



Halton District School Board
Special Education Programs and Services Review
Phase II

**Review of Elementary Special Education
Referral, Identification and Placement Pathways
For Students identified with
Autism, Learning Disabilities, and Giftedness**



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Notes:

- ▶ The term “parent” is used throughout this report and refers to **parents and guardians** of students.
- ▶ Key informant interviewees represent local community associations and also have (or had) children attending schools in the HDSB. In order to maintain anonymity, details regarding discussion topics with these participants are included with those presented for parents throughout the report.

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SPECIAL EDUCATION IN THE HALTON DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Halton District School Board (HDSB) serves approximately 64,700 students, of which approximately 45,100 are in elementary grades. The HDSB operates 86 elementary schools and 19 secondary schools, with more than 9000 staff, across the municipalities of Burlington, Halton Hills, Milton and Oakville. HDSB's four-year strategic plan (2016-2020) sets direction and priorities to fulfil their vision: *every student explores and enhances their potential, passions, and strengths to thrive as contributing global citizens*. Established priority areas include: (1) engagement and achievement, (2) stewardship and resources, and (3) equity and wellbeing (HDSB, 2016).

The Student Services Department holds responsibilities for various aspects of special education across the Board. Through its mission statement, Student Services is committed to ensuring *schools work in partnership with students, families, and community to meet the educational needs of every student*. More than 10,000 students currently receive special education support in the HDSB, and over 58% are in elementary grades. Elementary special education services and supports range from those provided in the regular classroom to those offered in full-time self-contained classes. The range of supports provided to exceptional students are based on the following Statements of Belief maintained by Student Services:

- student needs should be identified and concerns should be addressed at the earliest possible stage;
- inclusion of students in their regular classroom and neighbourhood school environment to the greatest extent possible is most desirable, when it is in the best interest of the child, and in accordance with parental wishes;
- a range of placements and programs is necessary to meet the needs of learners;
- alternate placements outside of the neighbourhood school should be provided for students who would most benefit from them when necessary; and
- there should be equitable access to programs (HDSB, 2017).

Within the priority area of Stewardship and Resources, the Board's multi-year plan states two goals with associated targets that address the needs of exceptional students:

1. Every student will be supported by evidence-based instructional strategies, resources and interventions differentiated to their strengths and needs; with the target of narrowing the gap in achievement by 25% for students with special education needs in all EQAO assessments by 2020.
2. All staff will use data to inform actions, validate decision-making and allocate resources; with the target of 100% of teachers using Individual Education Plans and/or Student Profile to individualize assessment and/or instruction of students by 2020. (HDSB, 2016).

Overall, HDSB maintains a commitment towards its mission to *inspire every student to LEARN, GROW, and SUCCEED*. Students with special needs are provided with supports and services that align with the Board's strategic plan, its philosophy on special education, and its special education delivery model.

BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW

During the 2016-2017 school year, the HDSB performed an initial review of the special education programs and services (Phase I), focusing on student enrolment, student achievement trends, stakeholder perspectives, and cost analyses. Key findings from Phase I include:

Student Enrolment

- Close to 16% of students receive special education support; with a large majority comprising of non-identified (IEP) students, and students with Giftedness, Learning Disabilities, and Autism.
- Over five years (2012-2016), special education student enrolment increased by 15%; with the largest population increase found among non-identified (IEP) and Gifted students.
- Over nine years, HDSB experienced a greater increase in their special education population (7% increase), when compared to the province and the GTA (3% increase for both).

Student Achievement

- Over four years, elementary student assessment results demonstrated large achievement gaps between exceptionalities, and between students receiving special education support and students who were not.

Student Perspectives (grades 6-12)

- The majority reported positive thoughts about school, and one-third reported having positive experiences often at school.
- Three-quarters reported greater independence and confidence due to the support received in school.
- 7 out of 10 students reported that they were satisfied with the support they receive in school.

Parent Perspectives

- The majority reported satisfaction with various elements of the special education program.
- Over half reported that their child had *slightly* or *moderately* improved their academic and social-emotional skills over the past year.
- 7 out of 10 parents reported satisfaction with their child's special education program.

School Staff and Educator Perspectives

- Program strengths: responsive services, supportive school-based model, skilled and dedicated staff, innovative programs, and assistive technology available to students.
- Program challenges: rapid and unpredictable growth in Halton while funding is decreasing, increased complexity and intensity of student needs, shortage of support and professional staff, and increased responsibilities for classroom teachers.
- Concerns for students with Autism – their vulnerability, the need for adequate programming and services, the need for qualified support, and low achievement results among these students.
- Concerns for students with Learning Disabilities – an underserved group, struggles they face, insufficient support with many students opting for a non-identified status.
- Concerns about the primary Gifted program – screening and assessment process, self-contained classes, inconsistent implementation of criteria, and transportation costs. (Love and Favaro, 2017).

Phase I identified a need for HDSB to further examine elementary special education procedures, placements and programming for students with Autism, Learning Disabilities, and Giftedness. The focus on these three exceptionalities in Phase II reflects: (1) the concerns expressed by school staff regarding the services, supports and increased student needs among these exceptionalities; (2) the large achievement gaps between students not receiving special education support and students with Learning Disabilities and Autism; and (3) current enrolment trends, where 58% of students in the special education program are in the elementary panel, with a sizable proportion comprising of these three exceptionalities.

PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW

The purpose of the Special Education Programs and Services Review–Phase II was to examine the Halton District School Board’s (HDSB) current referral, identification and placement pathways for the provision of special education programs and services to elementary students with Autism, Learning Disabilities, and Giftedness. The review provides a comprehensive analysis of the pathways involved for each of the three exceptionalities through the exploration of key problem solving practices, screening and assessment procedures, identification criteria, decision making processes, and placement options. Phase II of this review builds on the information illuminated in Phase I, with the intent to further inform Board practices and procedures when placing exceptional students. Overall, the review set out to examine special education referral, identification and placement procedures, with a focus on enhancing the fidelity, consistency, efficiency, and effectiveness of implementation.

The Special Education Programs and Services Review–Phase II was conducted by an external evaluation consultant. Independent reviews provide organizations with an objective approach, analysis and interpretation of program and service strengths, challenges and opportunities for improvement. Throughout the review process, the consultant approached each component with a clear awareness of stakeholder investment while maintaining a neutral and open-minded perspective. As such, the reported findings and subsequent recommendations are based on the evidence acquired throughout this review, and are provided with the intent to guide future decisions regarding procedures and processes towards the provision of special education programs and services in the HDSB.

APPROACH TO THE REVIEW

The review employed a mixed methods approach, involving a range of quantitative and qualitative data sources. Data were collected from multiple perspectives (Student Services staff, teachers, school administrators, and parents), using multiple methods (existing databases, document reviews, focus groups, interviews, and consultations). The following questions were used to guide the program review:

- 1** What are the special education referral, identification and placement pathways for elementary students identified with Autism, Learning Disabilities, and Giftedness in the HDSB?
- 2** What do key stakeholders think about the referral, identification and placement pathways for elementary students identified with Autism, Learning Disabilities, and Giftedness in the HDSB?
- 3** How do the elementary special education referral, identification and placement pathways in the HDSB align with the procedures, policies, and regulations issued by the Ontario Ministry of Education?
- 4** How do the special education referral, identification and placement models for elementary students with Autism, Learning Disabilities, and Giftedness compare with neighbouring school boards?

Table 1: Review Framework for Elementary Referral, Identification and Placement Pathways

Review Component	Review Goals	Data Sources
Overview of student enrolment	Examine elementary student enrolment trends for students identified with Autism, Learning Disabilities, and Giftedness in the HDSB, the region and in the province.	HDSB Student Information System databases
1 Overview of procedures and pathways	Identify special education referral, identification and placement processes and procedures. Create a procedural flowchart for each exceptionality.	HDSB & Student Services online resources <u>Key Informant Consultations:</u> IPLs for Autism, Learning Disabilities, & Gifted exceptionalities to confirm procedures
2 Key stakeholder perspectives	Explore the extent to which referral, identification and placement procedures are implemented across the system, focusing on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Fidelity</u>: extent to which procedures are implemented as specified/intended • <u>Consistency</u>: extent to which procedures are implemented in a consistent manner across the system • <u>Efficiency</u>: extent to which procedures move students through pathways in a proficient manner • <u>Effectiveness</u>: extent to which pathways enable staff to accurately refer, identify and place students • <u>Strengths & challenges</u> with the pathways • <u>Recommendations</u> for improvement 	<u>Focus Groups:</u> 3 staff groups: special education Staff – SERTs, IPLs, Psycho-educational Consultants 3 staff groups: school administrators, teachers 6 parent groups: parents of elementary students with Autism, Learning Disabilities, & Giftedness <u>Key Informant Interviews:</u> 3 interviews with SEAC representatives for Autism, Learning Disabilities, and Giftedness
3 Ontario Ministry of Education expectations	Identify key procedures, policies, and regulations for special education referral, identification and placement of elementary students. Explore the extent to which schools align their practices with Ministry guidelines.	Ontario Ministry of Education documents
4 Procedures in neighbouring school boards	Conduct an environmental scan to identify key referral and identification practices and placement options for elementary students with Autism, Learning Disabilities, and Giftedness among other school boards. Explore similarities and differences in practice among neighbouring school boards and the HDSB.	<u>Selected School Boards:</u> Halton Catholic DSB Hamilton-Wentworth DSB Peel DSB Waterloo Region DSB Online Board resources <u>Key Informant Consultations:</u> Board administrative staff responsible for special education programs

Special Education Programs and Services Review Steering Committee

Phase II employed a participatory approach to the review process. From project inception, a Special Education Programs and Services Review Steering Committee was assembled to provide ongoing guidance and support throughout the review process. Together, committee members helped to craft the review questions, strategize project planning, facilitate data collection, and construct recommendations. Steering Committee members included senior staff, Student Services staff, a trustee, a Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) representative, school administrators, a board researcher, and a program evaluation consultant. Steering Committee members are listed on the inside cover of this report.

REVIEW METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

The Special Education Programs and Services Review-Phase II employed a mixed methods approach to data collection, including: document reviews, student enrolment data, student identification and placement data, focus groups, key informant interviews and consultations, and financial data. Data was collected from multiple perspectives, including: Student Services staff, school staff, SEAC representatives, and parents of students with Autism, Learning Disabilities, and Giftedness.

Overview of Student Enrolment in the HDSB

Student Enrolment Data: October 2017 elementary enrolment data for students with Autism, Learning Disabilities and Giftedness were analysed using percentages, and are disaggregated by gender, grade, location, and placement type. In addition, HDSB's five-year enrolment trends are compared to those in the region and the province for each exceptionality.

Skopus Data Warehouse, Trillium (Student Information System), and Board Interface Tools comprise of large system databases which house a variety of student information. The majority of student-related data were retrieved from these databases.

Referral, Identification and Placement Procedures in the HDSB

HDSB Document Review: information regarding the elementary special education referral, identification and placement pathways in the HDSB was collected from the following sources:

- *Special Education Plan 2017-2018 – Halton District School Board*
- *Working Together – Special Education Procedures: A Guide for Parents, Guardians and Students*
- *Guide to Student Services 2017-2018 – Halton District School Board*
- Other board and Students Services Special Education support documents

Key Informant Consultations: key informant consultations were conducted with Instructional Program Leaders (IPLs) to review and confirm the procedural flowchart describing elementary special education referral, identification and placement procedures for students with Autism, Learning Disabilities and Giftedness in the HDSB.

Focus Groups and Key Informant Interviews

Focus Groups: a total of 13 focus groups were conducted, involving 134 participants. Seven focus groups involved Student Services staff (IPLs and Psycho-educational Consultants); and school staff (Special Education Resource Teachers [SERTs], elementary teachers, and principals). Six focus groups were conducted with parents of elementary students identified with Autism, Learning Disabilities or Giftedness. Two parent focus groups were conducted for each category of exceptionality (one group with parents of students attending schools in the North, and one group with parents of students attending schools in the South). Focus group invitations were sent via email to staff and parents, and participants were randomly selected to participate among groups where a large number of invitees expressed interest. All sessions were scheduled for 1.5–2 hours, and were facilitated by an experienced facilitator.

Key Informant Interviews: three key informant interviews were conducted with a total of five SEAC members, representing local community associations for Autism, Learning Disabilities, and Gifted individuals. Each interview was scheduled for one hour, and were facilitated by an experienced facilitator. Content analysis was conducted on the feedback provided by participants in each focus group and interview. Discussion items were coded, categorized and analyzed for themes. For the purpose of this report, common themes were identified across all focus groups and interviews, and discussion details are presented for each theme.

Alignment with Ontario Ministry of Education Regulations, Policies & Procedures

Ontario Ministry of Education Document Review: guidelines and procedures relevant to the referral, identification, placement, and transition processes were extracted and from the following regulations, policy/program memoranda (PPMs), and documents:

1. *Special Education in Ontario—Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide* (Draft), 2017
2. PPM No. 59 – Psychological Testing and Assessment of Pupils, 1982
3. PPM No. 11 – Early Identification of Children’s Learning Needs, 1982
4. Regulation 181/98 (O. Reg. 181/98) – Identification and Placement of Exceptional Pupils, 2005
5. PPM No. 8 – Identification of and program planning for students with learning disabilities, 2014
6. PPM No. 156 – Supporting Transitions for Students with Special Education Needs, 2013
7. PPM No. 140 – Incorporating Methods of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) Into Programs for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, May 2007

A review of alignment between Ministry guidelines and HDSB practices was conducted using HDSB procedural references, system support documents, and feedback from focus group and interview participants.

Models Used in Neighbouring School Boards

School Board Document Review: information regarding the elementary special education referral, identification and placement procedures implemented by the four neighbouring school boards was obtained from respective school board websites, special education plans, parent guides, and online special education support documents.

Key Informant Consultations: key informant consultations were conducted with special education representatives from each school board (i.e., Special Education Coordinators) to confirm the online information collected, and to fill in gaps in the data.

Elementary procedures used by neighbouring school boards were summarized and compared to those used by the HDSB. Similarities and differences between the HDSB and other school boards were reported.

LIMITATION OF THE REVIEW

The reported strengths and challenges regarding the elementary special education referral, identification and placement process reflect common themes discussed among focus group and interview participants involving 139 staff, parents and SEAC representatives. Focus groups and interviews provide a powerful means of investigating complex program issues by exploring the perceptions and experiences of program stakeholders, digging deep into discussion topics, and probing for clarification. However, the focus group participants in this review were self-selected and the data may not represent the perceptions and experiences of all staff and parents of exceptional students in the Halton District School Board. Therefore, focus group and interview results should be interpreted within this context.

OVERVIEW of ELEMENTARY STUDENT ENROLMENT in Special Education Programs and Services In the Halton District School Board

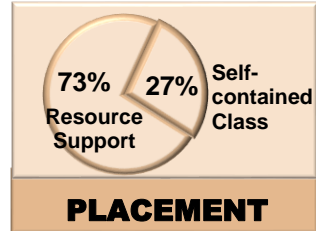
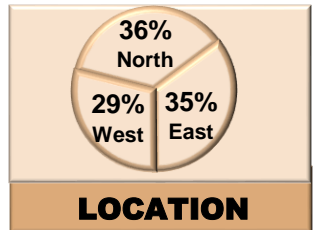
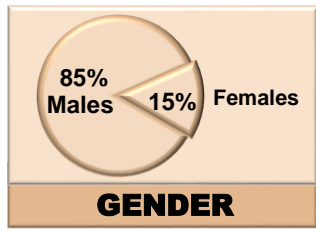
October 31, 2017

45,135 elementary students
6,125 receiving special education support
▶ 2,298 (37.5%) identified exceptional
▶ 3,827 (62.5%) non-identified (IEP)

AUTISM

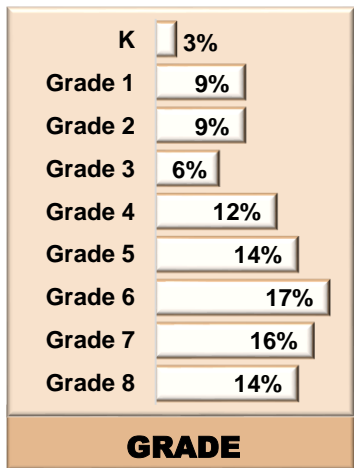
192
elementary students diagnosed and identified with Autism are receiving special education support.

