

2021-22 Education Funding

A Guide to the Special Education Grant



Spring 2021

Ontario 

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Notice: Some of the elements and proposals set out in this guide can only take effect if certain regulations are made by the Minister of Education or Lieutenant Governor in Council under the *Education Act*. Such regulations have not yet been made. Therefore, the content of this Guide should be considered to be subject to such regulations, if and when made.

Introduction

Special Education in Ontario

This guide provides an overview of special education and how it is funded in Ontario. The goal is to provide a clear explanation of the funding model for interested partners in the education sector.

The Ministry of Education allocates funding to Ontario's 72 district school boards¹. In addition to the Pupil Foundation Grant and other grants within Grants for Student Needs funding, the ministry allocates funding for students with special education needs through the Special Education Grant. School boards also have the ability to use other allocations of the Grants for Student Needs to support students with special education needs. The goal is to ensure equity in access to learning for all students with special education needs.

The *Education Act* mandates all school boards to provide special education programs and/or services for students with special education needs. This includes students receiving special education programs and/or services who have been identified as exceptional by an Identification, Placement and Review Committee and students receiving special education programs and/or services who have not been identified as exceptional by an Identification, Placement and Review Committee.

All students receiving special education programs and/or services, whether identified as exceptional or not, should have an Individual Education Plan. An Individual Education Plan is a written plan describing, among other things, the special education programs and/or services required by a particular student, based on a thorough assessment of the student's strengths and needs.

1. There are also 10 School Authorities, consisting of four geographically isolated boards and six hospital-based school authorities.

There are five categories and twelve definitions of exceptionalities, as follows:

- **Behaviour** – behaviour
- **Intellectual** – giftedness, mild intellectual disability, developmental disability
- **Communication** – autism, deaf and hard-of-hearing, language impairment, speech impairment, learning disability
- **Physical** – physical disability, blind and low vision
- **Multiple** – multiple exceptionalities

These five broad categories of exceptionalities are designed to address the wide range of conditions that may affect a student’s ability to learn, and do not exclude any medical condition, whether diagnosed or not, that can lead to particular types of learning difficulties. All students with demonstrable learning-based needs are entitled to appropriate support in the form of special education programs and services, including classroom-based accommodations.

Overview of Students Receiving Special Education Programs and/or Services

Data from the Ontario School Information System showed that in 2019-20², 17.7 per cent of students in Ontario’s publicly funded school system were receiving special education programs and/or services. In total there were 364,038 students receiving special education programs and/or services out of the total of 2,053,036 Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 students. Approximately 47 per cent of students with special education needs had been identified as exceptional by an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) process. In addition, school boards reported that approximately 86 per cent were in regular classrooms for more than half the instructional day.

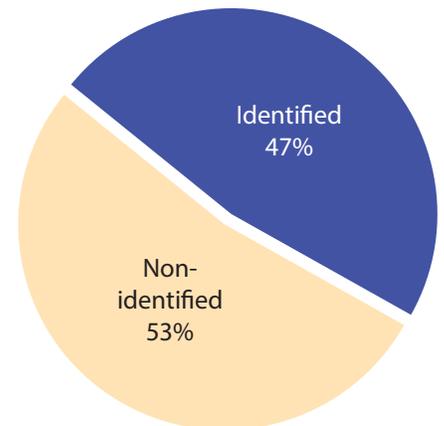
OVERVIEW OF STUDENTS RECEIVING SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND/OR SERVICES 2019-20

Students formally identified as “Exceptional” by an IPRC*

	Number of students	Percentage of panel	Percentage of all students
Elementary	90,388	6.3%	4.4%
Secondary	81,852	13.0%	4.0%
Total	172,240		8.4%

Students NOT formally identified as “Exceptional” by an IPRC*

	Number of students	Percentage of panel	Percentage of all students
Elementary	128,662	9.0%	6.3%
Secondary	63,136	10.1%	3.1%
Total	191,798		9.3%



*IPRC – Identification, Placement and Review Committee

2. Source: As reported by schools in Ontario School Information System (OnSIS), 2019-20 (preliminary as of September 18, 2020 with all schools that met identified criteria with signed off submissions except for 8 secondary schools in Renfrew County DSB). Total may not add due to rounding. Data includes public and Roman Catholic schools and school authorities. Data excludes private schools, publicly funded hospital and provincial schools, education and community partnership programs, summer, night and adult continuing education day schools. Data is based on headcount of students.

How funding is structured

Grants for Student Needs

The Ministry of Education provides the majority of operating funding to Ontario's 72 district school boards³ through the annual Grants for Student Needs, also known as "the funding formula." The Grants for Student Needs is actually a collection of grants described in detail in an annual regulation under the *Education Act*.

