

INCLUSIVE STUDENT SERVICES: SPECIAL EDUCATION AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

Information for Parents/Guardians

Students with special education needs will continue to be supported. Educators will continue to provide accommodations, modified expectations, and alternative programming to students with special education needs, as detailed in their IEPs. If it is not possible to meet a student's needs through RealTime learning, educators and families will work together to find solutions.

We will be working to provide continued access to assistive technology, including Special Equipment Amount (SEA) equipment, where possible, to support students with special education needs as they participate in remote learning. In situations where access to assistive technology is not feasible, educators are expected to work with students and parents to determine workable solutions on an individual basis.

Looking at the continuum of services and supports, we begin with the 'First 20 Days of Well-Being' and connection across our classrooms as we welcome students back, through to integrated services including DDSB@Home. Our establishment of mental health expertise, Speech Language Services and other supports such as SERTS, Interpreters, and Educational Assistants remains a core part of the services offered to our students.

Parents and guardians can refer to the FAQs below for more information, but if they have any specific needs, they are encouraged to contact their school team for ongoing support.

FAQs

This is an unusual school start for my child and their peers. How will that change their first few days of school and conversations about returning to classrooms?

Well-Being and Mental Health

These are unusual and uncertain times in schools, so school teams want to be as prepared as we can and to help our students to feel safe and cared for as we start this very unique school year.

The Durham District School Board has a strong commitment to enhance and protect student mental health as we return to school. This is the foundation for student success during this challenging time. This includes the hiring of five additional mental health clinicians (Social Work and Psychological Services) as additional professionals which equates to additional access for students.

We are committed to the following:

1. Mental health and well-being are key priorities for our board/school.
2. Students will return with a range of experiences, feelings, and needs.
3. Schools are always an excellent place to promote and protect student mental health, but never more than now.
4. We have strong foundations and resources to build on and can use this moment in time to better integrate learning, equity, and wellness.
5. We need to work together and support one another through this challenging time.

The Foundations of a Mentally Healthy Classroom: The First 20 Days (and Beyond) of Creating Connection and Well-Being Guide is a resource focused on building relationships, connection and community. Creating caring connections and trust centres on helping students to know that they matter – that their uniqueness is celebrated, and voice is heard. Students learn best when they feel safe, valued and certain that they belong. The strategies in this guide are also designed to help students ease into school routines. This supports Educators time to build a positive classroom climate while supporting students to learn and practice skills to manage the emotions and challenges they may encounter in coming weeks. As they learn ways for supporting social-emotional learning and mental health, students can create a “toolbox” of strategies to practice throughout the year in and outside school. We anticipate that all students will need a chance to debrief, build relationships, feel a sense of safety and belonging, calm anxiety, re-engage with learning, and honour missed rituals/milestones when they return to school.

As a system, we have made the commitment to The First 20 Days (and Beyond) of Creating Connection & Well-Being as always important and essential as we return to schools following many months apart. Here is a [calendar of examples](#) of the daily activities Educators can implement that support a mentally healthy return to school.

For some students, they may require additional supports to address their mental health needs. Our Psychological Services and Social Work Services teams are assigned to each school, as well as the DDSB@home campuses. These regulated mental health professionals are available to support students with their unique mental health needs.

We have selected virtual learning (DDSB@Home) for this school year. Will my child still have their Individual Learning Plan (IEP) in place?

Individual Education Plans are an integral tool in programming for students with special education strengths & needs. The sections of the document are intentional and help communicate programming foundations, goals and strategies for individual students. Students reviewed through Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) will continue to have IEPs in place as a key program planning and communication tool.

My child accesses programming through a Special Education Program. What can I expect to be similar this year and what can I expect to be different?

Each special education program has been designed with focus on specific outcomes. For example, functional literacy, functional numeracy and life skills being the foundation to the Practical Learning Program. These remain a constant into 2020-21. What changes are some of the strategies and protocols for student and staff health & safety.

Programming support documentation has been provided to school teams (classroom teams, SERTs and Administrators) to help with shifts to classroom practices to meet with health & safety guidelines. These include, as example, protocols specific to the use of:

- alternative spaces such as calming rooms and sensory rooms
- sensory tools (and washing)
- food preparation – only school purchased for embedding in programming
- safety protocols such as those outlined in Behaviour Management Strategies specific to increased PPE for COVID-19 related health protocols

My child accesses programming through a Special Education Program. Can you clarify who will be their programming lead and how they will access integration?

