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MEMORANDUM TO:

Directors of Education
Directors of Autism Intervention Program
Directors of Community Agencies
Supervisory Officers and
Secretary-Treasurers of School Authorities
Director of Provincial and Demonstration Schools
Superintendent of Centre Jules-Léger

FROM:

Barry Finlay, Director
Special Education Policy and Programs Branch
Ministry of Education

Susan Capling, Director
Specialized Services and Supports Branch
Ministry of Children and Youth Services

DATE:

September 7, 2010

SUBJECT:

**Evaluation of province-wide implementation of the
Connections for Students model 2010-2011**

As you are aware, all publicly-funded school boards and the Autism Intervention Program (AIP) started province-wide implementation of the *Connections for Students* model in March 2010. *Connections for Students* is centred on multidisciplinary, student-specific and school based transition teams that are established approximately six months before a child prepares to leave Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI) services delivered through the AIP to Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) instructional methods in the publicly funded school system. The transition team continues to support the student for at least six months after leaving the AIP and starting or continuing school. More information about the model and its implementation can be obtained from a joint Ministry of Education and Ministry of Children and Youth Services *Connections*

for *Students* Deputy Ministers' Memorandum available on the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) webpage at: <http://www.ontariodirectors.ca/ASD/asd-english.html>.

The CODE website also provides links to comprehensive tools and resources developed and made available by the 16 school board/AIP partnerships that have already participated in *Connections for Students*. Resources available are for use as examples of tools and strategies that have been found useful by partnerships that have implemented the *Connections for Students* model, and may support school boards introducing *Connections for Students* in schools. The Ministries of Education and Children and Youth Services would like to thank all these partnerships that have provided tools and strategies and for continuing to support the provincial implementation of *Connections for Students*.

To better support school boards in implementation of the *Connections for Students* model and assess system changes, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services will conduct an evaluation of the *Connections for Students* model. School boards are requested to identify a designated lead responsible for the *Connections for Students* model implementation (e.g., ABA expertise professional). AIP providers are also requested to identify respective School Support Program – Autism Spectrum Disorder (SSP-ASD) leads responsible for the *Connections for Students* model implementation. The leads will act as the main contact for the evaluation, and ensure all required information is submitted.

Evaluation *Connections for Students* Timeline:

- Preliminary information on the number of children who have transitioned/are transitioning from IBI services delivered through the AIP to ABA instructional methods in the publicly funded school system will be collected from AIP providers in September 2010. Additional information will be gathered from designated *Connections for Students* school board leads, if necessary.
- Principals/designates jointly with SSP-ASD consultant complete the Model Compliance/Process Integrity Checklist for School Transition Teams Template in collaboration with all members of the transition team **for all transition teams** in school board (see appendix 1). An initial template with baseline information about each transition team will be submitted by the transition team to the designated school board *Connections for Students* lead by October 15, 2010. A second complete template with final information about each transition team will be submitted by the transition team to the designated school board lead by March 15, 2011.
- A designated school board *Connections for Students* lead and the AIP lead will submit the completed *Connections for Students* Implementation Reporting Template (see appendix 2) to the ministries by November 15, 2010, and submit a final Implementation Reporting Template by April 15, 2011.
- Ministries' evaluation team will prepare a summary capturing the baseline of the *Connections for Students* model province-wide implementation in December 2010 based on information gathered from school board/AIP reports.
- Ministries' evaluation team prepares a final evaluation report on the *Connections for Students* model implementation in June 2011.

AIP providers and school boards are requested to send the contact information of their designated leads responsible for the *Connections for Students* model implementation by **September 30, 2010** to the attention of Arkadi Toritsyn, Senior Policy Advisor, Special Education Policy and Programs branch at arkadi.toritsyn@ontario.ca, tel.416 325-2732.

Thank you for your cooperation with this initiative as we move forward to ensure the needs of children with ASD continue to be met.

Sincerely,

Barry Finlay

Susan Capling

Attachment

Appendix 1

Model Compliance/Process Integrity Checklist for School Transition Teams

To be filled out by principal/designate jointly with SSP-ASD consultant in collaboration with all members of the transition team for each transition team in the school board.

To be submitted to a designated *Connections for Students* school board lead two times: by October 15, 2010 and by March 15, 2011.

Model's Elements	Completed Y/N
Once a clinical decision has been made that a child is ready to begin the transition process from the AIP (approximately 6 months prior to discharge from IBI), the AIP provider contacts the identified school board personnel with ABA expertise to initiate the transition process	
School where the child will be transitioning from the AIP is identified	
Principal establishes a transition team approximately six months prior to the planned date of child's admission to school, or continuation of school	
Parents are informed about the transition team model and their role as members of the transition team	
Team includes a range of professionals including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • principal or designate (Team Lead), • parent/guardian, • teacher(s), • the SSP - ASD Consultant, • a school board person with ABA expertise, as required, • as well as other multi-disciplinary expertise, especially those who have previously worked and/or are currently working with a student with an ASD¹ 	
Specific goals of the model and team members' responsibilities are made clear to all team members	
Team meets monthly (or more frequently as needed) to address any issues related to the transition	
Parents are engaged and participate in transition team meetings	
The transition plan identifies target behaviours that will be the focus of support to the child/youth as s/he prepares to leave the AIP and begin or continue in school	
Transition plan is developed; goals and expectations are embedded into the student's IEP	
Monitoring mechanism is put in place, and measures of success are identified	
The information collected through the monitoring mechanism and specific measures is used to improve effective transition plan implementation	
Team (i.e., principal/designate, classroom teacher, parent(s)/guardian(s), School Support Program-ASD consultant, school board personnel with ABA expertise and	

