

Special Education Annual Report 2024-2025



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INTRODUCTION

Special Education

The Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board (BHNCDSB) is dedicated to meeting the diverse needs of all students and ensuring that each learner achieves their academic, social, emotional, and spiritual potential. We strive to create safe, inclusive, and faith-filled learning environments where every student can thrive. Our Special Education programs and services are guided by the principles of equity and inclusion, and are designed to build upon each student’s strengths and address their individual needs. The delivery of specialized supports is led by classroom teachers and enhanced through interdisciplinary collaboration at the school and system levels. Partnerships with parents/guardians are foundational to our approach; they are considered full partners in their child’s educational journey. In alignment with our Catholic mission and the Board’s spiritual theme, *Pilgrims of Hope*, we work closely with families, community agencies, Ministries, and local resources to enrich the educational experience of all students.

Through this collective effort, we aim to close achievement gaps, foster a sense of belonging, and cultivate learning environments where all students are valued and supported. The *Pilgrims of Hope* theme calls us to walk alongside students with special education needs, ensuring that they are embraced with dignity and love. Our goal is to equip every learner to become an independent, faith-filled, and positive contributor to society. The BHNCDSB’s Special Education Services team, supported by faith-based learning, works collaboratively with families and partners to fulfill our shared vision of “*Excellence in Learning ~ Living in Christ.*”

The Annual Report was compiled from information provided by members of the Special Education Services Team. It will be reviewed and presented for approval to the BHNCDSB Board of Trustees on June 17, 2025. The Annual Plan will be submitted to the Ministry of Education by July 31, 2025, and posted to the Board website.

Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)

The membership of SEAC for 2024-25 was as follows:

NAME	ORGANIZATION
Dennis Blake	Trustee Representative
Philip Wilson	Superintendent of Education
Sandra De Dominicis	Student Achievement Lead – Special Education
Debbie Cotter	Resource to the SEAC, Executive Assistant to Philip Wilson
Mischa Dinsmore (Chair)	Lansdowne Children Centre
Lauren Moulton (Vice-Chair)	Woodview Mental Health & Autism Services
Shannon Mason	Principal, Sacred Heart Langton & Special Education Staffing
Kerri Lomax	Principal, St. Michael’s Dunnville & Special Education Staffing
Jennifer Rudyk	Principal, St. Bernard of Clairvaux & Special Education Staffing
Simon Jennions	Community Living Brant
Michelle Drake	Crossing All Bridges
Marilyn Noi	Autism Ontario
Lauren Freeborn	Contact Brant
Patti Mitchell	Community Resource and Parent, County of Brant
Nil Woodcroft	Haldimand-Norfolk REACH

Shannon Korber	Child & Family Services of Grand Erie
Brandi Bertling	Child & Family Services of Grand Erie
Janelle Sandy	Indigenous Child & Youth Team at Child & Family Services of Grand Erie

Throughout this past school year, representatives from various community agencies presented an overview of the mandate of their agencies. This will continue in 2025-26 as new members will have the opportunity to present information from their respective agencies.

The 2024-25 SEAC heard presentations on the following:

Orientation and Mobility

Orientation and Mobility Instructor, Rachel Moreau, presented details on how CNIB Deafblind Services has been actively engaging with schools through insightful presentations that shed light on the career path of a Deafblind intervenor and the lived experiences of individuals with deafblindness. These sessions have provided students and educators with a deeper understanding of communication techniques, accessibility, and the essential role of intervenors in bridging gaps for those with combined vision and hearing loss. Schools are also improving their gardens to create inclusive, sensory-friendly spaces for learning and engagement, supporting Deafblind Awareness Month in June.

Complex Communicator Guidebook

Speech-Language Pathologist, Mary Hanhan, presented a new resource titled the *Complex Communicator Guidebook*. This tool was developed by the Speech & Language team to support educators working with students who have complex communication needs. It includes practical tools, evidence-based strategies and accessible handouts designed to build capacity across school teams. The presentation highlighted key sections and shared how the guidebook aligns with the broader goals of inclusive communication and student-centered support. Additionally, the accompanying visual supports that were created to accompany the guidebook were available to explore. These included nutrition break placemats and theme boards, among many other accessible tools. These visuals were designed to help bring the strategies in the guidebook to life and support implementation across school environments.