8%
of all identified elementary students.



70% resource assistance
3% withdrawal assistance
21% full-time self-contained
6% partial integration

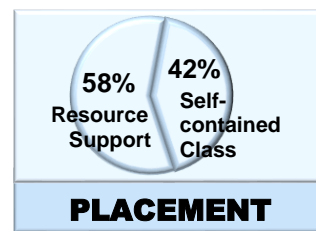
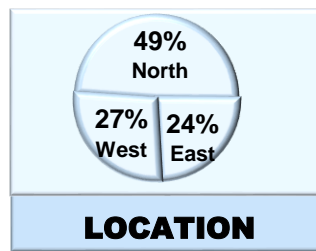
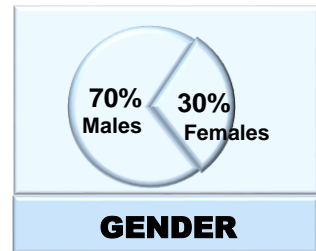
PLACEMENT TYPE



LEARNING DISABILITIES

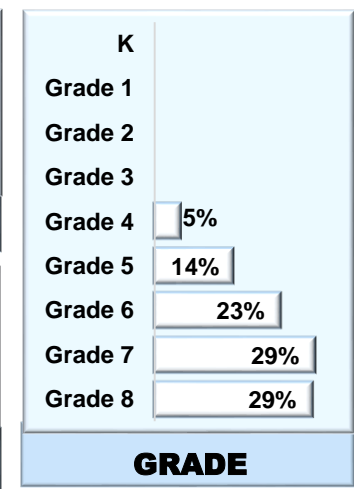
400
elementary students identified with Learning Disabilities are receiving special education support.

17%
of all identified elementary students.



54% resource assistance
4% withdrawal assistance
1% full-time self-contained
41% partial integration

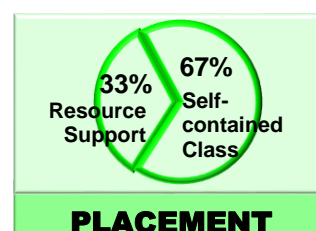
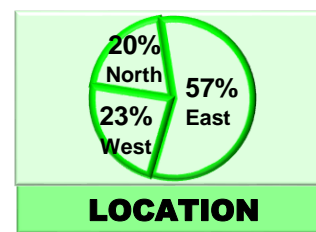
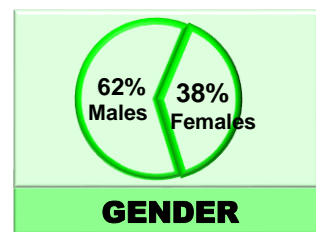
PLACEMENT TYPE



GIFTED

1,244
elementary students identified as Gifted are receiving special education support.

54%
of all identified elementary students.



32% resource assistance
1% withdrawal assistance
67% full-time self-contained
0% partial integration

PLACEMENT TYPE

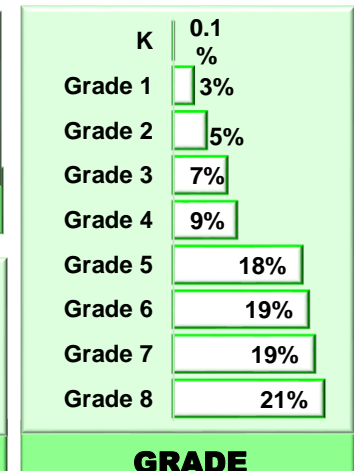


Figure 1: Enrolment and Distribution of Students Identified with Autism, Learning Disabilities and Giftedness in the HDSB by Gender, Location, Grade and Placement on October 31, 2017

OVERVIEW of EXCEPTIONAL ELEMENTARY STUDENT POPULATIONS In the Region, Province, and the HDSB Over 5 Years

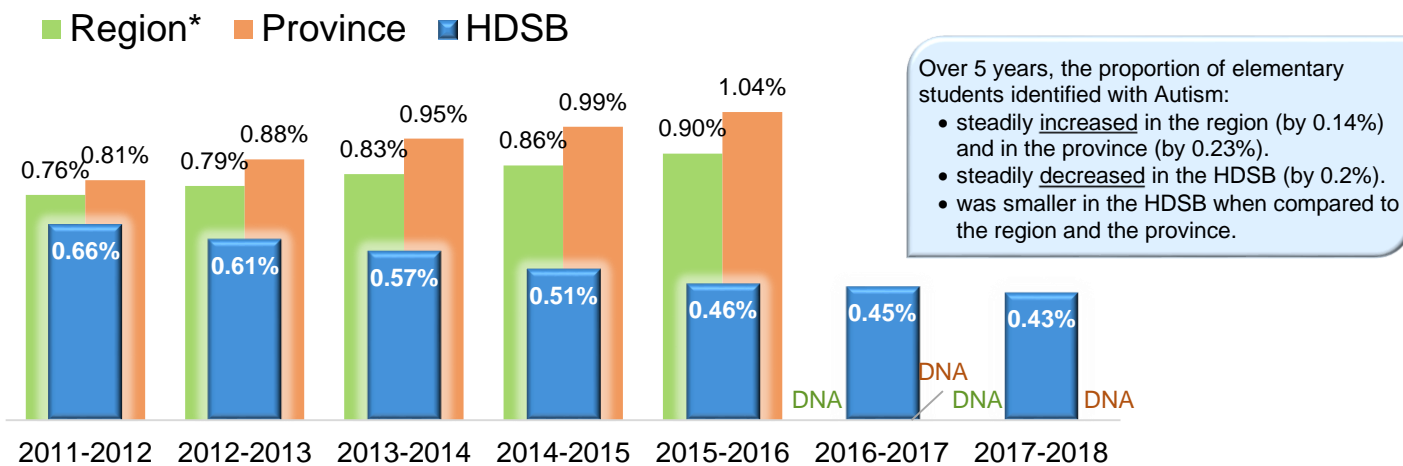


Figure 2a: Percentage of Elementary Student Population Identified with AUTISM

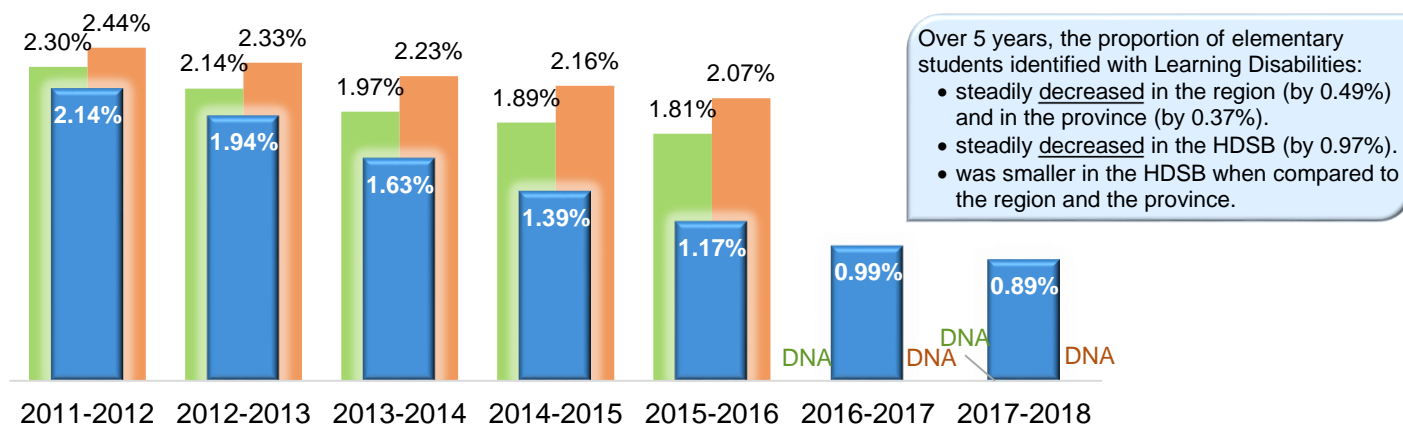


Figure 2b: Percentage of Elementary Student Population Identified with LEARNING DISABILITIES

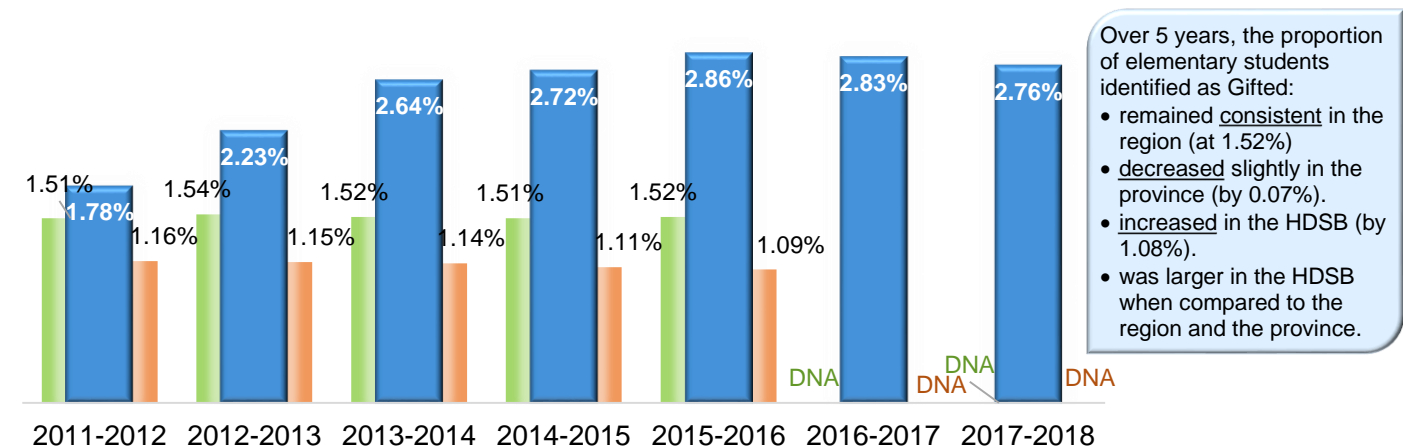


Figure 2c: Percentage of Elementary Student Population Identified as GIFTED

DNA denotes data not available.

* Graphs presenting Regional data include the following school boards: Conseil scolaire Viamonde; Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud; Conseil scolaire Catholique Providence; Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board; Halton Catholic District School Board; Halton District School Board; Peel District School Board; Toronto Catholic District School Board; Toronto District School Board; Upper Grand District School Board; Wellington Catholic District School Board.

REFERRAL IDENTIFICATION AND PLACEMENT PROCEDURES for Students with Autism, Learning Disabilities and Giftedness in the HDSB

REVIEW QUESTION

What are the special education referral, identification and placement pathways for elementary students identified with Autism, Learning Disabilities, and Giftedness in the Halton District School Board?



Special education referral, identification and placement procedures, as well as placement options are examined for elementary students with Autism, Learning Disabilities, and Giftedness. For each exceptionality, a procedural pathway is presented, illustrating the processes and procedures involved in:

- ▶ Referring students to the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC);
- ▶ Identifying students as exceptional; and
- ▶ Placing exceptional students into special education programs and services.

Within the referral, identification and placement pathways, there are common actions that occur among all exceptionalities, and processes that are unique to each exceptionality. Procedures used to refer, identify and place elementary students with Autism, Learning Disabilities and Giftedness are presented in this section, alongside details for each placement options.

Common Referral, Identification and Placement Procedures for All Exceptionalities

Referral Process

The special education referral process involves ongoing communication and collaboration among the In-School Team members involving the classroom teacher, in-school personnel, and parents. Together, they discuss the student's profile and identify supports and accommodations for the student in order to support his/her learning needs in the regular classroom.

If issues or concerns continue, or further problem solving is required, the School Resource Team (SRT) is consulted for additional interventions and/or further assessments.

The SRT may recommend:

- instructional strategies to support the student;
- behavioural or social/emotional supports for the student;
- further testing or formal assessment be completed;
- an Individual Education Plan (IEP) be developed for the student;
- the student be referred to the IPRC for formal exceptional identification and placement, or a change in placement; and/or
- community support options for a student/family.

School Resource Team

The SRT is a team consisting of school staff (principal, SERT, classroom teacher) and regional support staff (e.g., Psycho-educational Consultant, CYC, Social Worker, SLP, ABA Facilitator). This team meets on a monthly basis to problem solve issues and concerns for students experiencing difficulty.

Referrals to the IPRC are made by the school principal, through recommendation of the SRT, or through a parent request. Where necessary, more than one SRT process may occur to finalize recommendations.

Identification Process

For all exceptionalities, recommendations prepared by the SRT, relating to the identification and placement of an exceptional student, are presented to an Area IPRC. Elementary IPRCs are held monthly in each of HDSB's three geographic areas (North, East, West).

IPRC

The IPRC is legally responsible for making decisions about the identification of students as exceptional and the placement of students into special education programs and services (Regulation 181/98).

The Area IPRC:

- considers relevant assessment information when making a decision to identify and place a student;
- formally identifies students as exceptional and places students into special education programs and services;
- reviews the student's identification and placement once a year unless the annual review is waived by their parent or student, and changes are made as appropriate;
- may make recommendations regarding programs and services.

Placement Process

When deciding on the appropriate placement for an exceptional student, the IPRC considers:

- the student's profile and current IEP;
- supports currently in place for the student in school and in the community;
- assessment results;
- type of assistive technology required by the student; and
- parent concerns, ideas and information.

Two special education placement options are available for exceptional elementary students in the HDSB: (1) Resource Support provided in the regular classroom, and (2) Self-contained special education classes.

Three categories of Resource Support include:

- Consultative Support – the student is placed in a regular class for the entire day, and the teacher receives specialized consultative services;
- Resource Assistance – the student is placed in the regular class for most of the day and receives specialized instruction, individually or in a small group, from a qualified special education teacher; and
- Withdrawal Assistance – the student is placed in a regular class and receives instruction outside of the classroom, for less than 50% of the instructional time, from a qualified special education teacher.

Placement Consideration

When making a placement decision, the committee shall, before considering the option of placement in a special education class, consider whether placement in a regular class, with appropriate special education services would meet the pupil's needs, and is consistent with parental preferences (O. Reg. 181/98, s. 17 (1)).

Resource Support placements require a formal identification of exceptionality through the Area IPRC process. The IPRC reviews and confirms the request for placement, parents are notified of the decision, and an IEP is created for the student within 30 instructional days following the placement date.

Two categories of self-contained placements include:

- Partial Integration – the student is placed in a special education class for more than 50% of the day;
- Full-Time – the student is placed in a special education class for the entire school day.

A self-contained placement for a student requires a formal identification of exceptionality through the IPRC process, and the IPRC determines if placement in a self-contained class is the most effective option to address the student's strengths and needs.

