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February 17, 2009

**To:** Directors of Education  
Directors of Autism Intervention Program  
Directors of Community Agencies

**From:** Ben Levin, Deputy Minister, Education  
Judith Wright, Deputy Minister, Children and Youth Services

**Re:** **Supporting Seamless Transitions from the Autism  
Intervention Program to School**

The Ministries of Education and Children and Youth Services are continuing to work closely together to improve the continuity of supports for children and youth with autism as they move into and through school. The successful transition of students with autism to school is consistent with the government's overall priority of success for students.

To improve outcomes for students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and their families, we are pleased to confirm the next steps for our latest collaborative initiative, which is focused on achieving seamless transitions from the Autism Intervention Program to school. Once fully implemented, this initiative will improve support for students with ASD who are transitioning from intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) services delivered through the Autism Intervention Program to applied behaviour analysis (ABA) instructional methods in school.

In response to the February 2007 recommendations of the Ministers' Autism Spectrum Disorders Reference Group regarding the most effective ways to meet the needs of students with ASD in Ontario schools, our ministries continue to take steps to build on the foundational collaborative work which included:

- Release of PPM 140, *Incorporating Methods of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) into Programs for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)*, to establish a policy framework to incorporate ABA into school boards' practices;

- Extensive opportunities and funding for training and professional learning about ABA for school board teams, school teams, principals, teachers and education assistants; and
- The first phase of Collaborative Service Delivery Models for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (CSDM Phase 1) jointly supported by EDU and MCYS.

Through CSDM Phase 1, we are supporting seven regional collaborative service delivery models involving eight school boards in 2007-08 and 2008-09. In collaboration with community agencies that serve children and youth with ASD, seven English-language school boards (two co-terminous) and one French-language school board formed Regional Leadership Teams (RLT) to oversee pilot projects that identify and build upon successful service delivery models for students with ASD.

### *Connections for Students*

The Ministers' ASD Reference Group recommended improved supports for students with ASD, including at key transition points such as entry to school. CSDM Phase 1 confirmed that there is a need to build on effective practices related to transitioning children and youth with ASD into the school system. Consistent with our vision of enhancing supports for students with ASD and the expectations of PPM 140, we are applying what we learned through CSDM Phase 1 to build capacity for more coordinated and seamless transitions for students who are ready to make the transition from the Autism Intervention Program (AIP) to school.

The *Connections for Students* model is centred on multi-disciplinary, student-specific, school-based transition teams that are established approximately six months before a child prepares to transition from the AIP to school. Transition teams will develop transition plans tailored to the specific support needs of individual students and provide support for at least six months after a child starts school.

Transition teams will include the Principal or designate (Team Lead), parent/guardian, teacher(s), the School Support Program ASD Consultant and a school board person with ABA expertise as required. These teams may be supplemented by other multi-disciplinary expertise based on the child's needs. Other multi-disciplinary expertise may include: education assistants, special education resource teachers, and other professionals providing service to the child (e.g. mental health service providers, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists).

Transition teams will draw on the ABA and ASD expertise of both board level staff and ASD Consultants in the School Support Program in the planning and delivery of ABA instructional methods. A description of the roles and responsibilities of transition team members is attached (Appendix A).

After six months, the principal, parent/guardian and teacher will continue to work together to monitor the student's progress at key transition points in order to provide appropriate supports. The principal must ensure that relevant school board personnel

and community personnel who have previously worked and/or are currently working with a student with ASD are invited to provide input.

Staff of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services have initiated discussions with the School Support Program providers about how the ASD Consultant role can be realigned to provide school-based, student-specific supports to principals, teachers and education assistants through this new model.

### ABA Expertise

Beginning in 2008-09 all school boards will receive new funding to hire additional board level ABA expertise to support principals, teachers, and multi-disciplinary transition teams by providing and coordinating ASD training and resources, and facilitating collaboration between service providers and schools. Board allocations will be calculated on a base plus enrolment model, accompanied by a list of suggested ABA expertise competencies.

These additional and/or re-aligned resources will support a more comprehensive implementation of the transition processes that are required in PPM 140. Our expectation is that school boards will use the additional funding for ABA expertise to enhance the work they are already doing with their community partners to support children and youth transitioning from the AIP to school, and to make more supports available to these students and other students with ASD throughout their school years.