Lexia

System Special Education Consultant, Jennifer Tonnies explained updates to the Lexia license complement and progress monitoring model, as well as professional development opportunities. An increase of 50 licenses brought the total District complement to 300 licenses, which has eliminated waitlists for students. Through ongoing partnership with Greenfield Learning, professional development sessions were offered to Special Education Resource Teachers and Administrators to strengthen use of the program and leverage data. Continued data tracking and usage analysis ensured accountability among Special Education Resource Teachers so that the program was implemented as intended for maximum gains in literacy skills. As of April 2025, the following data was shared: 53% of students gained 1 - 2 levels in skills, 38% of students gained 3 or more levels in skills, with 10% of those students gaining 5 or more levels in skills. It was noted that 3 - 4 levels equates to a grade's worth of reading skills. The Primary Learning Strategies Class (PLSC) was highlighted for their engagement and dedication to Lexia, demonstrated by gains of 4 - 8 levels per student.

Non-Violent Crisis Intervention Training

System Special Education Consultants, Tracie Witteveen and Maria Petruccelli provided updates about the Non-Violent Crisis Intervention (NVCI) training program (3rd Edition) and its continued implementation focusing on equipping staff with effective strategies to recognize, de-escalate, and manage crisis behaviours safely. The training continues to be delivered to Educational Assistants, SERTs, ABA Leads, and Speech Language Pathologists and has been extended to administrators based on requests. Changes to the training model, shifting from a blended learning model to a full-day, in-person classroom format were shared. Presenters noted changes to key policy documents and forms to reflect the language and safety interventions used in NVCI, and shared the new 'Debrief Meeting Minutes Template' as a tool to guide post-incident discussions and planning. The presenters also emphasized the board's dedication to continuous professional learning by providing 'Verbal Intervention' training to all staff during the September PA Day.

Empower

Student Achievement Leader for Special Education, Sandra De Dominicis, reminded members that Empower™ Reading is an intensive reading program that was developed by researchers at the Hospital for Sick Children and took over 30 years to develop. Empower™ Reading provides struggling readers with the skills necessary to become successful readers by teaching them various word identification skills and decoding strategies. Empower™ Reading is a 110-lesson program, that is delivered in 45- to 60-minute blocks, four to five times per week. Year 1 data from 13 schools and 81 students was shared to show gains made over the course of the first instructional year. 10 metrics were measured at 3 checkpoints in the learning process (prior, mid-way, and post completion) and includes measures from the Empower Reading Program as well as selective standardized achievement subtests from the Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement. There is evidence of growth and a steady incline in scores on all measures during all checkpoints. The gains were continuous regardless of identification or cognitive ability.

EQAO & OISE for #DataInAction Symposium

The Superintendent of Special Education and the Student Achievement Leader for Special Education shared that they were invited to present at this year's #DataInAction Symposium. Their presentation highlighted the board's intentional, system-wide approach to improving reading achievement for students identified with learning disabilities.

Rooted in equity-driven research and a commitment to dismantling ableist practices, the board shifted beyond traditional deficit-based models of special education. Through the implementation of structured literacy interventions, targeted professional learning, and redesigned support structures, BHNCD SB fostered more inclusive learning environments and improved student access to grade-level curriculum.

The session showcased practical strategies and measurable outcomes, including significant gains in EQAO Grade 6 reading scores. This evidence demonstrates how thoughtfully designed and scalable interventions can meaningfully impact student success and promote equity for all learners.

The 2024-25 meeting schedule was as follows:

2024-25 SEAC Meeting Schedules	
Tues., September 17, 2024	Tues., February 18, 2025
Tues., October 15, 2024	Tues., March 18, 2025
Tues., November 19, 2024	Tues., April 15, 2025

Tues., December 17, 2024	Tues., May 20, 2025
Tues., January 21, 2025	Tues., June 17, 2025

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

System Special Education

System Special Education Consultants are assigned to elementary and secondary schools to support staff and enhance student achievement and wellbeing. Their role is to collaborate with school teams and community agencies, and to build capacity among teachers, SERTs, Educational Assistants and parents by providing in-services within schools and in the community. In addition, System Special Education Consultants ensure that Ministry of Education mandates and protocols are followed by providing training and producing resources to support staff in meeting Ministry standards. Through resource creation and information sharing, System Special Education Consultants build capacity, maintain consistency, and enhance communication with parents.

