and their parents/guardians, are informed in Grades 7 through 10 that they will need an identification, placement and review committee if they will be requesting accommodations when they enter postsecondary education. As well as ensuring students and their parents/guardians understand accommodations in K-12 do not automatically translate to the postsecondary environment and an assessment of accommodations needs will be conducted in postsecondary.*

Build this directly into Recommendation #15

27. *Ensure that every student with an individual education plan in their transition plans from Grade 9 onwards, and specifically in the year prior to graduation, is informed about the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) Bursary for Students with Disabilities (BSWD) and the Canada Student Grant for Services and Equipment for Students with Permanent Disabilities (CSG-PDSE). Information provided will include the following:*

g. Students should engage with the postsecondary disability services office before the start of the school term.

Mandate IPP providers embed this into their program and flag all students that have an IEP. Share information about accessing bursaries etc. through IPP such as My BluePrint. Process should be embedded and prompted every year.

28. *Inform every student with an individual education plan and transition plan from Grade 9 onwards, and specifically in the year prior to graduation, about other funding sources for psycho-educational assessments if they are not Ontario Student Assistance Program-eligible (for example, sliding fee scale support available through the Assessment Resources Centers [RARC, NOARC] and through family health plans).*

Add language that encourages parent networking and sharing of information and strategies around accessing bursaries and obtaining assessments.

TRANSITIONS FROM K-12 TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

a) *Consistent and integrated transition planning*

The Ministry of Education shall:

29. *Establish a centralized transitions hub that will serve as a professional learning community of practice for transitions facilitators/navigators (as identified in recommendation twelve). The hub will:*

- a. *Serve as a network for transitions facilitator/navigators throughout the province*
- b. *Facilitate sharing best practices in the field of transitions among public school boards and the postsecondary sector*
- c. *Provide smaller boards partnership opportunities with other boards for partnerships in developing successful transition programs*

Agree 100%. COVID practices have demonstrated that virtual meetings and repositories are possible; a virtual Transition Hub would be ideal.

31. *Direct K-12 boards to identify the barriers to transition at all levels of a student's academic journey within their multi-year accessibility plans, indicating plans for barrier removal with appropriate timelines.*

And document them with milestones in the IEP or common document (ITPP), with the student's pathway clearly documented and the grad plan front and centre. Expand page 4 of the IEP (identifying goals) to support the fading of relevant strategies and supports. "If you can't fade it...then you are going to have to fund it."

32. *Ensure that assistive technology training is provided to staff and students as they explore the technologies required to access their learning in elementary schools, secondary schools, and as they transition to postsecondary institutions.*

And parents/guardians, and between secondary and post-secondary environments – perhaps through Transition Hubs.

34. *Postsecondary institutions shall promote and make the transition programs available on their website in a clear location.*

And parents/guardians, and between secondary and post-secondary environments – perhaps through Transition Hubs.

35. *The Ministry of Colleges and Universities shall provide government resources to develop and enhance the transition programs and supports.*

And attend individual transition meetings when requested by secondary institutions.

b) Collaboration and Coordination

The Ministry of Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, shall:

37. *Fund a transition facilitator/navigator position for each postsecondary institution who will lead the institution's response to supporting the transition needs of students with disabilities. Transition facilitators/navigators will: ... advise the institution on transition-related barriers and make recommendations for their removal.*

39. *Ensure students are aware of the need to request accessible format material (for example, braille textbooks) in the semester before starting their postsecondary studies.*

We disagree: this should begin in Grade 7.

40. *In collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, transition navigators shall develop and deliver a plan to coordinate technological assessment needs of student with disabilities, so they have the assistive technologies they require before commencing their postsecondary studies.*

There should be direct collaboration with Assistive Technology Resource Teachers (ATRT). All boards should be required to have ATRTs, if this is not already mandated.

c) Documentation and Funding Barriers
The Ministry of Education shall:

43. *Require postsecondary institutions to publish clearly stated documentation requirements that:*
- a. Confirm that the student is a person with a disability*
 - b. Confirm that the student does not have to disclose their medical diagnosis to receive accommodations*
 - c. Requests sufficient information about the student's functional limitations to inform accommodation planning*

And/or develop truncated assessment criteria to match the \$2000 cap.

44. *Ensure that the eligibility criteria for psycho-educational assessment funded through the ARCs are fair and equitable.*

Based on what criteria?