Prior to considering a self-contained placement, school and support staff ensure that all strategies and avenues of support are explored with the student at his/her home school. If a self-contained setting is still considered best for the student, Board staff will recommend the most suitable location—considering parental requests (with the exception of students identified as Gifted), and the student’s age/grade level, exceptionality, learning profile, and home address relative to the class location. Parents may visit the recommended class, and if in agreement, the school principal, on behalf of the SRT, will recommend a self-contained setting through a request to the IPRC. Parents are then informed of the decision made by the IPRC. If parents are unsure or in disagreement with the placement or class location, further discussion ensues at the SRT.

Transition Plan

To ensure each student experiences successful transitions throughout their elementary years, transition plans in the IEP are continually revised. Transitions may include starting in-school support, changing the type of support they receive, changing schools, or moving to a new special education class. These plans address the student’s physical, social/emotional, and learning needs, and provides supportive activities and strategies that the student and staff can engage in to optimize student experiences during the transition period. School staff, support staff and parents are involved in the transition planning process.

Annual Review Process

All exceptional elementary students in Resource Support and self-contained placements are reviewed annually by the School Resource Team. Following the review process, the SRT may recommend that no changes occur to the identification or placement of the student. For example:

- No change in identification or placement for the student
- The student will remain in the same self-contained class
- The students will remain in a self-contained class but move to a new location because of grade

With parental agreement, an annual review with the IPRC will be waived for these students. If parents do not sign the waiver for IPRC, the student is presented and discussed at a school-based IPRC meeting.

The SRT may recommend changes to the identification or placement of the student. For example:

- The student’s identification will change
- The student’s placement will change from self-contained placement to Resource Support or from Resource Support placement to self-contained placement after exploring other programs and services available
- The student’s identification will change but placement will remain the same (may change location)
- The student will be demitted from special education

The student will be presented, discussed, and a formal decision will be made regarding the change for that student at the next Area IPRC meeting.

Early Identification Procedures for Exceptional Students

The Halton District School Board strives to ensure that staff understand the strengths and needs of students early and promptly following enrolment in school. For Kindergarten students, and students entering the HDSB in other grades, the following activities are used to understand each student as soon as possible:

Procedures for Kindergarten Students

Kindergarten Parent Questionnaire
is completed by all parents/guardians during Kindergarten registration, providing the opportunity to describe their child's learning needs.

Open House
for parents/guardians of children who are registered for Kindergarten. Provides an opportunity for parents to gather information from school staff, SEAC members, and community agencies.

Observation of Child
Prior to school entry, board personnel may observe the child in his/her preschool setting and discuss his/her needs with the staff (with parental consent).



Transition Plan
is developed for students with special learning needs, providing strategies that meet his/her needs.

Case Conferences
are routinely held with parents and other key stakeholders to discuss the student and his/her needs.

Assessment Data
is collected throughout the primary years for all students and is stored in the Electronic Students Achievement Tracker (ESAT). The data represent student development, learning, and achievement.

Procedures for Students in Other Grades

Student Registration Form
is completed by parents/guardians during registration, providing the opportunity to describe their child's learning needs, and the types of supports and services he/she has been receiving.

Information Collection
Parents are asked to provide as much information about their child as possible, and the child's Ontario Student Record is obtained from the current educational provider.

Observation of Child
Prior to school entry, board personnel may observe the child in his/her educational setting and discuss his/her needs with the staff (with parental consent).



Immediate Referral to SRT & Contact Student Services Personnel
if a child has received extensive intervention and will continue to need support.

Referral to SRT
occurs if the student has been identified as exceptional in another school board. SRT will determine if further assessment is required, if an IEP should be initiated, and/or if an identification and placement recommendation to IPRC should occur.

Procedures for Students with AUTISM

Referral Process

For students who enter the HDSB with a medical diagnosis of Autism, the classroom teacher, in-school support staff, and parents create an IEP within 30 instructional days of entry. If more intensive support or programming is required, further problem solving occurs within the SRT and the student is referred to the IPRC. Similar to other exceptionalities, the IPRC reviews the student profile and decides the appropriate placement for the student.

Diagnostic Assessments for Autism

The majority of students diagnosed with Autism in the HDSB are diagnosed externally. Students who are assessed within the Board are usually not initially assessed for Autism. Rather, during the assessment process, PSSP may notice various behaviours, challenges or results that suggest the student is exhibiting signs of Autism. The student may then participate in assessments that test for Autism.

The following assessments are used to identify students with Autism:

1. Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS): a semi-structured observational assessment of communication and social behaviour. The areas of focus include communication, imaginative use of objects, social interaction and play skills.
2. Autism Diagnostic Interview, Revised (ADI-R): a semi-structured interview conducted with parents of students who have been referred for the evaluation of possible Autism. The areas of focus include early development, language/communication, social interactions, and repetitive behaviours and interests.

Identification of Students

Table 2: Number of Elementary Students Identified with Autism in the HDSB Over 5 Years

2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
63	39	51	67	61

Placement Process

When deciding appropriate placements for students with Autism, the IPRC considers the following:

- if the student has been identified with a Mild Intellectual Disability or a Developmental Disability
- assessment results
- other diagnoses
- the student's academic skills relative to grade placement and cognitive ability
- the student's social and adaptive skills
- if the student's IEP includes alternative program areas
- if the student is on an alternative curriculum
- level of EA assistance required
- behavioural concerns and required supports

Figure 3a provides a procedural framework displaying referral, identification and placement pathways for elementary students diagnosed with Autism in the HDSB. The blue shaded components represent common procedures for all exceptionalities, and the brown shaded components represent elements unique for students with Autism.

Autism Spectrum Disorder

A severe learning disorder that is characterized by:

a) disturbances in:

- rate of educational development;
- ability to relate to the environment;
- mobility; and
- perception, speech, and language.

b) lack of the representational symbolic behaviour that precedes language.

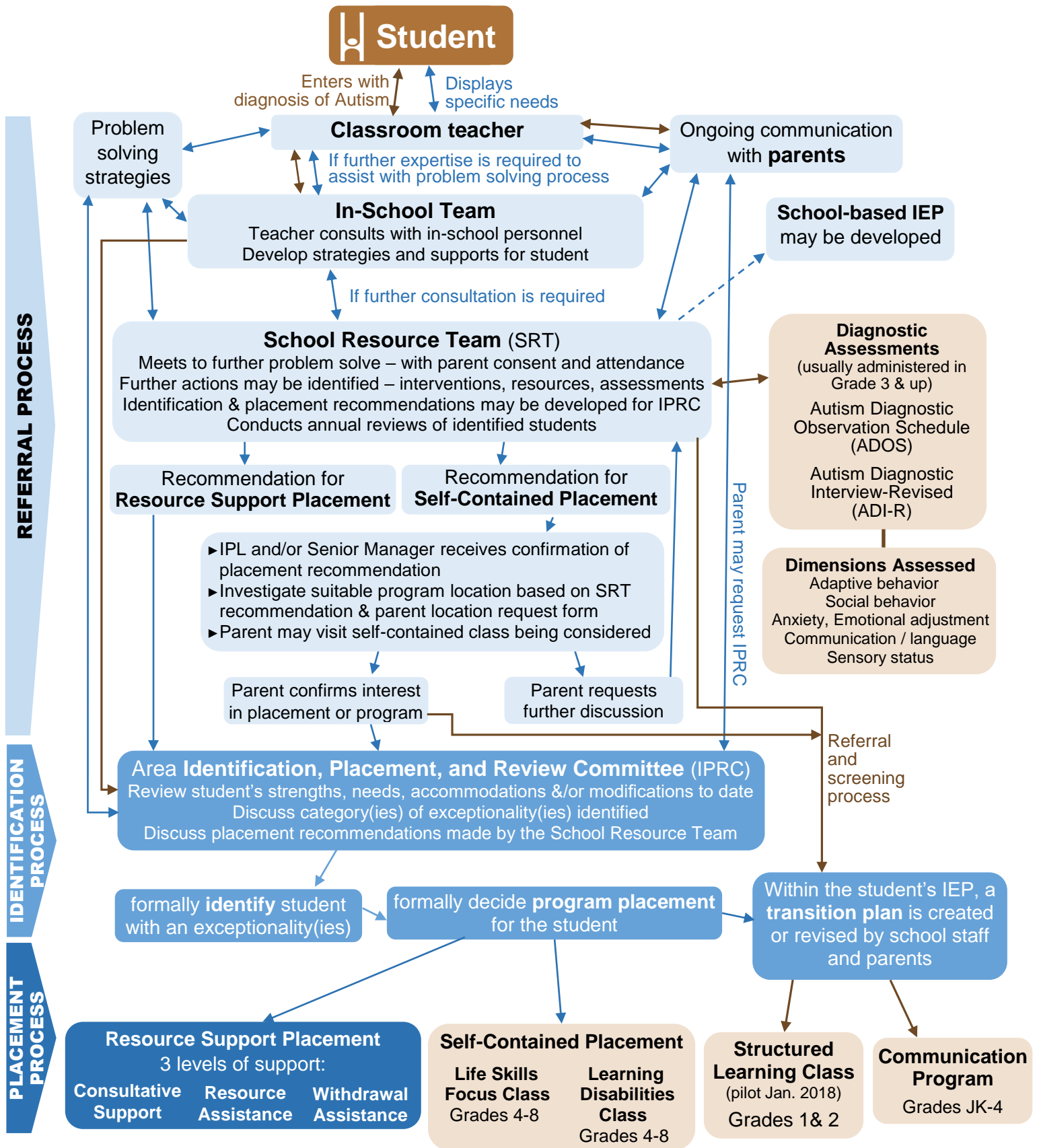


Figure 3: Elementary Referral, Identification and Placement Pathways for Students Diagnosed/ Identified with Autism in the HDSB

Table 3: Elementary Special Education Referral, Identification and Placement Details for Students with Autism in the 2017-2018 School Year

2017-18 School Year	Resource Support Placement			Special Education Class or Program			
	Consultative Support	Resource Assistance	Withdrawal Assistance	Mixed Exceptionality Life Skills Focus Class	Learning Disabilities Focus Class	Structured Learning Class	Communication Program
Grades	K – 8	K – 8	K – 8	4 – 8	4 – 8	SK – 2	JK – 4
Placement Type	Regular classroom	Regular classroom	Regular classroom	Self-contained Partial Int. or Full-time	Self-contained Partial Integration	Self-contained Full-time	Self-contained Full-time
# Classes	N/A	N/A	N/A	25	24	2 (began Jan. 2018)	10
Class Locations	Throughout Board	Throughout Board	Throughout Board	North-10, East-7, West-8	North-13, East-4, West-7	Burlington-1, Milton-1	North-4, East-3, West-3
Class size	≤ 20–Primary ≤ 25–Jr./Intermediate	≤ 20–Primary ≤ 25–Jr./Intermediate	≤ 20–Primary ≤ 25–Jr./Intermediate	10 students	8 students	6 students	6-8 students
Referral &/or Identification Requirements	Identification and placement through IPRC	Identification and placement through IPRC	Identification and placement through IPRC	Identification and placement through IPRC	Identification and placement through IPRC	Referred by SRT Placement through Student Services	Referred by SRT Placement through Student Services
Full-time Staff	Classroom teacher	Classroom teacher	Classroom teacher	Classroom teacher with Spec.Ed. AQs	Classroom teacher with Spec.Ed. AQs	Classroom teacher with Spec.Ed. AQs	Classroom teacher with Spec.Ed. AQs
Support Staff	SERT Others as needed	SERT Others as needed	SERT Others as needed	May include ABA facilitators, SLPs, EAs, others as needed	School support staff as needed	May include ABA facilitators, SLPs, EAs, others as needed	SPL 1 day/week regional EA EAs as needed
Support Received	Teacher receives specialized consultative services	Student receives specialized instruction for part of the day	Student receives specialized instruction ≤ 50% of the time	Student receives full-time specialized instruction or partial integration into regular classes	Student receives specialized instruction and partial integration into regular classes	Student receives full-time specialized instruction	Student receives full-time specialized instruction
Learning Focus	<u>Ontario Curriculum</u> with accommodations modifications alternate programs <u>Alternate Curriculum</u>	<u>Ontario Curriculum</u> with accommodations modifications alternate programs <u>Alternate Curriculum</u>	<u>Ontario Curriculum</u> with accommodations modifications alternate programs <u>Alternate Curriculum</u>	<u>Alternate Curriculum</u> communication self-regulation self-advocacy social skills <u>Ontario Curriculum</u> basic literacy & numeracy skills	<u>Alternate Curriculum</u> As needed or where appropriate (language (receptive expressive, processing), self-advocacy, self-esteem, social skills other skills (organizational, study, management) <u>Ontario Curriculum</u> literacy & numeracy	<u>Alternate Curriculum</u> social skills <u>Ontario Curriculum</u> literacy & numeracy skills	<u>Alternate Curriculum</u> vocabulary language functional & social communication play skills
Transportation	Student is in home school	Student is in home school	Student is in home school	provided	provided	provided	provided

Procedures for Students with LEARNING DISABILITIES

Referral Process

Assessments for Learning Disabilities

A variety of assessments are used to identify students with Learning Disabilities. The selection of assessments largely depends on the strengths and challenges exhibited by individual students. Frequently used assessments include:

1. Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-IV): an assessment of a child's general intellectual ability, with a focus on verbal comprehension, visual spatial skills, fluid reasoning, working memory, and memory processing speed.
2. Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT): an assessment of academic achievement, with a focus on reading, writing, math, and oral language.
3. Wide Range Assessment of Memory and Learning (WRAML): an assessment of memory functioning with a focus on verbal memory, visual memory, and attention-concentration.

Other examples of assessments used to identify Learning Disabilities include:

- Behaviour Assessment System for Children (BASC)
- Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP)
- Behaviour Rating Inventory of Executive Function (BRIEF)

Identification of Students

Table 4: Number of Elementary Students Identified with Learning Disabilities in the HDSB Over 5 Years

2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
200	171	170	145	119

Placement Process

When deciding on the appropriate placement for a student identified with a Learning Disability, the IPRC considers the following:

- assessment results
- other diagnoses
- student's current achievement levels in Language and Math
- extent to which student is below grade level in Language and/or Math
- behavioural concerns
- estimated timeframe that student will return to a regular classroom
- use of assistive technology

Figure 4 provides a procedural framework displaying referral, identification and placement pathways for elementary students identified with Learning Disabilities in the HDSB. Blue shaded components represent common procedures for all exceptionalities, and orange shaded components represent elements unique for students with Learning Disabilities.

Learning Disability

One of a number of neurodevelopmental disorders that persistently and significantly has an impact on the ability to learn and use academic and other skills and that:

- affects the ability to perceive or process verbal or non-verbal information in an effective and accurate manner in students who have assessed intellectual abilities that are at least in the average range
- results in (a) academic underachievement that is inconsistent with the intellectual abilities of the student (which are at least in the average range) and/or (b) academic achievement that can be maintained by the student only with extremely high levels of effort and/or with additional support
- results in difficulties in the development and use of skills in one or more of the following areas: reading, writing, mathematics, and work habits and learning skills
- may typically be associated with difficulties in one or more cognitive processes, such as phonological processing; memory and attention; processing speed; perceptual-motor processing; visual-spatial processing; executive functions.
- may be associated with difficulties in social interaction, with various other conditions or disorders, diagnosed or undiagnosed; or with other exceptionalities.