An area of focus for System Special Education Consultants is to collaborate with school SERTs to better understand learners by exploring student profiles, assessment data and evaluation. They assist in the development of student profiles through assessment (Hawaii Early Learning Profile, Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement (WJ), and Battelle Early Academic Survey (BEAS)), observations and program recommendations. System Special Education Consultants dialogue with school teams to determine appropriate next steps and potential interventions. This valuable information could result in the development of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and possibly the formal identification of a student through the IPRC process. The System Special Education Consultant supports the school team in preparing IPRC paperwork in order to ensure appropriate identification and placement of the student.

System Special Education Consultants are responsible for training students and teachers in the use of computer equipment assigned through the Special Equipment Amount (SEA) process. Following their Phase 1 (pre-recorded) training, every student who receives a laptop computer works with their school's respective consultant for one or more individual sessions to learn and practise their skills in using the assigned equipment. Following the student training session, the consultant connects with the student's teacher to ensure they are informed about the use of assistive technology, and to provide individual training based on the teacher's needs. Please refer to the *Information Technology: Training Model* section of this report, for more information.

Academic Assessments

System Special Education Consultants use two different assessment tools to examine a student's academic performance. The Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement (WJ) is used with the majority of students in elementary and secondary grades. It is a standardized test which explores achievement and provides scores in Broad Reading, Broad Mathematics, Broad Written Language, and Phoneme-Grapheme Knowledge. A breakdown of each broad area is as follows:

Broad Reading	Broad Mathematics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter-Word Identification Sentence Reading Fluency Passage Comprehension 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Calculation Math Facts Fluency Applied Problems
Broad Written Language	Phoneme-Grapheme Knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spelling Sentence Writing Fluency Writing Samples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Word Attack Spelling of Sounds

With our early struggling learners, specifically those in grades one and two, we use the Battelle Early Academic Survey (BEAS). With its comprehensive breakdown in the areas of *Phonological Awareness* and *Phonics and Word Recognition*, the BEAS provides valuable information about where gaps exist, enabling classroom teachers and school SERTs to tailor programming to address the specific areas of need. This skill analysis blends very well with primary teachers' use of the Heggerty *Phonemic Awareness* program and SERTs' use of the *Bridge the Gap Phonemic Awareness Intervention Lessons*, to help identify areas of need and work toward closing gaps in students' learning. The BEAS provides scores in overall Literacy and Mathematics, with breakdowns as follows:

Literacy	Mathematics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Print Concepts Phonological Awareness (6 subtests) Phonics and Word Recognition (7 subtests) Listening Comprehension Fluency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Numbers, Counting, and Sets Geometry Measurement and Data Operations and Algebraic Thinking

Cognitive Assessments

System Special Education Consultants are responsible for determining the eligibility of a student to receive a cognitive assessment with contracted psychologists through a committee process. The cognitive assessment referral process involves consultation with school staff, and the review of documents in the Ontario Student Record (OSR) including Provincial Report Cards, EQAO results, WJ or BEAS assessment results, CogAT scores and outside agency reports.

Transitions

The System team places great importance on successful student transitions. Assistance is provided when planning and implementing entry into school for students with high needs, as well as transitioning into special class placements, secondary school and post-secondary opportunities. This liaison with community agencies, school teams and parents/guardians helps to ensure student needs are met by creating supported and informed transitions.

The following chart illustrates some of the processes that System Special Education Consultants have supported during the 2024-2025 school year:

Cognitive Referrals Submitted	IPRCs (school or system level)	Case Conferences	Achievement Tests Completed (WJ and BEAS)
59	301	254	43

Deaf and Hard of Hearing

There are currently 32 Hard of Hearing students in the Board.