Many grants are made up of two or more components, which are called "allocations." Information on the funding provided by each grant and an explanation of the major allocations within it, including a high-level description of the calculation, can be found in the *Education Funding: Technical Paper 2021-22*.

Funding entitlements for school boards can be generated on a per-pupil, per-school, or per-board basis depending on the structure of each grant within the Grants for Student Needs regulation. There are two major components of the Grants for Student Needs:

- **The Foundation Grants** cover the basic costs of an educational experience that is common to all students, which is allocated based on student enrolment and the number of schools.
- **The Supplemental Grants** address the unique needs of students, schools, and school boards related to location, student and school needs, and a board's demographic profile.

The ministry recognizes that conditions vary widely across Ontario and the funding formula cannot take every situation into account. That is why local school boards which are best positioned to respond to local needs, are given flexibility in how they use funding.

In addition to Grants for Student Needs funding, school boards also receive funding from the ministry for special, often time-limited programs, and from other ministries for specific purposes related to their mandates.

3. There are also 10 School Authorities consisting of four geographically isolated boards and six hospital-based school authorities.

Further background on all grants and how they are calculated, as well as more detailed information on the funding formula, appear in the *Education Funding: Technical Paper, 2021-22*, the annual regulation under the *Education Act* and on the ministry's *Education Funding* webpage.

Special Education Grant

In addition to other Grants for Student Needs funding, the ministry provides school boards with the Special Education Grant. This grant supports positive outcomes for students with special education needs. This grant is for the additional costs of the programs, services and/or equipment these students may require.

Special Education Grant funding is allocated to school boards by the Grants for Student Needs regulation. School boards in turn use their Special Education Grant funding to implement their own local policies and priorities. As noted above, school boards are also able to use other funding to support students with special education needs.

School boards may *only* use Special Education Grant funding for special education programs, services and/or equipment. Any unspent Special Education Grant funding in a given year must be put aside and spent on special education in the future. School boards have the authority and flexibility to use other Grants for Student Needs funding, in addition to the Special Education Grant, to meet their responsibility to support students with special education needs.

School boards are given flexibility to use special education and other funding to support their special education policies and priorities because school boards have the greatest knowledge of their students and communities. They are best positioned to respond to local needs when setting budget priorities and determining what special education programs, services and/or equipment to provide. This means, for example, that individual school boards make decisions about classroom placement, classroom programming and staffing.

The Special Education Grant is made up of six allocations:

1. Special Education Per Pupil Amount Allocation
2. Differentiated Special Education Needs Amount Allocation
3. Special Equipment Amount Allocation
4. Special Incidence Portion Allocation
5. Education and Community Partnership Program Allocation
6. Behaviour Expertise Amount Allocation

The Special Education Grant is projected to be approximately \$3.21 billion in 2021-22.

The following pages outline each of the six allocations of the Special Education Grant.

1. Special Education Per Pupil Amount Allocation

The Special Education Per Pupil Amount provides funding to every school board to assist with the costs of providing additional support to students with special education needs. It is allocated to school boards based on total enrolment of all students, not just students with special education needs.

This allocation provides all school boards with a foundational amount of funding for special education.

The Special Education Per Pupil Amount allocation is projected to be approximately \$1.61 billion in 2021-22.

2. Differentiated Special Education Needs Amount Allocation

This allocation addresses the variation among school boards with respect to their population of students with special education needs and school boards' ability to support these needs.

The Differentiated Special Education Needs Amount allocation includes four components:

- Special Education Statistical Prediction Model
- Measures of Variability
- Base Amount for Collaboration and Integration
- Multi-Disciplinary Supports Amount

The Differentiated Special Education Needs Amount allocation is projected to be approximately \$1.18 billion in 2021-22.

Special Education Statistical Prediction Model

The Special Education Statistical Prediction Model estimates the likelihood of students in a school board needing special education programs and/or services. The model considers neighbourhood profiles for all students across Ontario and in each school board. This generates predicted percentages for the population likely to have special education needs in each school board, which are used to allocate Special Education Statistical Prediction Model funding.

These neighbourhood profiles, which are anonymous, use data from the federal government's long-form census and other similar sources. This includes long-form census factors such as parent level of education, family income, unemployment, and recent immigration to Canada.

Measures of Variability

The Measures of Variability uses seven categories of information that reflect differences in each school board's population of students with special education needs and in the school board's ability to respond to these needs.

Three of the categories use data to develop a school board profile of special education needs. This is done by looking at different data sets and comparing a school board to the provincial average. These three categories are: students reported as receiving special education programs and/or services; participation and achievement in Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessments by students with special education needs; and credit accumulation and participation in locally developed and alternative non-credit courses (K-Courses) by students with special education needs.