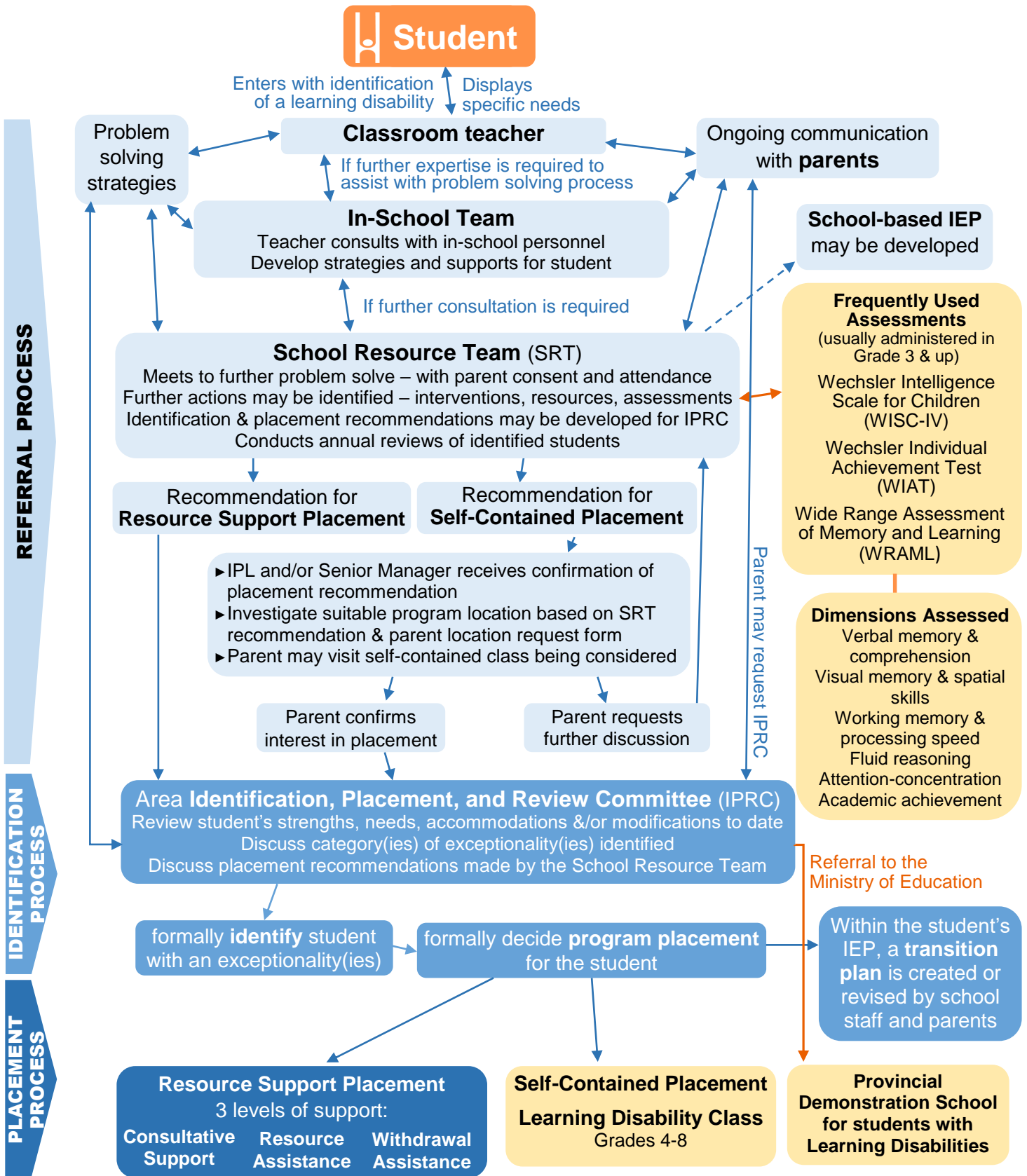


Figure 4: Elementary Referral, Identification and Placement Pathways for Students Identified with Learning Disabilities in the HDSB

Table 5: Special Education Referral, Identification and Placement Details for Elementary Students with Learning Disabilities in the 2017-2018 School Year

2017-18 School Year	Resource Support Placement			Special Education Class
	Consultative Support	Resource Assistance	Withdrawal Assistance	Learning Disabilities Focus Class
Grades	K – 8	K – 8	K – 8	4-8
Placement Type	Regular classroom	Regular classroom	Regular classroom	Self-contained Partial Integration
# Classes	N/A	N/A	N/A	24
Class Locations	Throughout Board	Throughout Board	Throughout Board	North-13, East-4, West-7
Class size	≤ 20–Primary ≤ 25–Jr./Intermediate	≤ 20–Primary ≤ 25–Jr./Intermediate	≤ 20–Primary ≤ 25–Jr./Intermediate	8 students
Referral &/or Identification Requirements	Identification and placement through IPRC	Identification and placement through IPRC	Identification and placement through IPRC	Identification and placement through IPRC
Full-time Staff	Classroom teacher	Classroom teacher	Classroom teacher	Classroom teacher with Spec.Ed. AQs
Support Staff	SERT Others as needed	SERT Others as needed	SERT Others as needed	School support staff as needed
Support Received	Teacher receives specialized consultative services	Student receives specialized instruction for part of the day	Student receives specialized instruction ≤ 50% of the time	Student receives specialized instruction and partial integration into regular classes
Learning Focus	<u>Ontario Curriculum</u> with accommodations modifications alternate programs <u>Alternate Curriculum</u>	<u>Ontario Curriculum</u> with accommodations modifications alternate programs <u>Alternate Curriculum</u>	<u>Ontario Curriculum</u> with accommodations modifications alternate programs <u>Alternate Curriculum</u>	<u>Alternate Curriculum</u> language (receptive expressive, processing) self-advocacy self esteem, social skills other skills (organizational, study, management) <u>Ontario Curriculum</u> literacy & numeracy
Transportation	Student is in home school	Student is in home school	Student is in home school	provided

Procedures for Students Identified as GIFTED

Referral Process

Gifted Screening Process

SK and Primary Students:

If a teacher observes sufficient evidence that a student may meet the Gifted criteria, she/he completes a Teacher Nomination Form and a Student Profile Form as part of the screening process for Gifted identification. Once nominated, the student's parent/guardian completes a Parent/Guardian Checklist. These forms inquire about the degree to which students demonstrate characteristics frequently displayed by Gifted children.

Gifted

An unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability that requires differentiated learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the regular school program to satisfy the level of educational potential indicated.

Grade 4 Students:

1. Canadian Cognitive Abilities Test (CCAT-7): every year, the majority of students in Grade 4 complete a gifted screening assessment. The CCAT-7 is an assessment of a child’s aptitude for learning. The areas of focus include verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal cognitive abilities.
2. Gifted Rating Scales (GRS): if the results on the CCAT-7 meet the Gifted criteria, the student’s teacher completes the GRS. The GRS contains norm-referenced rating scales that evaluate students on six domains: intellectual, academic, motivation, creativity, leadership, and artistic talent.
3. Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-IV): if the results on the CCAT-7 and GRS meet the Gifted criteria, students may complete WISC-V – an assessment of general intellectual ability, with a focus on verbal comprehension, visual spatial skills, fluid reasoning, working memory, and memory processing speed.

Primary Assessments for Giftedness

If the Teacher Nomination Form, Student Profile Form, and Parent/Guardian Checklist indicate the student may meet the criteria for Giftedness, the following assessments are administered:

SK Students:

Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI-III): assessment of general intellectual ability, with a focus on intellectual functioning in verbal and performance cognitive domains.

Primary Students:

Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-IV):
As stated above.

Identification of Students

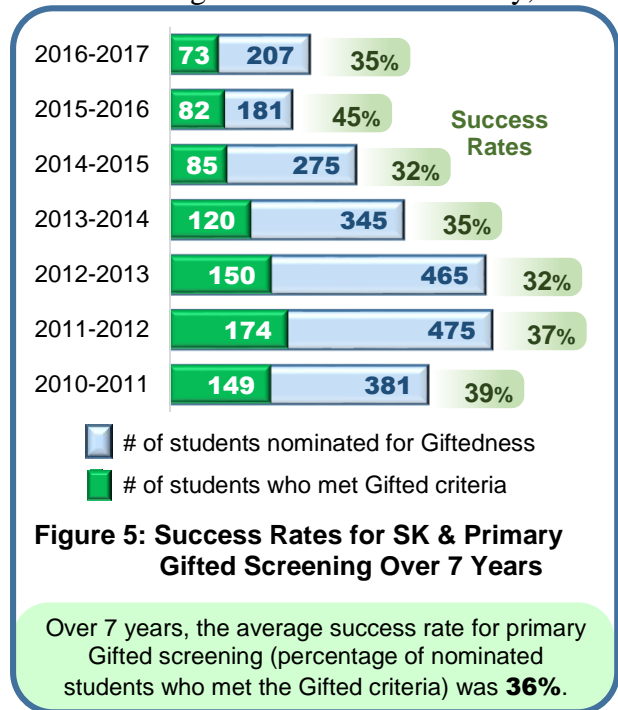


Table 6: Number of Elementary Students Identified as Gifted in the HDSB Over 5 Years

2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
362	292	256	143	181

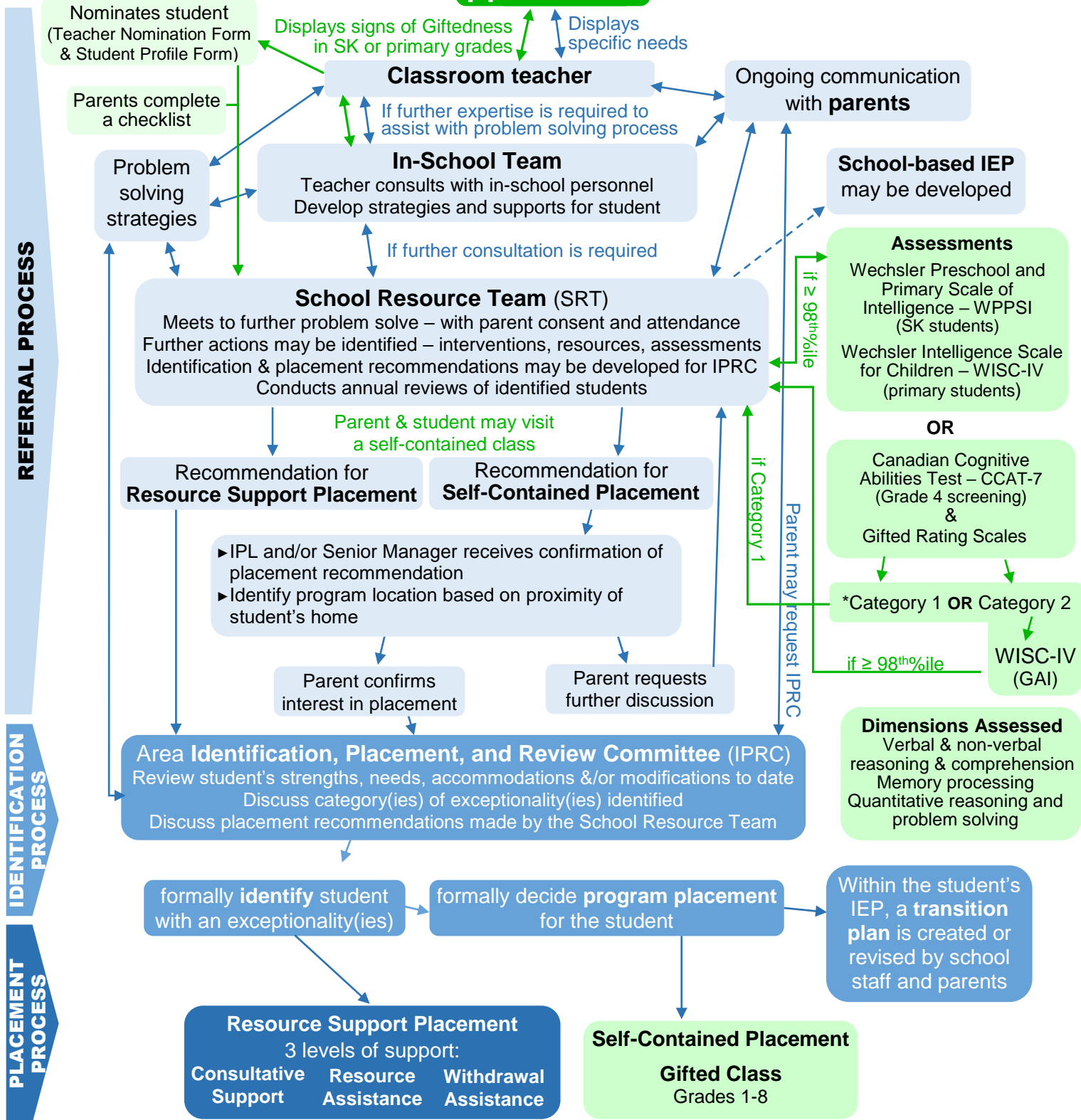
Placement Process

When deciding on the appropriate placement for a student identified as Gifted, the IPRC considers the following:

- assessment results
- additional learning needs (i.e., a Learning Disability)
- behavioural concerns
- level of EA support
- program differentiation and/or interventions currently in place the regular classroom
- unique needs that would be met through self-contained placement (e.g., social skills, anxiety)

Figure 6 provides a procedural framework displaying referral, identification and placement pathways for elementary students identified as Gifted in the HDSB. Blue shaded components represent common procedures for all exceptionalities, and green shaded components represent elements unique for students with Giftedness.

Student



*Category 1: Student attains CCAT-7 composite score $\geq 99^{\text{th}}$ ile, & GRS-at least 3 scales have a T-score ≥ 65
 Category 2: Student attains CCAT-7 1 domain score $\geq 98^{\text{th}}$ ile & 1 domain score $\geq 95^{\text{th}}$ ile, & GRS-at least 3 scales have a T-score ≥ 65

Figure 6: Elementary Referral, Identification and Placement Pathways for Students Identified as GIFTED in the HDSB

Table 7: Special Education Referral, Identification and Placement Details for Elementary Students who are Gifted in the 2017-2018 School Year

2017-18 School Year	Resource Support Placement			Special Education Class
	Consultative Support	Resource Assistance	Withdrawal Assistance	Gifted Class
Grades	K – 8	K – 8	K – 8	1 – 8
Placement Type	Regular classroom	Regular classroom	Regular classroom	Self-contained Full-time
# Classes	N/A	N/A	N/A	40
Class Locations	Throughout Board	Throughout Board	Throughout Board	North-8, East-24, West-8
Class size	≤ 20–Primary ≤ 25–Jr./Intermediate	≤ 20–Primary ≤ 25–Jr./Intermediate	≤ 20–Primary ≤ 25–Jr./Intermediate	≤20–Primary ≤25–Jr./Intermediate
Referral &/or Identification Requirements	Identification and placement through IPRC	Identification and placement through IPRC	Identification and placement through IPRC	Identification and placement through IPRC
Full-time Staff	Classroom teacher	Classroom teacher	Classroom teacher	Classroom teacher with Spec.Ed. AQs
Support Staff	SERT	SERT	SERT	School support staff as needed
Support Received	Teacher receives specialized consultative services	Student receives specialized instruction for part of the day	Student receives specialized instruction ≤ 50% of the time	Student receives full-time specialized instruction
Learning Focus	<u>Ontario Curriculum</u> with modifications	<u>Ontario Curriculum</u> with modifications	<u>Ontario Curriculum</u> with modifications	<u>Ontario Curriculum</u> with modifications
Transportation	Student is in home school	Student is in home school	Student is in home school	provided

FOCUS GROUPS AND KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

REVIEW QUESTION

What do key stakeholders think about the Special Education referral, identification and placement process for elementary students identified with Autism, Learning Disabilities, and Giftedness in the Halton District School Board?



Background

Through focus groups and key informant interviews, in-depth information was collected from staff, parents, and SEAC representatives about the elementary special education referral, identification and placement process for students with Autism, Learning Disabilities, and Giftedness. The sessions were designed to obtain the opinions and perceptions of the fidelity, consistency, efficiency, and effectiveness of the procedures used within the HDSB; reported strengths and challenges with the process; and suggestions for improving the process. Discussion topics included: the referral process, identification process, placement process, communication, assistive technology, and support in the classroom.

