

Inclusive Student Services Impact Update

2024-2025 • Issue 9

Professional Learning to Support Shifts Towards Anti-Oppressive Practices

To address ableism, we must identify, challenge, and disrupt biases, barriers, structures and practices that hinder the achievement and well-being of learners—especially those who experience systemic discrimination and disadvantage. By critically examining our own practices, we can better support all students.

Professional learning reinforces our roles and responsibilities, both individually and organizationally. Ongoing learning throughout the school year helps us connect more deeply with students' experiences, strengthen our skills and reflect continuously on how to improve services. Inclusive Student Services staff have access to a range of professional learning opportunities, both job-embedded and session-based.

Student learning is at the core of all programs within the DDSB. As our students grow and evolve, so too must the professionals who support them.

Within Team Monitoring

Inclusive Student Services teams have established a variety of internal structures to support consultation and mentorship. For example:

- Clinical Supervisors within Psychological Services provide one-on-one and small group consultation.
- Social Work teams offer mentorship in small groups and ongoing support from the Senior Social Worker for consultation and debriefing.
- New this school year, lead roles were introduced for Teachers of the Blind/Low Vision and Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing. These roles provide formal mentorship for educators new to the team and offer in-school support for student program planning.
- These additions complement existing mentorship roles such as the Senior Social Worker and the newly established Senior Speech-Language Pathologist (S-LP) role.

“The training with Fae and Nicole specifically helped highlight the impact language has when working to support individuals/students/families. It was insightful to see how the way we approach these conversations are so connected to the relationship that also gets built between us as social workers and the people we work alongside...”

—Social Worker

Focused Working Groups

S-LP working groups have engaged in targeted, team-driven professional learning. For example:

- The team reviewed and updated its collection of low-tech and mid-tech Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) tools and created a resource lending library. This allows S-LPs to borrow and trial a variety of AAC tools with students in classroom settings.
- Assessment tools have also been reviewed. Outdated tests have been removed, and new tools—designed to be more strengths-based, dynamic and neuro-affirmative—are being trialed. Team feedback will inform next steps and potential implementation.



Collaborations and Community

Inclusive Student Services and the Innovation team recently partnered with GrandviewKids to co-host the first IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility) conference. This inaugural event featured a full day of learning sessions covering a wide range of topics relevant to staff across departments, including Special Education Resource Teachers (SERTs) and school administrators.

Teams supporting student mental health—including Social Work and Psychological Services—also engaged in learning with provincial and national leaders in identity-affirming system planning and anti-discrimination practices. We are grateful to facilitators such as Fae Johnstone, Special Advisor and Co-Owner, Wisdom2Action (W2A), and Nicole Bonnie, Principal Consultant, Firma Strategy Group, for leading meaningful discussions that strengthened our understanding and capacity.

The following reflections highlight some of the learning during the 2024-2025 school year and the impacts to both professional growth, service shifts and direct links to supports for students.

“I have learned so much in my first year as a SERT. The learning curve was steep... Having an Administrator to work alongside, collaboratively plan with and encourage me has been one of the most beneficial things that has helped me this year. Each member of the ISS team has shared their knowledge of their own field to help build perspective, assist with programming, and further my understanding of various learning needs. Finally, being able to collaborate with colleagues to understand processes, navigate meetings, and share opinions has been immeasurable.”

—First Year SERT

“...had the opportunity to attend the virtual Professional Development (PD) Trauma-Lens to S-LP Practice offered by Anna Rupert (Dr. PH-student) and Chiara Frigeni (M.Ed., RP) from the George Hull Centre for Children and Families. This may have been the most impactful PD of any I have attended to date. Interacting with students, families, and often others using trauma-informed approaches is critical to build trust, create a safe and supportive environment, and help individuals establish meaningful connections... This PD provided a thorough look into what trauma might look like in different individuals, the cerebral structures affected when exposed to trauma, and how these changes might present themselves in terms of behaviour, interpersonal abilities, and academic performance.”

—S-LP

“As a team, we have been learning to take a strength-based approach to assessments and ensuring our reports are written in a neuro-affirming way. Simple shifts in our conversations with caregivers, such as asking questions in a way they are proud of allows families to engage with the assessment process in a different way than if we were focusing on deficits and trying to solve a problem... Additionally, the sessions with Fae Johnstone and Nicole Bonnie were impactful experiences that deepened our understanding of identity, and impacts of bias and systemic barriers, and empowered us to take meaningful steps toward creating more inclusive and affirming learning environments.”

—Psychological Services



For more information about the DDSB Inclusive Student Services Impact Update, please visit [DDSB Inclusive Student Services](#).