This comparison is used to determine the amount of funding that each school board should receive. For example under the "credit accumulation and participation in locally developed and alternative non-credit courses" category, a component of this allocation generates more funding for school boards that report having more students with special education needs whose accumulation of curriculum credits is below the provincial average.

The remaining four categories address each school board's ability to respond to its population of students with special education needs. This is done by recognizing external factors that affect the school board's ability to meet these needs. These four categories include: Remote and Rural Adjustment, Indigenous Adjustment, French-language School Board Adjustment and Northern Adjustment. For example, the Northern Adjustment, provides funding to support all northern school boards and school authorities to address the challenges associated with providing programs and/or services to students with special education needs in Northern Ontario.

For more detailed information on the seven categories of information used in the Measures of Variability and how they are calculated, please refer to the *Education Funding: Technical Paper 2021-22*.

Base Amount for Collaboration and Integration

The Base Amount for Collaboration and Integration provides each school board with funding to help explore collaborative and integrated approaches to serving students with special education needs.

Multi-Disciplinary Supports Amount

The Multi-Disciplinary Supports Amount supports all students with special education needs, including subsets of this population such as students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and mental health needs. The Multi-Disciplinary Supports Amount provides funding to each school board for a

multi-disciplinary team of up to four staff. This team helps to build board capacity, supports special education assessments and helps teachers, education assistants, and other staff better understand and adapt to the unique needs of their students. In addition, the Multi-Disciplinary Supports Amount also includes funding for other staffing resources to support students with special education needs in a way that reflects their local needs.

For more detailed explanations of these four components of the Differentiated Special Education Needs Amount, please refer to the *Education Funding: Technical Paper 2021-22*.

3. Special Equipment Amount

This funding supports the purchase of equipment that may be required by students with special education needs. There are two components to this allocation:

- A per-pupil amount that allows the school board to purchase computers, software, robotics, computing-related devices and required supporting furniture, as well as all training and technician costs for all Special Equipment Amount equipment, maintenance and repairs. This allocation consists of a base amount for each school board plus a per-pupil amount reflecting the school board's day school average daily enrolment of students.
- A claims-based process that supports the purchase by the school board of other, non-computer-based equipment required by students with special education needs. This may include hearing and/or vision support equipment, personal care support equipment and/or physical assists support equipment.

Eligibility requirements for both the per-pupil amount and claims-based amount are outlined in the *Special Education Funding Guidelines: Special Equipment Amount (SEA), 2021-22*.

The Special Equipment Amount allocation is projected to be approximately \$130.6 million in 2021-22.

4. Special Incidence Portion

The Special Incidence Portion is intended to support students with extraordinarily high needs who require more than two full-time staff to address their health and/or safety needs, and those of others at their school. Funding is based on claims submitted by school boards. Eligibility criteria are set out in the *Special Education Funding Guidelines: Special Incidence Portion (SIP), 2021-22*.

The Special Incidence Portion allocation is projected to be approximately \$137.8 million in 2021-22.

5. Education and Community Partnership Program Allocation

This funding supports school boards' provision of education programs to school-aged children and youth in care, treatment or detention facilities. Eligible facilities include children's aid societies, hospitals, psychiatric facilities, custody and correctional facilities, licensed community group homes, intensive support residence supported group living residences and long-term care homes (all eligible facilities are as defined in the relevant Acts and require the relevant approval). A school board may provide these education programs under a written agreement between the school board and the facility.

The funding, for qualifying education programs, goes toward recognized costs that include teacher salaries and benefits, educational assistant salaries and benefits and classroom supplies. Further details can be found in the *Guidelines for Approval and Provision of an Education and Community Partnership Program (ECPP) 2021-22*.

The Education and Community Partnership Program allocation is projected to be approximately \$112.1 million in 2021-22.

6. Behaviour Expertise Amount

The allocation provides funding for school boards to hire board-level Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) expertise professionals, including Board Certified Behaviour Analysts (BCBAs), and to provide training opportunities that will build school board capacity in ABA.

The 2021-22 Behaviour Expertise Amount allocation is made up of the following three components:

- ABA Expertise Professionals Amount
- ABA Training Amount
- After-School Skills Development Amount

ABA Expertise Professionals Amount

The ABA Expertise Professionals Amount provides funding for boards to hire professional staff at the school board level who have expertise in ABA. Whenever possible, school boards are encouraged to hire individuals with Board Certified Behaviour Analyst certification, individuals working toward Board Certified Behaviour Analyst certification, or individuals with equivalent qualifications. ABA is an instructional approach that has been shown to be helpful for many children with *autism spectrum disorder*, as well as students with other special education needs.