Throughout the findings, relevant Phase 1 survey results from parents with exceptional children in elementary schools (administered in Jan. 2017) are presented for the three exceptionalities. Results reflect parent satisfaction with components of their child’s special education program that were similar to themes discussed during the focus groups and interviews.

Note: Phase I survey results include the following numbers of parents of students identified with:

- Autism: 74 parents (39% in self-contained classes, 61% receiving Resource Support);
- Learning Disabilities: 141 parents (32% in self-contained classes, 68% receiving Resource Support); and
- Gifted: 392 parents (66% in self-contained classes, 34% receiving Resource Support).

Focus Group and Interview Participation

The following information represents the number and characteristics of the participants in each focus group and key informant interview conducted with staff, parents and SEAC representatives in the HDSB.

7 STAFF
Focus
Groups

78
participants

School Staff

13 Elementary Teachers (SK – 2)
10 Elementary Teachers (Gr. 3-6)
8 Elementary Principals
23 Elementary SERTs

Student Services Staff

7 Instructional Program Leaders
17 Psycho-educational Consultants

Area Representation

35% of staff are from schools in the North
38% of staff are from schools in the West
27% of staff are from schools in the East

6 PARENT
Focus
Groups

56
participants

Category of Exceptionality

21 parents of children with Autism
15 parents of children with Learning Disabilities
20 parents of children with Giftedness

Child’s Grade Level

36% Primary
36% Junior
28% Intermediate

Child’s Placement Type

64% Resource Support
36% Self-contained

Area Representation

36% of parents have children attending schools in the North
34% of parents have children attending schools in the West
30% of parents have children attending schools in the East

3 KEY INFORMANT
Interviews

5 participants

Special Education Advisory Committee

1 member representing Autism Ontario, Halton Chapter
2 members representing Learning Disabilities Association of Halton
2 members representing the Association for Bright Children, Halton Chapter

Findings

Overall, staff and parents reported that the referral, identification and placement pathways follow a logical procedural flow that supports a team approach to decision making. The large emphasis on brainstorming, collaboration, and problem solving among staff and parents facilitates a thorough exploration and understanding of students' learning, social-emotional, and behavioural profiles. The contributions of each team member are valued, and decisions are based on information provided by all stakeholders.

REFERRAL PROCESS

Teamwork and Collaboration

Parents and staff reported that the success of the referral process is largely due to the team approach assumed by In-School Teams and School Resource Teams (SRT). These teams involve multidisciplinary panels of staff with varying expertise related to teaching and learning, and support strong parental presence and involvement. Team members genuinely care about the students they work with, and advocate strongly for them. Parents and staff noted that SERTs work passionately for the students and continually support parents throughout the process, thus facilitating positive rapport and strong school-home relationships. In addition, the expertise provided by IPLs regarding documentation, expectations and requirements for student identification is instrumental in ensuring that staff and students proceed through the process.

Staff and parents agreed that the effectiveness of the referral process depends largely on the school administration's knowledge of special education. In general, the referral process runs smoothly and efficiently in schools where the administrative team values special education, understands the complexities and importance of the problem solving process, and provides staff with adequate time for discussion and collaboration.

Member Participation in Meetings

Some parents felt the discussions and meetings they attended were productive, informative, and involved a consistent team of professionals. These parents found that the referral, identification and placement process ran smoothly and efficiently. Other parents expressed their frustration with the changing staff members involved in In-School Team and SRT. These parents felt that a large amount of time was spent reviewing their child's profile and past discussions in order to bring new members up to date.

Staff and parents of students with Autism consider EAs to be critical front line support systems for students. They noted that because EAs work so closely with students, they know the students best. However, EAs are not typically involved in In-School Team and SRT meetings, thus excluding them from crucial conversations regarding student needs, developmental progress, and plans. Both staff and parents suggested that EAs be included in all team meetings, conversations and decisions about students with Autism.

Time for Strategizing

School staff believe that problem solving and transition planning are crucial processes for students with exceptionalities, particularly for those who have complex needs. They noted that staff, in schools where release time is provided for these meetings, have sufficient time to engage in effective strategy-building and in-depth conversations about students.

Wait Time for Assessments and Support

There is a sense among staff and parents of students with Autism and Learning Disabilities that the wait time for assessments and support is too long, and that the learning gap for students who are struggling continues to grow during this time. Several parents questioned the rationale for the long wait times for assessments and services.

Early Gifted Screening and Assessment

Staff discussed the perception of the system-wide pressure placed on Kindergarten teachers to actively “seek out” and nominate students who display characteristics of Giftedness. However, there is a strong sense among staff that screening and assessing students for Giftedness in Kindergarten and Grade 1 is premature because they believe these children are too young and results are unstable. Staff also discussed current research evidence that suggests assessment results for Giftedness prior to the age of seven years are unreliable and have low predictive validity.

School staff feel that they are receiving confusing messages regarding the primary Gifted program. Staff noted that while they believe pressure is placed on primary teachers to nominate students who may be Gifted; school administrators feel pressure to encourage Resource Support placements for Gifted students before suggesting self-contained placements. Staff question the necessity of assessing primary students for Giftedness when they believe the system prefers the regular classroom with Resource Support. Many staff believe that the needs of the majority of primary students who display enhanced learning profiles can be addressed effectively in the regular classroom.

Staff Knowledge of Giftedness

Parents of students identified as Gifted discussed the importance of primary teachers nominating students who may be Gifted. However, parents expressed concern regarding the inconsistent referral practices within and between schools, and believe these differences may reflect variations in knowledge and beliefs among teachers. As a result, parents believe that primary teachers and SERTs require more training about Giftedness and the importance of enhanced programming for Gifted children.

Primary Gifted Assessment Expenses

Staff and parents noted that each year primary assessment results indicate that a large proportion of nominated students do not meet Gifted criteria. Staff and parents voiced concern about the large amount of staff time and money spent on these assessments each year with relatively low success rates.

Staff Turnover

High staff turnover among SERTs, EAs and teachers of self-contained classes was a noted concern among staff and parents. They feel that these frequent changes may delay the referral process, hinder student progress in school, and interfere with students’ ability to develop close relationships with their EAs (particularly among students with low-functioning Autism). Parents attribute the turnover among SERTs to job promotions, and believe that the high turnover among self-contained teachers is a result of stress and burn-out.

Parent Survey Results

Percentage of parents of elementary students who reported satisfaction with their child’s assessment or evaluation process.

	<u>Autism</u>	<u>Learning Disabilities</u>	<u>Giftedness</u>
Self-Contained	57%	92%	94%
Resource Support	76%	75%	87%

Source: Special Education Program Review – Phase 1 Parent survey results (Jan. 2017).

IDENTIFICATION PROCESS

Parents and staff agreed that the identification process moves quickly and efficiently once assessment results are provided to the SRT, team conversations have occurred, and documentation is complete. Parents expressed gratitude for the frequency at which the Area IPRC meets throughout the school year, and believe that the frequency of these meetings ensures students receive support in a timely manner.

Pressure to Avoid Identification

There is consensus among staff that, for some exceptionalities, there is system pressure for school staff and administration to avoid the formal identification process for primary students. Staff concur that they are encouraged to develop non-identified IEPs for students, and to help parents understand that the supports their children are receiving will not change as a result of formal identification. Many parents of students with Learning Disabilities and Autism expressed frustration with the resistance they experienced throughout their children's primary years.

Area IPRC Process

Staff and parents expressed appreciation for the work of the Area IPRCs. They recognize the importance of an objective perspective, the need to maintain procedural standards, and the committee's responsibility to thoroughly review recommendations brought forward by the SRT.

Criteria Required for Identification and Placement

Staff feel that information requirements and criteria for identification are inconsistent among IPRCs, are not always communicated, and may change without notice. Both staff and parents also described experiences with the IPRC process as being "unpredictable." They note that after several months of problem solving with the SRT, the IPRC may challenge their findings, or deny placement recommendations based on reasons staff and parents don't understand.

Inequities Between Exceptionalities

Primary Identification

Staff and parents believe that formal identification in primary grades is an expectation for Giftedness and is discouraged for other exceptionalities. Both parents and staff feel there is strong board-wide pressure for staff to nominate and refer primary students for Giftedness, with the intent of early identification and placement. Conversely, for primary students who may have Autism or Learning Disabilities, staff and parents feel there is system pressure to delay assessments and referrals.

There is a sense among staff and parents that the HDSB may be over-identifying Gifted students. They attribute this to the large number of student assessments administered in the primary grades, of which they believe the results are unstable at such a young age. Conversely, staff and parents believe that the HDSB may be under-identifying students with Learning Disabilities and Autism. They believe this is a result of the pressure for staff to delay referrals and create non-identified IEPs for these students.

Board-wide Screening

Staff and parents note that the Gifted exceptionality is the only exceptionality in the HDSB with Board-wide screening in Grade 4. The perceived inequity of this practice, coupled with system pressure to nominate and assess students for Giftedness in primary grades, has lead staff and parents to believe that the HDSB favours the Gifted exceptionality over other exceptionalities.

External Assessment Criteria

Staff noted that when students with Learning Disabilities are identified externally, and the assessments or diagnostic criteria differ from those used in the HDSB, these students may not be granted identification or placement upon entry into the Board, or following their assessment. Conversely, staff described that when students are assessed for Giftedness external to the HDSB, the IPRC accepts assessments and results that differ from those used in the HDSB.

Requirements for Reassessment

Parents of students with Learning Disabilities and staff discussed the requirement for students with Learning Disabilities to be reassessed every few years, or at least prior to the transition years. Staff and parents note that, in their experience, students with assessments older than three years may risk being denied a self-contained placement by the IPRC. However, staff noted that assessments conducted in Kindergarten and Grade 1 for students identified as Gifted are accepted throughout students' educational career in the HDSB.

PLACEMENT PROCESS

Parents of students identified with Autism, Learning Disabilities and Giftedness agreed that once students are formally identified and placement has been decided, students are transferred into self-contained placements and begin receiving support in a timely manner.

Staff and parents of students identified with Autism also noted that the pilot Structured Learning Class is an excellent addition for primary students. Staff and parents are hopeful that this placement option will continue beyond the pilot phase, and expand into other schools to accommodate more primary students with Autism.

Parent Survey Results			
Percentage of parents of elementary students who reported satisfaction with their child's program placement decision.			
	<u>Autism</u>	<u>Learning Disabilities</u>	<u>Giftedness</u>
Self-Contained	69%	93%	97%
Resource Support	89%	86%	91%

Source: Special Education Program Review – Phase 1 Parent survey results (Jan. 2017).

Placement Decisions Made by IPRC

Staff expressed confusion with some of the IPRCs decisions, particularly when placement decisions were based on parent demands. Staff question the purpose of the SRT when parent demands supersede the recommendations of an experienced team of staff.

Placement Changes

Staff believe that there is resistance in the Board to move students with Learning Disabilities from Resource Support placements to self-contained classes. Staff believe this may, in part, be due to the recent change in criteria that students must be achieving two grade levels below actual grade to qualify for a self-contained placement.

Inequities Between Exceptionalities

Primary Self-Contained Placements

Staff and parents of students with Learning Disabilities and Autism noted that self-contained placement options are not available for primary students identified with Learning Disabilities. Parents and staff explained that these students are required to wait 3-4 years before they can be considered for self-contained placements, and primary students who may be Gifted can be considered for such placements in Grade 1.

Junior and Intermediate Self-Contained Placements

Staff believe that a significantly higher proportion of junior and intermediate Gifted students are receiving self-contained special education support, when compared to students with Autism or Learning Disabilities. In addition, staff explained that self-contained placements have a “shorter lifespan” for students with Learning Disabilities, as these students are expected to join the regular class within two or three years. Conversely, staff note that self-contained Gifted classes span from Grades 1 to 8, and Gifted students have the option to remain in this placement throughout their elementary years.

Profiles of Students in Self-Contained Placements

Staff believe that the profiles of elementary students in self-contained placements have changed. Staff and parents believe these classrooms comprise of students with multiple or complex exceptionalities, mental health challenges, and/or extreme behaviour challenges.

- Staff believe that for some students who are placed in self-contained classes, the school classroom is not the appropriate environment, as they require intensive treatment and/or therapy to support their challenges.
- Staff believe that Learning Disability classes are comprised of many students whose primary need may not be a learning disability, and teachers are required to focus their efforts on behaviour management and improving social skills.
- Staff feel that the large developmental and functional range of students in Life Skills classes makes it very challenging for teachers to meet the learning needs of all students.
- Staff described Gifted classes as comprising of students struggling with behaviour and attention challenges which often disrupts the teaching and learning of others in the class.

Transition Planning

Both parents and staff value the transition process. Parents appreciate the efficiency of the transition process, as it enabled their children to obtain more intensive support in a timely manner. Staff believe that transition planning for students entering a self-contained class is an essential process in order to ensure students begin their placement with a strong start. However, in order to adequately support students and their families, staff feel that they require more time and information about these students prior to the transition.

COMMUNICATION

Information Provided to Parents

Parents feel they did not receive enough information about the referral, identification and placement procedures prior to the SRT meeting. Many participating parents reported that their child’s school did not direct them to the *Working Together* guide. These parents mentioned feeling confused about the process initially, and others conducted their own research to understand it.

Communication Regarding IPRC Attendance

Parents believe that the communication parents receive about the importance of their involvement and contributions in various meetings differs between schools. Many parents were encouraged by school staff to attend the School Resource Team meetings and some were encouraged to attend the Area IPRC meeting, particularly if their child was recommended for a self-contained placement. Other parents were discouraged by staff to attend the Area IPRC meeting. In addition, many parents believe that the messages

they receive from schools regarding the annual school-based IPRC review meetings are delivered in a way that minimizes the importance of their participation.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Parents of students identified with Learning Disabilities expressed gratitude for the availability of Assistive Technology for students. Many described improvements in their child’s written communication, reading, and class notes; as well as increased confidence and independence with school work.

Parents also noted that when transitioning into a new class, grade, and/or school, their child experienced some challenges with their Assistive Technology. Either their children’s Assistive Technology was not available for several days into the new school year; or the new teachers were unfamiliar with how students used their technology.

Parent Survey Results			
Percentage of parents of elementary students who reported satisfaction with their child’s Assistive Technology.			
	Autism	Learning Disabilities	Giftedness
Self-Contained	67%	93%	91%
Resource Support	75%	80%	100%

Source: Special Education Program Review – Phase 1 Parent survey results (Jan. 2017).

SUPPORT IN THE CLASSROOM

Focus groups and key informant interviews focused mainly on the elementary referral, identification and placement process. However, participants often discussed strengths and challenges regarding student IEPs, and the level of support provided to students following placement. In order to provide a full picture of common themes, discussion details relating to these topics are also provided.

Development & Implementation of IEPs

Parents of students in Resource Support placements expressed frustration with their child’s IEP. Parents felt that staff did not consult with them while developing their child’s IEP; the IEP did not accurately reflect their child’s development or academic progress; and the strategies in their child’s IEP were not being implemented effectively in the classroom.

Non-Identified IEPs

Staff discussed the many benefits of non-identified IEPs for primary students who show signs of struggling. For these students, creating non-identified IEPs helps to identify their strengths and needs, specify instructional strategies and accommodations that support their learning, and track their progress throughout the primary grades. Staff also believe that the yearly documentation enables SRTs to review students’ growth and development over time, and make informed decisions about assessments and possible identification during their junior years.