TRANSITION FOR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility in collaboration with other ministries shall:

49. *The circle will be made up of a constituency group with members of who have knowledge, experience and understanding of disability, ableism, education and Indigenous peoples, their values, histories, current issues and cultures. The group should include First Nations Boards and communities, Indigenous educators and disability service providers.*

Ensure that Indigenous Student Resource Teacher is present at all transition meetings for students passing out of the secondary system.

53. *Ensure that the transition between Indigenous and the provincially funded schools should start early to address systemic barriers moving between systems and prepare the students spiritually and mentally.*

Clearly document the barriers, and then address them.

54. *Provide education transition facilitators/navigators for Indigenous students with disabilities to facilitate connections with students when transferring between First Nation's schools and provincial schools. The transition facilitators/navigators will meet with students, parents, teachers, resource and key staff from both systems to provide advocacy, develop trust between parties where needed, and address fear of moving between systems.*

Will the transition facilitators be individuals who themselves identify as Indigenous?

55. *Develop an outreach strategy to promote engagement and pathways to higher education for Indigenous students with disabilities.*

Align with employment initiatives for Indigenous individuals and communities to ensure direct access to opportunities beyond post-secondary.

58. *Provide coordinated professional development for teachers on Indigenous peoples to understand the complexities with transitions between the Indigenous and provincial systems for Indigenous students, including how to address and support the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of students.*

Ensure Indigenous community agencies etc. are involved in the process from Day 1 of planning to ensure culturally responsive practices across the board.

59. *Increase opportunities for Ontario teacher education programs and education partners to work cooperatively on enhancing Indigenous teacher education and teacher education programs that meet the needs of Indigenous learners with disabilities.*

Is this referring to Additional Qualifications courses?

TRANSITIONS FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL TO THE WORKPLACE AND COMMUNITY

The Ministry of Education shall collaborate to:

63. *Ensure that administrators, teachers and other educational staff are sufficiently trained to effectively support transitions for students with disabilities throughout their school career, from school entry to postsecondary education, employment and community participation.*

Ensure enhanced training in each school: Special Education, Guidance, Co-op, administration and teaching staff. There must be a cohort of trained and trusted staff in each school.

64. *Expand current experiential learning opportunities and offer new ones for students with disabilities who transition directly to employment from secondary school to develop essential employment skills. Examples of current programs include the Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM), Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP), Community Involvement and AO: cooperative education programs.*

Develop strategies for community employers to recruit directly from secondary schools through experiential learning. Mandate that all students in the employment pathway have direct access to psycho-vocational assessments, and barrier-free access to co-op with employers that are aligned with their PV assessments. Geographic inequities exist in boards and throughout the province, e.g., CLM and BCCL in Peel offer different employment training experiences.

The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Colleges and Universities and Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development shall:

65. *Establish a repository for sharing transition planning resources with educators to support the transition of students with disabilities to postsecondary institutions and the workplace.*

IPP, My Blueprint would be great for this.

66. *Make information available through school boards about alternative credential program (for example, micro credentials) so that students with disabilities know of all available options during their transition planning.*

Mandate that IPP providers expand their current programming to include all pathways, all employment opportunities and supports in each community. Direct tracking reports to administration for gaps in pathways.

68. *Require that K-12 school boards publicly commit to ensuring that all experiential learning opportunities are equitable, inclusive and accessible for students with disabilities.*

What will be the evaluation and accountability measures for this?

ALTERNATIVE TRANSITION PROGRAMS/PATHWAYS

*The Ministry of Colleges and Universities and Ministry of Education shall:
Develop and promote alternative programs and pathways by:*

74. *Requiring colleges that offer the Community Integration Through Co-operative Education program to establish consistent admission requirements.*

◀ CICE and other processes for accepting students into these programs vary greatly across institutions; furthermore, they can be very subjective and are often triaged by who requires less support.

75. *Collaborate with the Ministry of Education, and in consultation with industry experts and the disability community, to jointly offer new industry-recognized certification programs, like the current Ontario Skills Passport and food handling certificate.*

◀ Currently there is a huge labour shortage in Ontario and with more overlap between the Ministries of Employment and Education we could see better and more satisfying outcomes for each. Overlap/collaboration might involve or enable or support:

- Directly recruiting students/workers from secondary schools into gainful employment
- Individual training to better prepare individual students for specific employment
- Removal of “middle management”
- Job Coaches instead of EAs, as a more effective option for some students
- Job Coaches could support students/workers transition to workplace