The main roles of the board-level ABA expertise professionals are to:

- Support principals, teachers, educators and other school staff through applied behaviour analysis coaching, training and resources;

- Strengthen and facilitate collaborative working relationships among schools, parents, community members and agencies; and
- Support transitions, including transitions to school of children from the Ontario Autism Program Entry to School program, collaboration and information sharing between community-based autism service providers, school staff and families.

The funding is made up of a fixed amount for each school board plus a per-pupil amount that reflects the school board's day school average daily enrolment of all students.

ABA Training Amount

The ABA Training Amount provides funding to boards for training opportunities to build school board capacity in ABA.

After-School Skills Development Amount

After-School Skills Development programs implemented by school boards provide students with autism spectrum disorder and other special education needs who may benefit from the program with additional targeted skills development opportunities, outside the instructional day, to better equip them for classroom success and to achieve other outcomes such as improved social and communication skills.

The Behaviour Expertise Amount allocation is projected to be approximately \$37.2 million in 2021-22.

Priorities and Partnerships Funding

In 2021-22 the ministry intends to provide school boards with Priorities and Partnerships Funding funding for specific programs or initiatives, which is additional funding outside the Grants for Student Needs. Some of this funding is allocated to school boards for initiatives to support students with special education needs. Further details regarding *Priorities and Partnerships Funding* can be found on the Ministry of Education website.

Accountability for Special Education Funding

The province, through the Ministry of Education, is accountable for the public education system and the policy decisions that determine funding for school boards. Given the key role of school boards in providing services at the local level, school boards are accountable to students, parents, the ministry and others with a stake in public education.

School boards have a responsibility to ensure the effective stewardship of resources. Thoughtful, transparent budgeting, aligned with a focused strategy, is vital and integral to this goal.

A robust financial accountability framework for the Grants for Student Needs has been developed between school boards and the province. This framework recognizes that accountability to the ministry must be balanced with the need for school board flexibility to address local conditions.

As noted earlier, to support accountability and the mandated role of school boards, special education funding is enveloped for special education expenditures only. If a school board does not spend all of this funding in the year, it must hold the unspent amount in a reserve account to be spent on special education in future years. School boards are required to report to the ministry on their special education expenditures three times a year.

School boards are also able to use other Grants for Student Needs funding to support students with special education needs.

Additional information

This guide focuses mainly on the approaches and calculations underlying Special Education Grant funding. More details on the allocation of other education grants appear in the *Education Funding: Technical Paper 2021-22* the annual regulation under the *Education Act* and on the ministry's *Education Funding* webpage.

For more information on special education policy, programs and/or services generally, please visit the *Ministry of Education website*.

For more information on a school board's specific special education policies and approaches, please contact the school board superintendent responsible for special education. Alternatively, you may contact a member of the school board's Special Education Advisory Committee for more information on the overall delivery of special education programs and/or services within a school board.

Useful terms to know

Special education services: Facilities and resources, including support personnel and equipment, necessary for developing and implementing a special education program.

Special education program: An educational program that is based on and modified by the results of continuous assessment and evaluation, and that includes a plan containing specific objectives and an outline of educational services that meet the needs of the student.

Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC): School boards are required to establish an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC). The IPRC is made up of at least three people, one of whom must be a principal or supervisory officer of the school board. The IPRC is responsible for deciding whether a student should be identified as exceptional. It identifies the exceptionality according to the categories and definitions set out by the ministry, decides the placement and reviews the identification and placement generally once in a school year.

Individual Education Plan (IEP): A written plan describing the special education programs and/or services required by a particular student, based on a thorough assessment of the student's strengths and needs. It documents the accommodations, modifications and/or alternative expectations needed to help the student achieve. It outlines the specific knowledge and skills to be assessed and evaluated for the purpose of reporting student achievement.

Accommodations: Special teaching and assessment strategies, human supports, and/or individualized equipment required to enable a student to learn and demonstrate learning. The provincial curriculum expectations for the grade are not altered for a student receiving accommodations.

Modifications: Expectations that differ in some way from the regular grade-level expectations for a subject or course in order to meet a student's learning needs. For students with an Individual Education Plan, these changes could include: expectations from a different grade level; significant changes (increase or decrease) in the number and/or complexity of the learning expectations; and measurable and observable performance tasks. At the secondary level, a credit may or may not be granted for a course, depending on the extent to which the expectations in the course have been modified.

Alternative Learning Expectations: Alternative learning expectations are developed to help students acquire knowledge and skills that are not represented in the Ontario curriculum expectations. Because they are not part of a subject or course outlined in the provincial curriculum documents, alternative expectations are considered to constitute *alternative programs or alternative courses* (secondary school courses).

For more information, please visit the [Ministry of Education website](#).