

Dear PAR Committee Members,

We are the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) who advises the board on issues related to Special Education Students. We are made up of community representatives from Autism Ontario, Association for Bright Children, Halton Down Syndrome Association, Learning Disabilities Association of Halton, VOICE for Hearing Impaired Children, Easter Seals, Members at Large and Trustees. We are writing to you to clear up some misconceptions and to identify some key factors you need to consider as you evaluate your various options.

The chart below gives you a sense of the children we represent at the secondary panel

Category of Exceptionality	Identification	Secondary
Behaviour	Behaviour	62
Communication	Autism	201
	Deaf/Hard of Hearing	17
	Speech & Language Impairment	39
	Language Impairment	12
	Speech Impairment	0
	Learning Disability	926
Intellectual	Giftedness	606
	Mild Intellectual Disability	133
	Development Disability	52
Physical	Physical Disability	34
	Blind/Low Vision	7
<b>Total Identified</b>		<b>2089</b>
<b>Total Non-identified</b>		<b>2639</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>4728</b>

Some students have multiple exceptionalities but they are tracked by their primary identification. For example a student may have a primary identification of Autism with a secondary identification of Mild Intellection Disability or a student may be Gifted with a Learning Disability. This creates extra layers of complication as we serve the needs of the students.

We have many beliefs within the Special Education in Halton but we would like to highlight a couple. We must have a Respect for Dignity which encompasses individual self respect and self worth. We must ensure that every student regardless of their exceptionality is treated with Dignity and Respect. We must have Individualized Accommodation and equitable access to programs. We must emphasize the student not the category of disability. Blanket approaches to accommodations that rely on labels and generalization are not acceptable. Finally we must have Inclusion and Full Participation. Every student must have the opportunity to participate with their peers. This relates back to the dignity mentioned earlier.

The words “Placement” and “Program” have been used frequently at the table. These two words are not interchangeable as they are two very different concepts within Special Education. A Placement defines the setting the student will be learning in. We have 2 primary types of placements with variations associated with each. The first and the preferred placement is a regular classroom with resource support that can be: a) consultative support b) resource assistance c) withdrawal assistance or d) gifted placement. The second is a self contained Special Education Class with a) partial integration into a regular classroom or b) full time placement in the self contained class. Examples of a self contained placement include: Primary Language Class, Behaviour Resource Centre, Learning Disability and Life Skills.

A Program defines what is provided to the students who demonstrate a need for assistance that differs from regular classroom. A child may not have an identified placement but will be accessing a Special Education Program. Examples of programming include: Lexia Reading Program, Community Program, PROPS (Positive

Return of Pupils to School) and Community Pathways. Our programs are wide and varied depending on the needs to the student.

Below is a table that outlines the placements we have:

<b>Category of Placement</b>	<b>Placement</b>	<b>Secondary</b>
Resource Support	With Consultation	228
	With Resource Assistance	705
	With Withdrawal Assistance	293
	Secondary Gifted Placement	416
<b>Total Resource Support</b>		<b>1642</b>
Self Contained	Full Time	193
	Partial Integration	84
<b>Total Self Contained</b>		<b>277</b>

Finally before we get to the top things we want you to consider, we want to address the Individual Education Plans (IEPs). The IEP is a written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student. It outlines areas of strength, needs and accommodations a student requires for instruction and assessment. It is not a daily plan but does outline goals and objectives for the student. As you can imagine these documents are as varied as the students who need them. A student can have an IEP with modification and/or accommodations in every subject, while another student has an IEP that simply accommodates in Physical Education due to a physical disability.

At our last meeting we discussed the top things we want you to consider and they are:

1. Transitions:

Transitions mark the time period when a student moves from one school environment to another. This could be a change in school, classroom or simply going from one subject to another. It represents a major shift in the daily contexts in which children interact and is related to a variety of behavioural and psychological changes. Many children in Special Education programming have had to make multiple transitions on their school path. In many instances this involves multiple schools before they even reach high school. We need to have a solid transition plan for each and every student which includes all their supports (technology, specialize equipment and staff) moving at the same time. A piece of equipment arriving 20 or 30 days after the student does not ensure a smooth transition. In addition the school needs to be prepared to receive that student. We recommend that a Board level committee be set up to address these transitions. No matter what decision is made many students are going to be impacted and the transition planning needs to be done on a large scale.

2. Non Evident Disabilities and Supports:

As you can see from our exceptionalities chart we have a large number of students who are unidentified or who have disabilities that may not be obvious or evident to everyone. We need to ensure that these needs are considered in your deliberations. This includes any supports they have developed in the community, staff within the school who may not be teaching staff but may be administrative, custodial or others. If these connections are severed or worse yet if we are not aware we are severing them it can have a huge detrimental impact on these students

3. Length of Bus Trip:

To state that a student is already on a bus so let's bus them further is not an acceptable statement. For some of these students even a 10 minutes bus ride can be very disruptive and therefore have a negative impact on their ability to learn and interact at school. Students should not be on a bus for more than 30 minutes, this is not just special education students but all students in general.

4. Do not create a "Special Education" school by placing all programming under the same roof.

Integration or the regular opportunity to interact in a meaningful way with their typically developing peers is crucial to their development. In addition it goes against the Ontario Human Rights Code that

says students with disabilities have a right to dignity, inclusion and full participation. We believe not only is it crucial to the development of students with disabilities but the benefits to all students is unmeasurable and creates better citizens in the future.

5. Certain programs must stay together. The Community Pathways Program and the Essentials Program is one example. The students in the CPP will often move between the two programs depending on ability and accommodation requirements. We would be severely limiting our students if they do not have access to both of these programs in the same school.

Ultimately no matter what is decided will impact students. We are not advocating for any of the options or any particular school, but we are the voice of the students with special education needs. The final decision must take into account what is best for all students regardless of our emotional ties to a particular school. At the end of the day we all have the same goals, healthy, happy, well education students.

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