What is a Special Education Plan?

About "Special Education" · https://inclusionactionontario.ca/docs/what-is-a-special-education-plan/

In Ontario, every school board is required by law to have a special education plan.

Special education plans are in many ways wanting, but will provide at least the basic information about how a board operates. The plan will reveal if the board operates on an inclusive model, with few or no special education classrooms; or whether it functions on a model that incorporates a wide range of special education classrooms. Boards with highly segregated programming options will often include in their plans the number and types of special education classrooms they operate, and what the particular aim or goal of those classrooms might be.

In 2020, IAO reviewed the special education plans for all the English boards in Ontario. Our findings are noted in our post, Which Boards are Leaders in Inclusive Education? Our research indicates about 18 boards in the province operate on a more inclusive model. None of them are Greater Toronto Area boards. To be sure how a board operates, however, it is important to speak with the administration.

In 2011, Avon Maitland District School Board (AMDSB) moved away from segregated placements as a fundamental part of its model. Fewer than five special education classrooms remain from the original 22 classrooms that existed at the time of transition (see Slide 13 of this Presentation). Their 2021-22 Special Education Plan Guiding Principles include the following:

> The Avon Maitland District School Board's approach to specialized education is based upon the principle of inclusion - meeting students' learning needs within the context of the regular classroom setting, whenever possible, as deemed appropriate. Students placed in learning environment with their age - and grade-appropriate peers are provided with the necessary supports and/or services which have been determined on an individual basis to enable them to succeed.

The AMDSB plan incorporates the following concepts and principles:

- Inclusive Education is a fundamental human right of all learners

- All students are able to learn to a high degree in general education settings given the rights supports and programming
- Universal Design for Learning and Differentiated Instruction support all diverse learners

The AMDSB plan specifically notes that peer mentors and volunteers provide individual support to students under the direction of the classroom teacher, a key feature of inclusive school boards.

In 2000, the Ministry of Education mandated province-wide standards that boards must meet in the development of their plans. However, it is not clear that the Ministry pays very much attention to the plans when they are annually submitted to the Ministry for review and approval. Under Regulation 306, subsection 2(5), the Minister has been given a broad power of review, however, and can require school boards to amend their special education plans where the Minister "considers necessary ... to ensure that the board provides special education programs and ... services that meet the current needs of the exeptional pupils of the board."

A school board's Special Education Advisory Committee is involved in the annual review of the plan. The value of that review is as variable as the people who make up the committees across the province, but it is an important function of the committee. Boards are also required to consult with the community about the plan. The board's consultation plan is required to be explained within the special education plan itself.

Notwithstanding the variable quality of special education plans, they are worth reviewing. They help parents and guardians fully appreciate a board's approach to special education and the particular terminology of a board. If a board is not following its plan and doing so would support your student's programming needs, it can also be an effective advocacy tool. For that reason alone, it is important to review and understand your school board's plan.