Parent Survey Results			
Percentage of parents of elementary students who reported:			
Agreement that they are an active team member in the development of the child’s IEP.			
	Autism	Learning Disabilities	Giftedness
Self-Contained	61%	89%	75%
Resource Support	76%	79%	75%
Satisfaction with the development of their child’s IEP.			
	Autism	Learning Disabilities	Giftedness
Self-Contained	69%	93%	90%
Resource Support	84%	74%	72%
Satisfaction with how their child’s IEP is used in school.			
	Autism	Learning Disabilities	Giftedness
Self-Contained	78%	88%	83%
Resource Support	62%	56%	55%

Source: Special Education Program Review – Phase 1 Parent survey results (Jan. 2017).

Parents of students with Learning Disabilities explained that their children were placed on non-identified IEPs during the primary grades, however these parents did not believe the IEP was implemented effectively.

Level of Support

Parents of students identified as Gifted discussed positive changes their children experienced when placed in self-contained classes during the primary years. Parents explained that their children became actively engaged in their learning, enjoyed school, and developed a strong sense of belonging. Similarly, parents of junior and intermediate students identified with Learning Disabilities noted the increase in self-confidence, independence, and academic progress their children experienced once placed in Learning Disability classes.

Parent Survey Results			
Percentage of parents of elementary students who reported satisfaction with the special education support their child is receiving.			
	<u>Autism</u>	<u>Learning Disabilities</u>	<u>Giftedness</u>
Self-Contained	69%	89%	88%
Resource Support	56%	56%	48%

Source: Special Education Program Review – Phase 1 Parent survey results (Jan. 2017).

Some parents of students identified with Giftedness and Learning Disabilities who were placed in regular elementary classrooms with resource support, believed that their children were not receiving the level of support required to meet their needs.

Suggestions for Improvement

Focus group and interview participants also provided suggestions for improving the referral, identification and placement processes, and for support provided in the classroom. These suggestions are combined with the recommendations based on collective findings throughout the review, presented on page 39.

ALIGNMENT WITH ONTARIO MINISTRY OF EDUCATION Regulations, Policies & Procedures

REVIEW QUESTION

How do the elementary special education referral, identification and placement pathways throughout the HDSB align with the procedures, policies, and regulations issued by the Ontario Ministry of Education?



Background

Student Services Department of the HDSB provides the public with relevant information regarding regulations and policies issued by the Ontario Ministry of Education (MOE) in the following documents:

1. *Working Together—Special Education Procedures: A Guide for Parents, Guardians and Students*; and
2. *Halton District School Board Special Education Plan*

The *Working Together* document provides stakeholders with information about the procedures used in the Board to identify and place exceptional students, and outlines the available programs and services. The *Special Education Plan* is a requirement of the Ministry of Education to ensure greater accountability in school boards, and to improve the quality of special education programs and services across Ontario.

Special education procedures and practices within the HDSB were reviewed alongside regulations, policies and procedures issued by the MOE. The extent to which HDSB procedures align with the MOE was examined using HDSB's special education procedural and support documents, and feedback obtained from staff, parents and SEAC representatives through focus groups and interviews.

Findings

Alignment with Key Practices

An examination of HDSB's elementary special education referral, identification and placement pathways indicated that HDSB implements procedures that are consistent with regulations and policies issued by the MOE. As seen in the documented pathways, and confirmed by staff and parents, the HDSB follows a comprehensive and inclusive referral process. Problem solving begins with the classroom teacher, includes an In-School Team of educators, and continues with a multidisciplinary School Resource Team when further consultation is required. With each level of response, parents reported being informed and included in discussions and decisions, and staff continue to gather a variety of student assessment information. Early identification procedures are implemented through school-based events, information gathering strategies, and child observations conducted prior to the start of school, staff have the means to begin investigating and problem solving with young students, and students new to the board, early and promptly.

Similar to the referral process, IPRC documented and reported practices within the HDSB are congruent with Ministry guidelines. In accordance with the MOE regulation (O. Reg. 181/98), an Area IPRC decides if a student should be identified as exceptional, identifies the area of exceptionality, and decides on appropriate placement. The categories and definitions of exceptionalities used by the HDSB are consistent with those provided by the MOE. Both an in-school principal or a parent can request an IPRC

for a student, and parents are informed of the IPRC within 10 days of the meeting through a written invitation to attend. Elementary IPRCs are held monthly, and during each meeting, relevant information about the student is reviewed prior to finalizing decisions.

As directed by the MOE (O. Reg. 181/98), and in keeping with HDSB's commitment to inclusion, placement in a regular class with appropriate special education services is considered by the IPRC before placement in a special education class. Student needs and parental preferences play a large part in this decision process. Following identification and placement decisions, parent focus group participants confirmed that student transition plans are developed collaboratively, transitions are smooth and efficient, and placement occurs in a timely manner. In addition, annual review meetings are held by an IPRC unless the school principal receives written notice from the parents to waive the review.

Perceived Areas for Improving Alignment

Staff, parents, and SEAC representatives agreed that HDSB's practices in special education adhere to the regulations, policies and procedures issued by the Ministry of Education. In general, they respect the procedural standards and believe they facilitate a smooth and efficient, yet comprehensive and inclusive decision-making process. When discussing various procedures, interview and focus group participants noted a few areas where improvement was needed. Most notable among stakeholders, was the perceived inequities between exceptionalities regarding early identification practices. Participants compared the lack of early assessment, identification, and placement options available for primary students with Learning Disabilities, to the system-wide early screening and assessment procedures and placement options available for primary students identified as Gifted.

As part of the referral and identification practice, the HDSB strives for transparency and inclusion regarding IPRC procedures. In accordance with MOE guidelines, Student Services maintains a parent guide entitled *Working Together – Special Education Procedures: A Guide for Parents, Guardians and Students* with direct online access and hard copies provided to all schools. In keeping with their mission statement, Student Services is also committed to working in partnership with parents, families and students. Feedback provided by parents during focus group discussions indicated that the consistency in which the Parent Guide is shared with parents across the schools could be improved; and the messaging that parents receive from school staff regarding meetings concerning their children could be framed in a more encouraging and inviting manner.

In alignment with the Ministry's established priority of considering placement in regular classrooms with appropriate supports prior to self-contained placements, the HDSB takes pride in its system-wide commitment to inclusion. With this in mind, Area IPRCs engage in comprehensive examinations of student profiles, and in-depth considerations of student needs, parent preferences, and SRT recommendations. During interview and focus group discussions, stakeholders indicated that this decision process, and the rationale for prioritizing regular class placements could be better communicated to staff and parents. Participants believe this strategy would increase understanding about the benefits of regular class placements, the purpose and value of SRT's problem solving endeavors; and reduce confusion about the criteria considered during the IPRC decision-making process, and final decision outcomes.

RERFERRAL, IDENTIFICATION and PLACEMENT MODELS in Neighbouring School Boards

REVIEW QUESTION

How do the special education referral, identification and placement models for elementary students with Autism, Learning Disabilities, and Giftedness compare with neighbouring school boards?



Background

HDSB provides a range of special education programs and services for exceptional elementary students, where the types of placements are based on the current needs of students within the Board. As a frame of reference, procedural information was gathered from four neighbouring school boards regarding the referral, identification and placement of students with Autism, Learning Disabilities, and Giftedness. The selected school boards include a combination of Public and Catholic boards, vary in size (based on student population), are located in close proximity to the HDSB, and offer a range of special education placement options for exceptional students. The following boards were selected:

- ▶ Halton Catholic District School Board
- ▶ Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board
- ▶ Peel District School Board
- ▶ Waterloo Region District School Board

Details regarding elementary special education referral and identification procedures and placement options for the selected school boards can be found in Appendix A.

Board-specific information was obtained through online special education resources, followed by consultations with special education representatives. During these conversations, it became apparent that each board had recently modified their referral, identification and placement procedures; or were in the process of revising their model and/or placement options. The information provided in this review reflects current procedures and placement options as confirmed by board personnel. Therefore, documented procedures may not reflect information available through online resources, or planned changes to be implemented in the near future.

Findings

In October 2017, the Halton District School Board served 63,785 students in 105 schools. A total of 44,765 students were enrolled in the elementary panel, with 13.6% receiving special education support across 86 elementary schools. Among the four selected school boards, total enrolment averaged approximately 75,100 students (ranging from 33,000 to 154,000 students).

Referral and Identification Procedures

An analysis of the procedures used to refer and identify elementary students with Autism, Learning Disabilities and Giftedness in the HDSB and neighbouring school boards, indicated the following:

- As recommended by the Ontario Ministry of Education, schools in each board organize a multidisciplinary team that assists with the problem solving process. This team includes school-based staff and may include other support professionals depending on student needs.

- Similar to the HDSB, two school boards also utilize an additional multidisciplinary team, as a second level of response, for those students whose needs require further consultation. This team is usually called upon prior to referring students to an IPRC.
- Different from other school boards, HDSB students who are to be recommended for a Resource Support placement are presented to an Area IPRC. For this type of placement, two other school boards present these students to school-based IPRCs, and two boards do not require students to be presented to an IPRC in order to receive this level of support.
- As in the HDSB, one other school board presents students seeking placement in a self-contained class to Area/Regional IPRCs. One board uses School-based IPRCs, and two boards use Field Office or Board IPRCs when determining these placements.
- As issued by the Ministry of Education, all school boards use the same categories of exceptionality, subcategories and associated definitions to assist with the identification of students with special education needs.
- Similar to the HDSB, annual reviews of student placements, where no changes are recommended, are conducted through School-based IPRCs in all school boards.
- In the HDSB and three other school boards, annual board-wide Gifted screening, using the CCAT, occurs in Grade 4. Students who meet the Gifted criteria may also complete the WISC, and the Gifted criteria for these assessments vary among boards. Similar to HDSB, one board also includes the Gifted Rating Scale (GRS), one board includes a staff nomination process, and the third board includes grade 3 EQAO scores when determining eligibility for Gifted identification. The fourth board does not conduct board-wide Gifted screening. Students do not require cognitive assessments to be considered for any Gifted placement. Other sources of information are used to determine student fit for these placements.

Placement Options

An analysis of the placement options available for students identified with Autism, Learning Disabilities and Giftedness within the HDSB and four neighbouring school boards demonstrated the following:

- The HDSB and all other school boards offer Resource Support involving consultative (or itinerant), resource, and/or withdrawal assistance in regular classrooms for students in Kindergarten/grade 1 through to grade 8.
- As in the HDSB, three other school boards offer a self-contained placement option for elementary students with Autism in Kindergarten/grade 1 through to grade 8. One board does not provide self-contained placement options for elementary students with Autism.
- The HDSB and two other boards offer self-contained placements for junior/intermediate students with Learning Disabilities, and one board offers similar placements from grade 1 through to grade 8. One board does not provide self-contained placements for students with Learning Disabilities.
- For elementary students identified as Gifted, the HDSB and all other school boards offer self-contained placements. Like the HDSB, one other board offers these placements in grade 1 through to grade 8, and the remaining three school boards offer self-contained placements from grade 5 through to grade 8.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The purpose of the Special Education Programs and Services Review–Phase II was to examine the HDSB’s current referral, identification and placement pathways for the provision of special education programs and services to elementary students with Autism, Learning Disabilities, and Giftedness. The review set out to investigate various components of the special education pathways, obtain feedback from key stakeholder groups, assess the extent to which practices in the HDSB align with Ministry guidelines, and explore procedures implemented by neighbouring school boards. Following is a summary of the key findings established throughout the review.

Student Enrolment

In October 2017, HDSB enrolment figures demonstrated that 6,125 elementary students were receiving special education support, of which 2,298 (37.5%) were identified with an exceptionality. Elementary students identified as Gifted comprised of 54% of the identified special education population, followed by students with Learning Disabilities (17%), and Autism (8%). Further elementary enrolment analyses among the three exceptionalities demonstrated that:

- males comprised of more than half of each exceptionality group (ranging from 62% - 85%);
- students with Autism were equally distributed throughout the school board, almost half of students with Learning Disabilities attended schools in the North, and 57% of Gifted students were in the East; and
- one-quarter of students with Autism, and 15% of students identified as Gifted were in primary grades, and approximately four out of ten students with Autism, Learning Disabilities, and Giftedness were in junior grades (range of 43%-46%).

Five-year enrolment trends demonstrated that the proportions of elementary students identified with Autism and Learning Disabilities in the HDSB were smaller than that of the region and province. The proportions of elementary students identified with Learning Disabilities decreased across the region, the province, and the HDSB (to a greater extent) over time. While the proportions of elementary students identified with Autism decreased in the HDSB over time, they increased across the region and the province. Conversely, the proportion of elementary students identified as Gifted in the HDSB was larger than that of the region and province, and increased over time; while proportions decreased slightly throughout the region and remained consistent throughout the province.

Elementary Referral, Identification and Placement Procedures in the HDSB

Referral, identification and placement pathways in the HDSB employ procedures that are common among all exceptionalities, and processes that are unique to each exceptionality. For all exceptionalities, the elementary referral process involves a leveled response approach to problem solving. An In-School Team (first level of response) supports the classroom teacher, and a School Resource Team (second level of response) is called upon when further consultation, assessments or student IEPs are required. The SRT provides identification and placement recommendations to one of three Area IPRCs, for subsequent student identification and placement.

As directed by the Ministry, the HDSB offers two special education placement options: (1) Resource Support provided in the regular classroom, and (2) self-contained special education classes/programs; both of which require formal identification through the IPRC process. In keeping with HDSB’s commitment to inclusion, Resource Support placements are considered prior to a special education class. Once identification and placement decisions are made, a transition plan is developed as part of the student’s IEP. Placements are reviewed annually by a school-based IPRC or an Area IPRC, depending on recommended changes and parental preferences.

Unique to each exceptionality are the types of assessments conducted and self-contained placements available to students. The HDSB offers one elementary self-contained placement option for students with Autism (K-8), one option for students with Learning Disabilities (grades 4-8), and one self-contained placement option for students identified as Gifted (grades 1-8). For each exceptionality the self-contained classes are housed in elementary schools distributed across the board, based on student need in each area.

Perceptions of Key Stakeholders

Elementary special education referral, identification and placement procedures are viewed by stakeholders as being logical, inclusive and collaborative. The strong team approach lends to a comprehensive understanding of student profiles and facilitates strong home-school relationships. Throughout the referral process, focus group and interview participants noted the high level of efficiency in which decisions are made, and the continuous support provided by school and board staff. With respect to assessment processes, a key topic of concern among staff and parents involved the primary Gifted screening and assessment practice in the HDSB. There was a strong sense among participating staff that the needs of primary students can be addressed effectively in the regular classroom, and that primary assessment is premature due to the lack stability and low predictive validity of results.

The identification and placement process was described as being quick and efficient as a result the frequency by which Area IPRCs convene during the school year, their objectivity, and their adherence to procedural standards. Staff reportedly respect the IPRC's responsibility for due diligence and appreciate the level of commitment demonstrated by its members. A noted challenge described by staff relates to perceived inconsistencies among the differing Area IPRCs regarding identification criteria, placement decisions, and expectations. Focus group and interview participants also identified various practices within the HDSB of which they believe to be inequitable. Most notably is the high level of system support for primary Gifted assessment, identification and self-contained placements vs. the reported resistance to identifying Learning Disabilities and Autism in primary students, and the lack of self-contained placement options for students with Learning Disabilities.

Parents noted aspects of home-school communication that required improvement in order to increase parental understanding of the procedures, and encourage participation throughout the process. Staff also noted the need for improved communication strategies during student transitions into self-contained placements. Although special education programming and support were not considered areas of focus in this phase of the review, parents often referenced disparities in their children's learning experiences and academic progress following the transition from the regular classroom and/or Resource Support placement to self-contained placements. Parents attributed these variances to the differing levels of support inherent to each placement type, and perceived issues regarding the development and implementation of student IEPs.