### Collaborative Service Delivery Models (CSDM) for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders Phase 2

Sixteen boards have been identified to participate in Phase 2 of the CSDM initiative. In collaboration with all nine AIP regional providers, boards will implement the *Connections for Students* transition teams for all students transitioning from IBI services delivered by the AIP to ABA instructional methods in school in September 2009 and thereafter. These boards will work with an evaluator to monitor and share their experience and best practices that support successful outcomes for students with ASD, their families, and for the system. A list of the sixteen boards is attached (Appendix B).

Phase 2 boards and the AIP providers will begin implementation of the model immediately, with the goal of having transition teams in place in late March 2009 in order to begin the transition process for children who are ready to transition from the AIP to school in September 2009 and thereafter. We expect to share their promising practices for the benefit of all school boards as they continue to evolve their supports for students with ASD and build their capacity. School boards throughout the province are expected to implement the *Connections for Students* transition teams no later than spring 2010 for all children transitioning from the AIP to school in September 2010 and thereafter.

We appreciate your continued local collaboration in working on behalf of young people with ASD and their families.

If you have any questions about the next steps outlined in this memo, please contact your regional office.

Ben Levin  
Deputy Minister

Judith Wright  
Deputy Minister

Attachments

cc: SEACs

## Appendix A

### **CONNECTIONS FOR STUDENTS: SUPPORTING SEAMLESS TRANSITIONS FROM THE AUTISM INTERVENTION PROGRAM TO SCHOOL**

EDU and MCYS have developed a collaborative approach to improving transitions for students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). The approach focuses on multi-disciplinary transition teams to work with children moving from the Autism Intervention Program (AIP) to school.

Multi-Disciplinary Transition Teams

#### ***Transition Team Role:***

Transition teams are a collaborative mechanism to facilitate students' transitions from the AIP to school. The teams have as their mandate achieving seamless transitions to school and supporting students according to their needs. To facilitate this goal, there will be a transfer of information about the students' strengths and needs from the AIP, enabling both the teams and transition plans to be tailored to the specific support needs of students. Transition teams will be multi-disciplinary, and include members who have an understanding of the individual student, as well as those with complementary skills and expertise related to ASD and/or supporting students with ASD in a school environment.

#### ***Transition Team Membership:***

Transition teams will be led by the principal (or designate). Members will include parent/guardian, teacher(s), School Support Program (SSP) ASD consultants, and school board staff with applied behaviour analysis (ABA) expertise as required. These teams may be supplemented according to children's needs with other multi-disciplinary expertise, such as: education assistants, special education resource teachers, and other professionals providing service to the child (e.g. mental health service providers, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists).

#### ***Transition Team Responsibilities:***

- Approximately six months prior to planned date of admission to school, develop a customized plan to support the child's transition from intensive behavioural intervention (IBI) services delivered through the AIP to appropriate special education programs and services including instructional strategies involving ABA in school.
- Address any specific needs to ensure school readiness and student readiness for entry to school.
- Provide assistance to teachers, education assistants and other professionals working with students transitioning to school as required to support the child's transition into the classroom setting.

- Once the child enters school, the team will meet monthly (or more frequently as needed) and will provide support for a minimum of six months to facilitate the child's transition and deal with any issues arising.
- The principal, parent/guardian and teacher will continue to work together to monitor the student's progress at key transition points in order to provide appropriate supports.
- The principal must ensure that relevant school board personnel and community personnel who have previously worked with and/or are currently working with a student with ASD are invited to provide input.
- Level of support provided will be modified as students' individual needs change.

The chart below outlines participants' roles and responsibilities in relation to the transition teams:

<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>ROLE ON TRANSITION TEAM</b>	<b>RESPONSIBILITIES</b>
School principal or designate	Transition team lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish and lead the multidisciplinary transition team.</li> <li>• Work with parent/guardian to identify any relevant professionals/community agencies involved with the child who should be invited to participate and provide input to the transition team.</li> <li>• Initiate transition team meetings after initial contact by school board personnel approximately six months prior to planned date of school entry.</li> <li>• Be responsible for the development and implementation of the transition plan and IEP.</li> <li>• Manage any issues arising with team members.</li> <li>• Be the primary contact for the family once the child enters school.</li> <li>• Continue to work with the parent/guardian and teacher to monitor the student's progress at key transition points in order to provide appropriate supports.</li> <li>• Ensure that relevant school board personnel and community personnel who have previously worked with and/or are currently working with a student with ASD are invited to provide input.</li> </ul>