Services provided during the 2024-2025 school year included:

- Acquisition of Specialized Equipment Amount (SEA) and materials to support students who are Hard of Hearing and have CAP difficulties.
- Monitoring and troubleshooting such equipment.
- Providing in-services for specialized equipment.
- Repairing SEA equipment, as required.
- Consulting on students' IEPs.

- Providing and installing noise reducing strategies for the classroom environment.
- Attending team meetings.
- Acting as a liaison, support and referral source for families and other agencies.
- Providing accommodations/modifications and programming strategies.

Information Technology

Overview of Specialized Equipment Allocation (SEA)

The Ministry of Education provides Specialized Equipment Allocation (SEA) funding to school boards each year. This funding is used to assist school boards with the cost of equipment essential to support students with special education needs. The equipment is to provide students with accommodations that are directly required and essential for the student to be able to attend school or to access the Ontario Curriculum. There are two components to the SEA funding model:

The Formula-Based Component

The formula-based fund is allocated for the purchase of computer and all technology-related equipment, non-computer-based equipment for items under \$5000, training, maintenance and repair of equipment. Each school district receives an allocated amount each SEA year (May 1st to April 30). The allocation amount is calculated based on a formula which includes a base amount, plus a per pupil amount that comes from the Board's average daily enrolment (ADE).

The Claims-Based Component

The SEA Claims-Based fund is allocated for the purchase of any single item equipment (technology-related and non-computer-based equipment) \$5000 and over.

Process for Submitting a SEA Claim

There are five different processes for submitting a SEA claim:

- Submitting a claim with a formal assessment
- Submitting a claim without a formal assessment
- Submitting a claim for a student with fine motor issues
- Submitting a shared claim
- Submitting a trial claim

Recommendations for special equipment are forwarded by the school and reviewed by the team. Claims must meet Ministry guidelines and requirements.

Purchasing SEA Equipment

The Board is committed to ensuring the efficient and responsible use of SEA funds. All equipment purchases made through SEA are guided by principles of cost-effectiveness, with selections based on the most economical options that meet student needs.

SEA fund allocation is carried out in an equitable and timely manner to support student learning. When procuring equipment, the Board considers several key factors, including quality, cost, durability, longevity, and compatibility with existing infrastructure.

Additionally, the SEA team is authorized to repurpose equipment within the system to maximize resource utilization and support broader student access.

SEA Repairs and Replacements

The Board is responsible for ensuring that all SEA-funded equipment is maintained in proper working condition and continues to meet the individual needs of students. In alignment with Ministry of Education SEA

Directives, school boards are expected to pursue financial efficiencies in the procurement and management of SEA equipment.

To comply with these requirements, the Board prioritizes equipment upgrades and refurbishment as the first course of action before considering the purchase of new devices.

Repairs

Non-Tech/Physical Equipment - Non-tech equipment repairs are completed by “Motion” after a quote has been obtained and the repair has been approved.

Hearing Equipment – School and system level staff attempt to problem solve the issue. If the issue remains unresolved, the equipment is sent back to the vendor for repair or replacement.

Tech Equipment - The SEA team collaborates closely with the Information Technology (IT) department to ensure that efficient and effective processes are in place for the maintenance and repair of SEA-funded technology equipment. To support this effort, the Board has designated a dedicated computer technician responsible for managing all SEA-related equipment work orders.

Replacements

SEA equipment will be replaced or upgraded **only** for the following reasons:

- The student’s needs have changed, and the equipment no longer meets their needs
- the student outgrows the equipment
- The equipment wears out through use
- The equipment is broken and is unrepairable
- The equipment is no longer functioning in a way that meets the student’s needs
- The equipment is too old and can no longer be serviced or supported

Taking SEA Equipment Home

In accordance with Ministry of Education SEA Directives, all equipment purchased through the Special Equipment Amount (SEA) claims process remains the property of the school board. This equipment is provided to support students for whom it is deemed essential for learning. As such, SEA-funded equipment must remain at the school and be accessible to the student throughout the instructional day.

The school principal is responsible for authorizing any use of SEA equipment outside of school premises. It is also the principal’s duty to ensure that the equipment is returned in good working condition.