Alignment with the Ministry of Education Guidelines

Through stakeholder feedback and an in-depth examination of the board's pathways, it is evident that HDSB's special education practices are strongly aligned with Ministry regulations and policies regarding the In-School Team process and assessments, identification and placement of exceptional students, program planning, and student transitions. Most notably, Ministry guidelines have informed:

- the rigorous procedural framework that lends itself to a comprehensive, multidisciplinary and inclusive problem solving process;
- Area IPRC's prioritized considerations of regular classroom placement through in-depth evaluations of student profiles, assessment results and student needs;
- the categories of exceptionalities and associated definitions;

- the range of placement options available across exceptionalities; and
- the smooth, efficient and timely manner in which students transition into special education programs and/or services.

A key area in which stakeholders expressed a need for the HDSB to maximize alignment with Ministry guidelines involves examining and reducing perceived inequities among exceptionalities, particularly with respect to early identification practices. Other areas for consideration, as conveyed by stakeholders, include: greater consistency across the system with the distribution and awareness of the *Working Together* document, improved messaging to parents regarding their participation in meetings; and improved parent and staff understanding of the IPRC decision-making process, including the rationale for prioritizing the regular classroom during placement decisions.

Procedures and Placements in Neighbouring School Boards

Through the compilation and analysis of elementary special education referral and identification procedures implemented in the HDSB and four neighbouring school boards of interest, it is clear that both similarities and variations exist. While a collaborative team approach to problem solving is a common thread among school boards, some use multidisciplinary first-level response teams, and others include second level-response teams when further consultation is required. During the identification process, the categories of exceptionalities and associated definitions used by all school boards were consistent with those issued by the Ministry. Like the HDSB, three of the four boards conduct system-wide screening for Giftedness, which may then lead to an individual cognitive assessment. Assessment criteria used to determine eligibility for Gifted identification differs slightly in each board. As directed by the Ministry, all school boards have established IPRCs to determine identification and placement of exceptional students, and within each board the level of IPRCs differ, ranging from School- to Board-based IPRCs.

Although the range of placement options available across school boards remains consistent with those regulated by the Ministry of Education, placement variations exist across school boards, grade levels, and exceptionalities. Given that all boards strive to meet the learning needs of their student populations, these variations are not surprising. While Resource Support is available throughout the elementary grades and across the three exceptionalities in each school board, the provision of special education classes and programs differ by exceptionality and grade level. Most notably, the HDSB and two neighbouring school boards offer students with Learning Disabilities self-contained placement options beginning in the junior grades, one board provides such placements starting in primary grades, and one school board does not offer self-contained placements. The HDSB and one neighbouring school board offers self-contained placement options for Gifted students throughout the elementary grades, while three other boards provide these options beginning in grade 5.

CONCLUSION

A review of the Halton District School Board's elementary special education referral, identification and placement pathways identified a variety of procedural strengths, challenges and opportunities for improvement. An examination of the board's current pathways and student enrolment trends facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the procedures and level of participation in programs and services available for students with Autism, Learning Disabilities and Giftedness. Key stakeholder feedback addressed the degree of implementation, and perceived factors that may facilitate or impede procedural operations. A frame of reference provided by the Ministry of Education provided a means of confirming HDSB's procedural alignment with respective guidelines; and the exploration of neighbouring school boards enabled a comparative analysis of similarities and differences in practice.

Review findings identified a variety of factors that contribute to the fidelity, efficiency and effectiveness in which students with exceptionalities navigate through the elementary referral, identification and placement pathways. Through a comprehensive review of the procedural components, assessment of Ministry expectations, and the reported perceptions of parents, staff and SEAC representatives, it is clear that the success of the special education pathways is largely due to:

1. a logical and rigorous framework that promotes objective perspectives and follows procedural standards;
2. a multidisciplinary and collaborative team approach;
3. a comprehensive problem solving process involving thorough examination of students' strengths and needs;
4. the extent to which in-school administration understand and value the problem solving process;
5. the expertise, passion and dedication demonstrated by SERTs, IPLs and other support staff;
6. the ongoing responsive and supportive nature of SERTs;
7. high level of parental inclusion and respect during team-based discussions and decisions;
8. frequency of Area IPRC meetings;
9. quick transition processes for students entering self-contained placements; and
10. Ministry directions that guide the planning and implementation of system-wide procedures and processes.

Phase I of this review identified similar strengths related to responsive services, the multidisciplinary team-based approach, the supportive school-based model, and skilled and dedicated staff (Love & Favaro, 2017).

Alongside factors that contribute to the success of the special education pathways, are challenges relating to the manner in which procedures and processes are implemented. Found throughout the review were various challenges identified by stakeholders as being largely related to the degree of consistency in which procedures and processes were implemented between schools and throughout the system. Although not a focus of Phase II, but of equal importance to stakeholders, challenges regarding the fidelity and effectiveness of programming and services were also highlighted. Specifically, these challenges reflect: (1) home-school communication, (2) student assessment, (3) identification, (4) placement options, (5) professional development, (6) support in the classroom, and (7) Individual Education Plans. Similar to this phase of the review, Phase I identified challenges regarding primary screening and assessment practices, implementation of criteria, identification, placement options, and services and supports provided in the classroom (Love & Favaro, 2017).

In conclusion, the collective findings and subsequent recommendations are based on the evidence acquired throughout this review, and are provided with the intent to guide future decisions regarding procedures and processes that students, parents, and staff encounter as elementary students access special education programs and services in the Halton District School Board. It is anticipated that the following recommendations, coupled with the action steps provided, will work to further enhance the fidelity, consistency, efficiency, and effectiveness of the referral, identification and placement pathways.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following eight recommendations provide suggestions and action steps for improving aspects of the elementary referral, identification and placement pathways for the provision of special education programs and services. The recommendations address the challenges identified throughout the review and are not presented in any particular order of priority.

1. Develop a Special Education Communication Plan

Assemble a Special Education Student Services Work Team to develop a comprehensive online Elementary Special Education Information Video for parents and community members. The Work Team should collaborate with the Communications Department to strategize the development, implementation, and dissemination of this video. The information video should include the following six sections:

- a) Navigating the Special Education Website
- b) *Working Together* resource for parents
 - ▶ Purpose of the resource
 - ▶ High level review of its contents
- c) IPRC Process
 - ▶ Purpose of the Committee
 - ▶ Decision-making process and rationale
- d) Parent Involvement
 - ▶ How parents can be involved, provide input/feedback
 - ▶ Parent's rights and expectations of parents
 - ▶ Key staff parents can contact (classroom teacher, EA, SERT, principal)
 - ▶ Standard meetings and timelines (meeting types: In-school Team, SRT, IPRCs, and member participation)
- e) Individual Education Plan
 - ▶ Purpose
 - ▶ Development – who is involved, how parents can contribute, time frame, process of development
 - ▶ Contents and definitions (accommodations, modifications, goals, strategies, transition plan, etc.)
 - ▶ Process of implementation in the classroom
- f) Placement, Support and Service Options
 - ▶ Range of special education placement options available
 - ▶ Details regarding each placement type

2. Improve information sharing and communication among staff.

Within schools, leadership teams should continue to encourage and support opportunities for ongoing information sharing, communication and collaboration among educator teams responsible for students receiving special education support (e.g., classroom teachers, SERTs and EAs) to ensure:

- ▶ essential student information (needs, strengths, concerns, goals, strategies, etc.) is discussed during In-School Team, SRT, IPRC, case conferences, and parent discussions; and
- ▶ important details, decisions and plans discussed in these key meetings are shared with team members who work closely with the respective students.

3. Use the Grade 4 screening assessment results to build learner profiles.

Upon receipt of CCAT-7 results, Grade 4 classroom teachers, in collaboration with other support staff, should review assessment results for each student with the intent to develop student and class profiles, inform instructional programming, and flag students whose results may suggest learning profiles associated with other exceptionalities.

Teaching staff should:

- ▶ review all assessment scores - verbal, nonverbal, quantitative; and composite scores;
- ▶ review individual student CCAT-7 results in tandem with other formative and summative assessment results; and
- ▶ discuss the necessity of presenting flagged students to In-School Team and/or SRT for further discussion.

Student Services should:

- ▶ establish a protocol for school staff to follow when exploring CCAT-7 results that may demonstrate challenges in cognitive functioning among students; and
- ▶ establish criteria for assessment results that warrant further investigation.

4. Review and revise identification and placement criteria for each exceptionality

During the time of this review, descriptions for special education classes and programs (self-contained placements) were in the process of being revised. It is recommended that the HDSB include the following information as part of this work:

Special Education Classes and Programs

- ▶ revise the descriptions of existing elementary special education classes and programs to reflect current inclusion criteria, student profiles (learning, behavioural, social-emotional), learning goals and objectives, expectations of students, and exit criteria.

Internal Identification and Placement Criteria

- ▶ clarify and document all criteria used in the decision-making process during Area IPRCs for students seeking self-contained placements (e.g., assessment, inclusion, and exclusion).

External Assessment Sources

- ▶ develop and document clear criteria that specify the types of acceptable external assessments, assessment results (e.g., ranges, cut-points), and recommended age groups for assessments; and
- ▶ specify acceptable licensed/registered professionals who can provide diagnoses (psychologists, OTs, PTs, general practitioners, SLPs, etc.).

5. Simplify the identification process for Resource Support placements.

For students of whom SRT is recommending special education classes or programs, continue to present them to Area IPRCs for identification and placement. For students of whom SRT is recommending Resource Support placements, present them to In-School IPRCs if these students have:

- ▶ assessment results confirming an exceptionality,
- ▶ authorization/support from relevant Student Services staff (i.e., Psycho-educational Consultant),
- ▶ parent approval, and
- ▶ school principal agreement.

It is anticipated that this change will streamline the process for student identification and placement, reduce wait times for students, increase parental participation in meetings (increase accessibility – school proximity, flexibility with meeting dates and times), and reduce the workload for the Area IPRCs.

6. Support primary students who demonstrate characteristics of Giftedness in their home schools.

a. Throughout the primary grades, classroom teachers, together with and SERTs and other support staff should continue to build class learning profiles using observations, student assessments, and parent feedback. During the profile exploration and development stages, school staff should:

- ▶ flag students who demonstrate advanced learning skills and abilities;
- ▶ develop and implement strategies to further explore and understand the characteristics of these students; and
- ▶ consider developing IEPs documenting strengths, needs, learning goals and supports for these students, prior to nominating them for possible Gifted identification.

b. For primary students who demonstrate characteristics of Giftedness, a programming model may be implemented in the regular classroom of the student’s home school, along with consideration for placement in a self-contained class. Together with ongoing differentiation of instruction and assessment, classroom teachers should continue to work closely with school- and board-based support staff to:

- ▶ implement a range of programming options;
- ▶ develop IEPs that effectively address student learning profiles;
- ▶ explore the potential for an identification and placement in Resource Support or a self-contained class;
- ▶ continue implementing evidence-based pedagogy with engaging, challenging, and self-directed learning opportunities; and
- ▶ plan and implement extra-curricular enrichment opportunities outside of the classroom that build on student’s interests, abilities, and learning styles.

c. To support student profile exploration, student IEPs, and system-wide Resource Support programming for primary students demonstrating characteristics of Giftedness, HDSB should continue to build capacity among primary teachers and support staff by providing ongoing professional learning opportunities. Topic areas of such initiatives should include but not be limited to:

- ▶ understanding intellectual Giftedness;
- ▶ characteristics of Giftedness;
- ▶ development and implementation of IEPs for Gifted students; and
- ▶ evidence-based pedagogy.

7. Continue providing learning opportunities for staff supporting primary students with Learning Disabilities and Autism.

Continue to provide ongoing professional development opportunities for special education resource support staff in order to further build capacity among primary classroom teachers. Implement professional learning initiatives that support:

- ▶ sharing of knowledge, experience and strategies specific to understanding the learning needs of primary students with Learning Disabilities and Autism;
- ▶ evidence-based practices and interventions that support the development of early academic, social and behavioural skills;
- ▶ principals of *Universal Design for Learning* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013), differentiated instruction, and instructional and assistive technology;
- ▶ consistent and intensive instructional strategies that effectively address the needs of students who are struggling in the regular classroom, as well as those receiving support through resource and withdrawal assistance; and
- ▶ development and implementation of IEPs for students with Learning Disabilities and Autism.

It is anticipated that focused, early and intensive support, coupled with the use of assistive technology, will work to strengthen early skill development, increase independence, decrease the learning gap, and improve the academic outcomes for these exceptional students.

8. Review and improve the IEP development and implementation process.

Consider conducting a system-wide review on the development and implementation of IEPs for elementary students, particularly for those in Resource Support placements and for those with non-identified IEPs. The review should examine:

- ▶ procedures for developing IEPs;
- ▶ information staff use to create and revise IEPs (e.g., formal assessment results and recommendations, contributions from professional and support staff, parent suggestions);
- ▶ the frequency at which staff review and revise IEPs;
- ▶ the quality of information provided on IEPs (i.e., extent to which strategies, accommodations, modifications and goals reflect the student's strengths and needs);
- ▶ the extent to which teachers implement IEPs in the classroom – including teacher's level of knowledge of student IEPs, the feasibility of implementing IEPs in the regular classroom, the frequency at which IEPs are implemented, and teacher attitudes towards student IEPs; and
- ▶ The level of consistency in which IEPs are developed and implemented within schools and across the system.

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Halton District School Board. (2016). *Multi-Year Plan 2016-2020*. Burlington: Author, Retrieved from: <https://www.hdsb.ca/our-board/Documents/multiyear-plan-2016-20-online-4pg.pdf>.

Halton District School Board. (Revised 2016). *Working Together – Special Education Procedures: A Guide for Parents, Guardians and Students*. Burlington: Author, Retrieved from: <https://www.hdsb.ca/Documents/WorkingTogetherBooklet.pdf>.

Halton District School Board. (2017). *Elementary Self-contained Classes and Program Profiles*. Burlington: Author, Retrieved from: <https://www.myhdsb.ca/StudentServices/Documents/Elementary%20Self-Contained%20Classes%20and%20Program%20Profiles.pdf>

Halton District School Board. (2017). *Guide to Student Services 2017-2018*. Burlington: Author.

Halton District School Board. (2017). *Special Education Plan 2017-2018*. Burlington: Author, Retrieved from: <https://www.hdsb.ca/our-board/Documents/SpecialEducationPlan.pdf>.

Love, A., & Favaro, P. (2017). *Halton District School Board Special Education Review – Key Findings*. Unpublished presentation. Burlington, Ontario: Halton District School Board.


Ontario Ministry of Education. (2013). *Learning for All: A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students, Kindergarten to Grade 12*. Toronto: Author. Retrieved from: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/LearningforAll2013.pdf>.