PARTICIPANTS	ROLE ON TRANSITION TEAM	RESPONSIBILITIES
Classroom teacher	Transition team member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide input to the development of the student’s transition plan and IEP.</li> <li>• Implement components of the transition plan related to classroom instruction.</li> <li>• Provide feedback to the transition team on the student’s progress and any issues arising during the transition.</li> <li>• Continue to work with the parent/guardian and principal to monitor the student’s progress at key transition points in order to provide appropriate supports.</li> </ul>
Parent/guardian	<p>Transition team member</p> <p>Represent their child’s needs and provide information to facilitate planning and provision of transition supports.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify any relevant professionals/community agencies involved with their child who should be invited to participate and provide input to the transition team.</li> <li>• Participate on the transition team and provide input to the development of their child’s transition plan and IEP.</li> <li>• Provide feedback to the transition team on their child’s progress and any issues arising during the transition.</li> <li>• Continue to work with the principal and teacher to monitor the student’s progress at key transition points in order to provide appropriate supports.</li> </ul>
School Support Program ASD Consultant	<p>Transition team member</p> <p>Support transitions of children from AIP to school.</p> <p>Support incorporation of ABA practices into teaching strategies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide expert support to transition teams for children transitioning from the AIP to school.</li> <li>• Be the key resource and point of contact for school staff about the child’s strengths and needs, and for issues related to the child’s transition from the AIP into the school setting.</li> <li>• Provide a coordination function within the school related to the child’s transition.</li> <li>• Provide in-class observation and coaching for teachers and education assistants on effective learning strategies and techniques for students with ASD.</li> <li>• Enhance educators’ knowledge with respect to the characteristics of students with ASD.</li> </ul>

PARTICIPANTS	ROLE ON TRANSITION TEAM	RESPONSIBILITIES
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance educators' knowledge and skills in the principles of ABA, and other evidence-based teaching strategies as appropriate, which can be used in schools and classrooms.</li> <li>• Enhance educators' knowledge and expertise in teaching strategies to improve communication, social skills and life skills of students with ASD.</li> <li>• Assist educators in reviewing environmental supports/structures that can lead to greater success for students with ASD.</li> <li>• Enhance educators' knowledge of and familiarity with non-educational services and supports available in the community for students with ASD.</li> </ul>
<p>School board personnel with ABA expertise</p>	<p>Transition team member</p> <p>Support principals.</p> <p>Support the transition team as required depending on the particular needs of the child.</p> <p>First contact for AIP and family when child ready to begin transition process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate with AIP clinical staff in the initial transition planning meeting to initiate discussions with the family regarding the child's transition from the AIP to school.</li> <li>• In consultation with parent/guardian and AIP staff, identify school/placement options based on the child's profile.</li> <li>• Work with AIP staff to initiate the transition process.</li> <li>• Contact the principal and SSP ASD Consultant at the selected school and provide information about the child and planned date of admission. <i>(Note: Upon enrolment student may be formally identified and placement may be determined by a school board Identification Placement and Review Committee.)</i></li> <li>• Provide input and support to the transition team as required.</li> <li>• Provide and/or coordinate ASD training and resources at the school and school board levels.</li> <li>• Facilitate enhanced collaboration between service providers and schools.</li> <li>• Provide the family with the school board's parent/guardian guide to special education</li> </ul>

PARTICIPANTS	ROLE ON TRANSITION TEAM	RESPONSIBILITIES
		<p>during first contact.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide support to principals and teachers as required, including coaching on ABA-based teaching strategies.</li> </ul>
<p>Other team members may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School staff (<i>i.e. EA, SERT</i>)</li> <li>• Other professionals involved with the student (<i>e.g. mental health service providers, SLP, OT, PT</i>)</li> </ul>	<p>Provide additional support as required depending on the particular needs of the student.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide input to the development of the student's transition plan and IEP.</li> <li>• Provide support for student transitions as needed.</li> </ul>

### ***Complementary Role of Autism Intervention Program (AIP) Staff:***

In order to improve transitions to school for children with ASD, increased collaboration between service provider agencies and schools is important. MCYS' Autism Intervention Program includes transition coordinators who are employed by each regional autism service provider to coordinate other community supports for children transitioning from the AIP, including facilitating entry to school and identifying and supporting the family's needs. Clinical staff within the AIP including the Senior Therapist and the Instructor Therapist may also play key roles in facilitating children's transitions to school or other community settings.