Student Program Access

Students in special education programs, with focus on modified or alternative curriculum and with fewer than 15 students, will have their learning led by their school-based classroom team whether selecting in-person or virtual school.

Classroom teams will create programming schedules that support teacher led learning that includes time supported by Educational Assistant(s) for skill building.

The only differences to this model are for the Gifted program and integration for School Support Program students who have selected virtual learning (to max. class size)/

The following chart is provided to help map student programming access for students with families having selected 'virtual school' noting that for students in-person all access will be through their school as planned.

In-Person Selected by Student/Family

Programs	In-Person Selected by Student/Family
All Special Education Programs	Student learning supported by in-school team through in-person format. Planning will include the potential need for responsive shift to home based learning should that direction be given by the Health Department.

Virtual School Access Selected by Student/Family

Programs	Virtual School Selected by Student/Family
Deaf/Hard of Hearing Program	Student learning supported by in-school team through virtual platforms.
Developmental Program	Student learning supported by in-school team through virtual platforms.
Gifted Program	Students will access learning through DDSB@Home classes.
Practical Learning Program	Student learning supported by in-school team through virtual platforms.
School Support Program	Student learning will be supported by in-school team through virtual platforms for core learning (e.g., Language, Math), integration subjects/content will be facilitated through DDSB@Home.
Self-Regulation Program	Student learning supported by in-school team through virtual platforms.
Structured Learning Program	Student learning supported by in-school team through virtual platforms.
Transition to Work	Student learning supported by in-school team through virtual platforms.

As plans for individual students and their integration are made, ongoing consultation with families/guardians/students is essential.

Will Special Education Resource Teachers be part of the school team through DDSB@Home?

Special Education Resource Teachers (SERTs)

Special Education Resource Teachers, at both elementary and secondary provide key in school leadership for special education programming. All schools, both in-person and through DDSB@Home, will have Special Education Resource Teachers embedded within school staffing for each campus.

My child has often accessed the SERT and/or Academic Resource Room. Will this be available to them during the 2020-2021 school year?

SERT Rooms and Academic Resource

SERT Rooms and Academic Resource Rooms will be accessed differently in the 2020-21 school year in compliance with health & safety protocols. Strategies such as use of a Virtual Learning Hub and scheduling will be coached with SERTs as we all work together to maintain key supports for students. Many schools implemented Virtual Learning Hubs last spring and we thank the summer learning team for refining the model. School will use the term “Virtual Learning Hub” for online support spaces supported by staff such as SERTs and EAs so that there is consistency for families and our community partners.

My child’s program includes use of either a sensory room or calming room? What protocols are in place regarding the use of these spaces specific to COVID-19 related health & safety planning?

COVID related health & safety protocols for use of sensory and/or calming rooms include:

- Use by one student at a time
- Cleaning procedure between student use
- Individualized, preferred equipment

My child’s support team includes staff in addition to their teacher. Will these supports continue to be available during the 2020-2021 school year?

Classroom Support Staff

Student programming may be supported by classroom support staff such as Educational Assistants, ASL Interpreters and/or Intervenors.

Educational Assistants:

- For some students, Educational Assistants support programming including health & safety (e.g. self-care, toileting), behaviour (e.g., self-regulation cueing) and programming support (e.g., supported practice of developing skills).

Interpreters:

- Interpreters support students who have ASL as their first language.
- Educators will be supported by the Interpreter and a member of the Hearing Resource Team for student program planning.

Intervenors:

- Intervenors provide support to students who are Deaf/blind.
- Educators will be supported by the Intervenors, Hearing and Vision Resource Teams for student program planning.

I have a question about my child’s specialized equipment. Who should I contact?

Please connect with the Special Education Resource Teacher(s) through your school for inquiries regarding specialized equipment for your child.

Who else is available to support my child and their school team?

Inclusive Student Services (ISS) Team Support

The Inclusive Student Services team is an extension of each school team including DDSB@Home.

Each school team will be supported by an integrated team including:

- Hearing Resource Teacher (for students on service and/or for consult)
- Psychological Services
- Social Worker
- Special Education Facilitator
- Speech Language Pathologist
- Vision Resource Teacher (for students on service and/or for consult)

Focus of in-school time for Inclusive Student Services team members will be on direct service to students. As members work across a number of schools, planning is taking place to minimize daily number of schools that members are working physically within, as other means of communication are leveraged where possible.