¹ Policy/Program Memorandum No. 140, *Incorporating Methods of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) into Programs for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)*, <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/140.html>.

others as appropriate) is in place for a minimum of six months after the date of child's transition to school is completed and continues providing appropriate supports (as outlined in the Transition Team Responsibilities section of the March 31, 2010 joint Deputy Ministers' memo on Connections).	
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Appendix 2

Connections for Students Implementation Reporting Questionnaire

First report is due by November 15, 2010.

Final report is due by April 15, 2011.

(Return both reports to the ministries)

School Board: _____

AIP Provider: _____

This report will be prepared by the designated school board and AIP *Connections for Students* leads. The purpose is to support school board and AIP partnerships in implementation of the model and to help the ministries to assess system-wide model implementation. The analysis of the first report will help to establish a baseline; the second report will provide a more comprehensive assessment of the progress and identify province-wide trends. This questionnaire focuses on the process of *Connections for Students* model implementation.

Definitions:

Collaboration is defined as: *“Parents and students engage actively and collaboratively with educators and community agencies in decisions related to providing effective programs and services for students with ASD.”*²

Parent engagement is defined as: *“Parent engagement has a positive impact on student achievement. We envision an inclusive education system in Ontario where students are supported and inspired to learn in a culture of high expectations in which parents:*

- *Are welcomed, respected and valued as partners by the school community in their children’s learning and development.*
- *Have a full range of choices and opportunities to enable them to be involved and support student success.*
- *Are engaged through ongoing communication and dialogue to support a positive learning environment at home and at school.*
- *Are supported with tools which enable them to participate in school life.”*

² *Making a Difference For Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Ontario Schools: From Evidence to Action*, Report of the Ministers’ Autism Spectrum Disorders Reference Group to Minister of Education Minister of Children and Youth Services, February 2007, p.10.

Questions

I. Quantitative Questions

1. How many children in your school board have transitioned from the AIP to schools by September 30, 2010? Of this group, how many are entering school for the first time?

2. How many children in your school board have been identified as transitioning from the AIP to schools after September 30, 2010?

3. How many schools have students participating in *Connections for Students* as of September 30, 2010? No identifying information should be provided. Please use the format below which assigns a number for each school with a student participating in *Connections for Students* in your board. Please list the number of students that are participating from each school:

School	Number of Students
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

4. Please complete the table below for each *Connections for Students* transition that is underway in your school board. No identifying information should be provided. Please use the format below which assigns a number for each transition team in *Connections* in your board:

Transition Team	How many months before the expected child's transition date did the AIP provider contact the identified school board personnel?	How many weeks and/or months before the child's expected transition date was the transition team established?
1		
2		
3		
4		
[add additional rows as required]		

5. In your school board, how frequently do transition teams typically meet to address any issues related to a child's transition?

II. Qualitative Questions

6. Did the school board and the AIP develop protocols and other supporting documentation to support implementation of the *Connections for Students* transition model? Please identify and briefly describe specific materials that have been developed and/or used. Some examples include:

- Protocols
- Parent pamphlet
- Handbook
- Information sheet

7. Did the school board and the AIP provide training and/or other types of support (e.g. parent handbooks, principal manuals, templates) to key partners involved in transition teams? Please provide details.

8. How do you monitor the process of *Connections for Students* model implementation in your school board? How is the collected information used to improve the model implementation?

9. Where and how are a child's transition plan goals and expectations embedded into the student's IEP?

10. How did the school board and AIP involve parents? Please describe the strategies utilized to promote parents' engagement and participation in transition teams in your school board. Did you use any of the following mechanisms:

- communication packages for parents,
- information sessions,
- individual conversations and phone calls,
- teleconference or videoconference whenever possible
- interpreters for parents who are not English speaking,
- providing parents with a copy of minutes from all transition team meetings, and
- timing meetings at a time that is more convenient for parents?

11. How does your partnership monitor and evaluate parent involvement in and satisfaction with the transition planning process for their children?

12. How were SSP-ASD consultants and ABA expertise professionals involved in the transition team and the transition process? Please describe their key roles and the duties they carried out throughout the process.

13. Please describe how you consult with your Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) regarding the *Connections for Students* model implementation. Some examples include:

- presentations on the status of model implementation, and
- discussions of plans of action.

14. Do transition teams invite and encourage the input and involvement of all relevant partners (e.g., occupational therapists, physiotherapists, other medical professionals, psychologists, etc.)? Please provide specific details on the process.

15. Are there any particular challenges associated with the implementation of the *Connections for Students* model? How did you address them?

16. What are three main effective strategies that helped you to implement the *Connections for Students* model in your school board?