APPENDIX A

Elementary Referral, Identification and Placement Details for Neighbouring School Boards

Halton Catholic District School Board

(as of February 2018)

Elementary Referral, Identification and Placement Process	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solving by In-School Special Education Team • Board-based Special Education Support Team assists In-School Teams with problem solving, capacity building, and supporting students and staff • Transdisciplinary Rounds (TDR) – Behaviour Analysts work with Special Education Support Team to build capacity in schools for students with complex needs • TDR meetings (once a month per Family of Schools) to set goals and strategies to support In-School Teams with meeting student needs • Student is referred to school-based IPRC (for Resource Support), or Regional IPRC (for Self-contained Class) • IPRC identifies student and determines placement • Yearly review is conducted by school-based IPRC 	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>BOARD FACTS</p> <p>Approximately:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 33,000 students 22,000 elementary students 55 schools 46 elementary schools  </div>

Elementary Special Education Placements		Class Type	Grades	# Classes	Class Size	Identification & Placement
AUTISM	Resource Support Program					
	Itinerant Support	regular class indirect, resource or withdrawal support	K-8	/	Ministry regulations	School-based IPRC
LEARNING DISABILITIES	Resource Support Program					
	Itinerant Support	regular class indirect, resource or withdrawal support	K-8	/	Ministry regulations	School-based IPRC
GIFTED	Resource Support Program					
	Itinerant Support	regular class indirect, resource or withdrawal support	K-8	/	Ministry regulations	School-based IPRC
	Special Education Class					
	Self-contained Gifted class	self-contained partial integration	5-8	7 classes	25 students	Regional IPRC

For a student to be considered eligible for gifted programming, his/her intellectual functioning must fall at or above the 98th percentile as indicated on an appropriate full-scale psycho-educational assessment or relevant sub-tests as determined by the supervising psychologist or psychological associate.

Board-wide gifted screening (using the CCAT-7) occurs in grade 4 (stage 1). Students qualify for stage 2 testing based on Grade 3 EQAO and Grade 4 CCAT-7 test scores. For students who meet the Gifted criteria in stage 1, the WISC-V is administered. Students who meet the Gifted criteria in stage 2 are presented to IPRC for identification and placement.

Sources:

Halton Catholic District School Board. (2017). *Special Education Annual Plan 2017*. Retrieved from:
<https://www.hcdsb.org/Programs/SpecialEducation/Documents/HCDSB%20Special%20Education%20Annual%20Plan.pdf>

Halton Catholic District School Board. (Revised 2013). *A Parent's Guide to Special Education Programs and Services*. Retrieved from:
<https://www.hcdsb.org/Programs/SpecialEducation/Documents/A%20Parent's%20Guide%20to%20Special%20Education%20Programs%20and%20Services.pdf>

Hamilton Wentworth District School Board

(as of February 2018)

Elementary Referral, Identification and Placement Process

- Problem solving by School Resource Team
- Assessment results indicate student meets criteria for exceptionality
- Referral to In-School IPRC (for Resource Support)
- Referral to System IPRC (for Special Education Class)
- IPRC identifies student and determines placement
- Yearly review is conducted by In-School IPRC

BOARD FACTS

Approximately:

49,500 students
35,100 elementary students
104 schools
89 elementary schools

Elementary Special Education Placements		Class Type	Grades	# Classes	Class Size	Identification & Placement
AUTISM	Resource Support Program					
	Itinerant Support	regular class indirect, resource or withdrawal support	K-8		Ministry regulations	Must demonstrate need or have diagnosis In-School IPRC not required
	Special Education Class					
	ASD Class	self-contained full-time	P/J J/I	5 classes 5 classes	6 students 6 students	System IPRC
	Special Education Program					
Social Communication Program	intensive withdrawal support 1 day/wk	5-8	1 location	Group size 7-8 students	Application to Intensive Support Services Team Must have diagnosis	
LEARNING DISABILITIES	Resource Support Program					
	Itinerant Support	regular class indirect support	3-8		Ministry regulations	Must meet criteria via formal assessment In-School IPRC not required
	Special Education Class					
	Comprehensive Class*	self-contained partial integration	4-6 7-8	7 students 13 students	12 students	System IPRC
	Special Education Program					
Centre for Success Program	6 week program	5-7	3 locations	8 students	Application to Centre for Success Committee Must have a diagnosis	
GIFTED	Resource Support Program					
	Itinerant Support (via Special Assignment Teacher)	regular class indirect support	5-8		Ministry regulations	Must meet criteria via formal assessment In-School IPRC not required
	Special Education Class					
	Gifted + Class	self-contained full-time	6-8	2	15	System IPRC
	Special Education Program					
Enrichment and Innovation Centre Program	withdrawal 6-7 times a year	5-8	6-7 sessions per grade	22 students	Must meet criteria via formal assessment IPRC not required	

* Elementary Comprehensive Classes serve students with various exceptionalities who also demonstrate social and emotional challenges. The majority of students comprise of those with Mild Intellectual Disabilities and some have Learning Disabilities.

Board-wide gifted screening occurs in grade four (using the CCAT-7). Students who score highly on the CCAT-7, as well as those who are nominated by school personnel can complete an individual cognitive test. Results are compared against HWSB's Gifted Identification Criteria for eligibility to be identified as gifted.

Board Criteria for Categories of Exceptionalities

The HWSB adheres to the categories and definitions of exceptionalities provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education, and includes the following additional criteria for the exceptionalities of interest:

Communication: ASD

A written report from a professional member of the College of Psychologists or the College of Physicians and Surgeons which gives a diagnosis of:

- a) ASD/ASD Spectrum Disorder, or other forms of Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) (Current DSM criteria); or
- b) Childhood Disintegrative Disorder;
- c) Asperger's Disorder; or
- d) Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDDNOS); and

Documentation (ex., report cards; IEP; assessment; work samples) of one or more of the following which adversely affect educational performance:

- a) social interaction impairment;
- b) communication impairments as documented by a Speech and Language assessment;
- c) restricted and stereotyped patterns of behaviour, interests and activities (ex., repetitive motor mannerisms or persistent preoccupation with parts of objects);
- d) ritualistic and compulsive behaviour; and/or
- e) poor self-regulation skills.

Communication: Learning Disability

1. The Best Estimate of assessed intellectual functioning is within the Average range (beginning at the 16th percentile) or higher as documented by a Psychoeducational assessment.
2. Academic underachievement that is consistent with Average intellectual abilities as documented by a Psychoeducational assessment.
3. Learning challenges as documented by a Psychological assessment associated with difficulties in one or more psychological/cognitive processes, such as:
 - Phonological processing
 - Attention
 - Processing speed
 - Visual-spatial processing
 - Executive functions
 - Memory
 - Working memory
 - Perceptual-motor
 - Visual-motor integration
4. Documentation indicates that achievement in Reading, Writing, Mathematics or Learning Skills can be developed and maintained by the student only with:
 - Modified expectation and/or
 - Significant accommodations and/or
 - Alternative expectations

*Documentation must include report cards, IEP, assessment summaries and work samples.

Intellectual: Giftedness

Non-English Language Learner

WISC-IV Assessment: (< 2015)

- Full Scale at or above the 99th percentile, **OR**
- Verbal comprehension Index (VCI) at the 99th percentile, General Ability Index (GAI) at the 99th percentile, and the Perceptual Reasoning Index (PRI) at or above the 50th percentile, **OR**
- Perceptual Reasoning Index (PRI) at the 99th percentile, General Ability Index (GAI) at the 99th percentile, and the Verbal Comprehension Index (VCI) at or above the 50th percentile.

WISC-V Assessment: (used currently)

- Full Scale at or above 98th percentile, **OR**
- Verbal (Expanded Crystallized) Index (VECI) at or above the 98th percentile, **OR**
- Nonverbal Index (NVI) at or above the 98th percentile, **OR**
- General Ability Index (GAI) at or above the 98th percentile

English Language Learner

WISC-IV Assessment (< 2015)

- (any of the above), **OR**
- Full Scale at the 95th percentile, and either the VCI or the PRI at the 98th percentile, with the other index (VCI or PRI) at or above the 50th percentile

WISC-V Assessment (used currently)

- (any of the above), **OR**
- Full Scale (FSIQ) General Ability Index (GAI) or Nonverbal Index (NVI) at or above the 95th percentile

Sources:

HWDSB (2017). *2016-2017 Special Education Report & Next Steps for 2017-2018*.

<http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Special-Education-Report-1617.pdf>

HWDSB. (ND). *Working Together: A Guide to Special Education and Student Services*.

<http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Parent-Handbook-English.pdf>

HWDSB. (2017). Gifted and Enrichment Centre Website. Retrieved from: <https://gifted.common.hwdsb.on.ca/>

Peel District School Board

(as of February 2018)

Elementary Referral, Identification and Placement Process

- Problem solving by In-School Review Committee (ISRC)
- Self-contained placements require formal assessments indicating student meets criteria for exceptionality
- For most school-based programs (Resource Support placements) students are referred to School-based IPRC
- Students with Autism are referred to Central Board Office IPRC
- For Superintendency or Field Office programs (specific special education classes) students are referred to Field Office IPRC
- Respective IPRC identifies student and determines placement
- Annual reviews are conducted by School-based IPRC.

BOARD FACTS

Approximately:

154,000 students
113,800 elementary students
257 schools
214 elementary schools



Elementary Special Education Placements		Class Type	Grades	# Classes	Class Size	Identification & Placement
AUTISM	Resource Support Program					
	Itinerant Support	regular class indirect support	K-8		Ministry regulations	Central Board Office IPRC*
	Special Education Classes					
	Primary Transition Program	full-time self-contained	K-2	10 classes	6 students	Central Board Office IPRC
	ASD Program	self-contained partial integration	3-5	16 classes	6 students	
	ASD Resource Program		6-8	21 classes	8 students	
	Special Education Program					
DD/ASD Class	full-time self-contained	3-5 6-8	9 classes 13 classes	6 students 6 students	Central Board Office IPRC	
LEARNING DISABILITIES	Resource Support Program					
	In-School Support Program** (ISRC)	regular class withdrawal, resource, or indirect support	K-8		Ministry regulations	In-School Review Committee or School-based IPRC
	Special Education Class					
	Communication Class	self-contained with integration opportunities	1-3 2-4 4-5 5,6,7 6-8	11 classes 8 classes 17 classes 2 classes 18 classes	8 students	Field Office IPRC
GIFTED	Resource Support Program					
	In-School Enhanced Learning Program *	regular class withdrawal, resource, or indirect support	1-8		Ministry regulations	School-based IPRC
	Special Education Class					
	Enhanced Learning Class **	full-time self-contained	1-3 4-5 6-8	2 classes 6 classes 18 classes	20 students 23 students 25 students	Field Office IPRC

* Itinerant Support for students with Autism

Students with a diagnosis of Autism receive Itinerant services prior to being identified as exceptional. Students are then identified through a Central Board Office IPRC as Exceptional *Communication - Autism* and are placed as receiving *Itinerant Service*.

** In-School Support Program for students with Special Education needs

Admission criteria for non-exceptional students – students have demonstrated the need for academic support beyond the regular classroom program which may include difficulties in varying degrees and combinations congruent with Learning Disabilities. A psycho-educational assessment is not required.

♦ In-School Enhanced Learning Program for students with Giftedness

Students have demonstrated strong abilities and/or are rated by their teachers as needing differentiated instruction & enhancements beyond regular classroom programming. A cognitive assessment is required.

♦♦ Enhanced Learning Class for students with Giftedness

To be identified as an enhanced learner, the student may undergo a CCAT-4 as an initial screener. Following a review of the CCAT-4 results, the ISRC may recommend completion of the Gifted Rating Scale (GRS). If the ISRC believes the student may qualify as Gifted, an individual psycho-educational assessment will be completed and an IPRC may recommend placement in an Enhanced Learning Class (ELC). An ELC may have multi-grades, with a grade range of two or three years. (e.g. grades 1 ,2,3, grades 4,5 or grades 6,7,8).

Gifted Screening

Board-wide gifted screening (using the CCAT-4) occurs in grade 4.

Sources:

Peel District School Board. (2017). *Special Education Plan 2017-2018*.
<http://peelschools.org/Documents/SEAC%20-%20June%2013,%202017.pdf>

Peel District School Board. (2017). *Special Education Programs and Services 2017-2018*.
<http://www.peelschools.org/parents/specialed/sep/Documents/Spec.%20Ed.%20Plan%20Amendment%202017-18.pdf>

Peel District School Board. (ND). *Elementary Enhanced Learning in Peel – Parent Information*
<http://www.peelschools.org/Documents/Elementary%20Enhanced%20Learning%20in%20Peel%20-%20Parent%20Info.pdf#search=gifted%20identification>

Peel District School Board. (ND). *Special Education Placements provided by the Board*. Retrieved from:
<http://www.peelschools.org/parents/specialed/sep/Documents/B8placements.pdf>

Waterloo Region District School Board

(as of February 2018)

Elementary Special Education Referral, Identification and Placement Process

	Resource Support Placement	Self-contained Placement
AUTISM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solving by School Based Team and Multidisciplinary Team • Referral to the Developmental Support Teacher • Referral approved by the Developmental Support Committee • Formal diagnosis is required • IEP is developed • IPRC is not required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Based Team and Multidisciplinary Team discussions/meeting • Formal diagnosis is required • Referral to Program Leader, who then refers student to the school-based IPRC • School-based IPRC identifies student and determines placement
	<p>In order to be eligible for services, students must have received a diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder as identified by a member of the college of Psychologists. In some cases, information from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario may be considered.</p>	
LEARNING DISABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solving by School Based Team & Multidisciplinary Team consultation • Formal assessment is required • IEP is developed • IPRC is not required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Based Team and Multidisciplinary Team discussions/meeting • Formal assessment is required • Referral to Program Leader, who then refers student to the School-based IPRC • School-based IPRC identifies student and determines placement
GIFTED	<p><u>Student Groups:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solving by School Based Team and Multidisciplinary Team • Formal assessment is not required • IEP is developed • IPRC is not required <p><u>Area Class for Gifted Learners:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home school staff nominate students. Teachers assess and evaluate the learning needs of the gifted students while attending the program. The Area Class Teacher will make a recommendation for further participation in succeeding years. • Formal assessment is not required • IEP is developed • IPRC is not required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Itinerant Enrichment Teacher, Area Class Teacher, and/or Program Leader, in consultation with home school staff and parents, nominate students. • Formal assessment is not required • School-based IPRC identifies student and determines placement

BOARD FACTS

Approximately:

- 64,000 students
- 44,000 elementary students
- 120 schools
- 104 elementary schools



The WRDSB does not conduct Board-wide Gifted screening. Students do not require cognitive assessments to be considered for any Gifted placement. Other sources of information/criteria are used to determine student fit for Gifted placements (Gifted Rating Scale, student profile, demonstrated needs of student, etc.).

Elementary Special Education Placements		Class Type	Grades	# Classes	Class Size	Identification & Placement
AUTISM	Resource Support Program					
	Itinerant Support	regular class indirect support	JK-8		Ministry regulations	IPRC not required
	Special Education Program					
	Developmental Education Program	self-contained partial integration	JK-8	17 classes	6 students	School-based IPRC
LEARNING DISABILITIES	Resource Support Program					
	Itinerant Support	regular class withdrawal and itinerant support	K-8		Ministry regulations	IPRC not required
	Special Education Program					
	Learning Disabilities Program	full-time self-contained integration opportunities	5 & 6 7 & 8	2 classes 3 classes	12 students 16 students	School-based IPRC
GIFTED	Resource Support Program					
	Student Groups	regular class indirect, withdrawal & itinerant support	K-8		Ministry regulations	IPRC not required
	Special Education Program					
	Area Class for Gifted Learners	withdrawal 1 day/week (off-site)	4-8	3 classes per grade	20 students	IPRC not required
	Gifted / Enrichment Program	full-time self-contained	5 & 6 7 & 8	3 classes 3 classes	25 students	School-based IPRC

Sources:

Waterloo District School Board (amended 2016). *Special Education Plan 2007-2009 Programs and Services*. Retrieved from: <https://www.wrdsb.ca/wp-content/uploads/Special-Education-Plan-2007-2009.pdf>

Waterloo District School Board. (Amended Sept. 2014). *Identification Placement and Review Committee Procedures: Understanding the IPRC Process – A Parent Guide*. Retrieved from: https://www.wrdsb.ca/wp-content/uploads/IPRC_Parent-Guide.pdf