In order to support the implementation of the multi-disciplinary approach to transitions, regional service providers will determine how AIP staff roles will be realigned in order to identify a single individual within the AIP who will be responsible for the following functions related to supporting children's transitions to school:

- coordinating transitions to school;
- initiating the transition process with the identified school board personnel with ABA expertise once a clinical decision has been made that a child or youth is ready to begin the transition process from the AIP;
- identifying the skills the child or youth needs to acquire in order to support a successful school entry;
- developing a profile of the child or youth's strengths and needs;
- working with AIP staff and the child's family to help the child develop the necessary skills; and
- transferring responsibility for the child's transition and knowledge of the transitioning child from AIP staff to the School Support Program ASD Consultant prior to school entry.

## Transition Team Model

### CONNECTIONS FOR STUDENTS:

#### *Supporting Seamless Transitions for Students with ASD from the Autism Intervention Program to School*



#### IBI / ABA transition & entry to school

#### Ongoing support in the school setting

#### IBI services through the AIP

AIP staff will support children's transitions to school by:

- initiating transition process with school board personnel with ABA expertise;
- identifying skills needed to support child's successful school entry;
- developing a profile of the child's strengths and needs; and
- transferring responsibility for the child's transition and knowledge of the transitioning child from AIP staff to the ASD consultant once transition team is formed.

**Transition Team** - initiated approximately 6 months prior to school entry to develop an individualized transition plan and provide support for at least 6 months after child starts school.

#### Members include:

- Principal (Team Lead)
- Parent/guardian
- School Support Program ASD Consultant
- Teacher(s)
- School board personnel with ABA expertise, as needed

Teams may be supplemented by other multi-disciplinary expertise according to children's needs. Examples include:

- Education assistants
- Special Education resource teachers
- Other professionals providing service to the child (for example, mental health service providers, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists)

#### Ongoing Support (after 6 months):

Principal, parent/guardian and teacher will continue to work together to monitor the student's progress at key transition points in order to provide appropriate supports.

Principal must ensure that relevant school board personnel and community personnel who have previously worked and/or are currently working with a student with ASD are invited to provide input, for example:

- School Support Program ASD Consultant
- School board personnel with ABA expertise
- Education assistants
- Special Education resource teachers
- Other professionals providing service to the student

## Core Competencies

### CORE COMPETENCIES

#### ***SSP ASD Consultant***

- Superior knowledge of ASD, the principles of ABA and behavioural teaching strategies and interventions for children and youth with ASD acquired through formal education in psychology, or applied behaviour analysis;
- Understanding of the unique learning needs of students with ASD;
- Experience working directly with children with ASD;
- Broad knowledge of school environments and the elementary and secondary education system in Ontario;
- Experience working as a member of a multi-disciplinary team that includes parent/guardian of children with ASD; and
- Communication, leadership, and facilitation skills.

#### ***School Board Personnel with ABA Expertise***

ABA expertise comprises formal education and training and practical experience that is recommended to include but is not limited to the following competencies:

- Completion of a postsecondary degree;
- Postgraduate studies or equivalent field experience in autism and behavioural science;
- Experience providing and/or facilitating adult learning and training;
- Experience working with children and youth who have special education needs, in particular those who have autism spectrum disorders;
- Training in applied behaviour analysis principles from a recognized institution;
- Knowledge of the elementary and secondary education system in Ontario;
- Familiarity with special education issues, particularly those relevant for children and youth with autism spectrum disorders; and
- Excellent organizational and coordinating skills.

## Appendix B

### Selected School Boards for Collaborative Service Delivery Models Phase 2 and Autism Intervention Program Provider

EDU Regional Office (6 of 6 + Francophone)	School Board	AIP Provider	MCYS Regional Office (9 of 9)
Toronto	- Toronto DSB - Toronto Catholic DSB	Surrey Place Centre	Toronto
London	- Hamilton-Wentworth DSB - Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic DSB	Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation (Chedoke)	Hamilton/Niagara
Toronto	- Upper Grand DSB	ErinoakKids	Central West
London	- Thames Valley DSB	Thames Valley Children's Centre	South West
Ottawa	- Limestone DSB	Pathways for Children and Youth	South East
Barrie	- York Region DSB - Simcoe County DSB	Kinark Child and Family Services	Central East
Ottawa	- Upper Canada DSB - Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l'est Ontarien	Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO)	East Regional
North Bay/Sudbury	- Near North DSB	Hands (formerly Algonquin Child and Family Services)	North East
North Bay/Sudbury	- Rainbow DSB* - Conseil scolaire de district du Grand Nord de l'Ontario	Child Care Resources	Northern
Thunder Bay	-Thunder Bay Catholic DSB* - Lakehead DSB		

\* also included in Phase 1