Permission to take SEA equipment home may be granted by the principal under the following circumstances:

- To complete unfinished schoolwork, assignments, or projects at home
- For participation in home instruction programs
- For use during summer school sessions

The Reclamation of SEA Equipment

SEA equipment can be reclaimed if:

- The student outgrows the equipment
- The student is not using the equipment
- The student no longer needs the equipment
- The parents/guardian(s) no longer want their child to have the equipment

SEA Transfers

When a student transfers to another school within the district or to a publicly funded school board elsewhere in Ontario, any equipment purchased through the SEA program must accompany the student. The receiving board retains the right to decline the transfer of the equipment.

Decisions regarding the transfer of SEA equipment are made with careful consideration of the student's best interests, the compatibility of the equipment with the receiving board's infrastructure, and the practicality and efficiency of the transfer process.

The SEA Coordinator is responsible for overseeing all equipment transfers. The receiving board is required to formally request the equipment and is responsible for covering all associated shipping costs. Transfers are expected to be completed within six weeks of the initial request.

In the 2024-25 SEA year, 61 students with SEA equipment transferred into our board and 47 transferred out.

SEA Equipment Management and Disposal

Maintenance and Management

Equipment purchased through SEA funding constitutes a set of physical assets that school boards are obligated to protect, maintain, and manage as valuable public resources.

To ensure the safety and functionality of this equipment, annual inspections are conducted on all electric and hydraulic non-tech devices. These inspections are carried out in accordance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act (O.H.S.A.), R.R.O., Regulation 851, Section 51. Following the review of inspection reports, any required repairs or maintenance are promptly arranged and completed to uphold safety standards and operational integrity.

Disposal and Reassignment of SEA Equipment

SEA-funded equipment that has reached the end of its useful life or is no longer safe for use must be disposed of in a responsible and environmentally sustainable manner.

- **Reassignment of Unused Equipment:** Any SEA equipment that is no longer in active use is placed in Board storage and reassigned to other students as needed, until it is deemed obsolete or reaches the end of its service life.
- **Technology Equipment Disposal:** Unusable technology equipment is collected by a Board-approved recycling provider. All computer equipment is recycled in accordance with environmentally responsible practices. Prior to collection, hard drives and any labels containing student information are securely removed.
- **Non-Technology Equipment:** Certain non-technology items are retained for spare parts. Equipment composed of recyclable materials is sent for recycling, while non-recyclable items are disposed of safely and in an environmentally conscious manner.
- **Donations of Surplus Equipment:** Non-technology equipment that has remained in storage for over five years without being reassigned may be donated to charitable organizations that support individuals and communities in need. For example, a truckload of surplus SEA equipment was donated in the fall to *For the Needy Not the Greedy*, a non-profit organization based in the Niagara region that provides assistive medical devices to individuals and organizations unable to afford them.

Collaboration and Partnerships

The Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board's SEA team actively collaborates with other school boards through the SEA Coordinators Council—a regional consortium comprising 17 boards—fostering shared learning and consistent practices across the region.

In addition, the Board works closely with community partners, such as Lansdowne Children's Centre, to ensure their involvement in the SEA process is aligned with the Board's procedures and supports a coordinated approach to student support.

SEA Computer Equipment Training Model

Students who receive SEA-funded computer equipment are provided with targeted training on software identified as essential to their learning needs. The training model has been designed to meet the specific needs of the student and support their effective use of assistive technology. The Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board employs an internal training model, with all instruction delivered by Board personnel.

There are three types of training:

1. Students who receive SEA computer equipment through a new SEA claim submission
2. Students who transfer into our board with SEA computer equipment
3. Boardmaker training

Students may receive training in one or more of the following programs, based on their individual learning profiles:

- Microsoft Word
- Microsoft Edge
- Windows 10 text suggestions
- Microsoft Word text predictions
- Smart Ideas
- Boardmaker

System Special Education Consultants are responsible for delivering training at their assigned schools.

Boardmaker training is conducted in collaboration with the student's Educational Assistant and is facilitated by the IT Special Education Consultant.

To ensure comprehensive support for both students and educators, the training model consists of three phases:

- Student Session 1 – Introductory Training
- Student Session 2 – Individualized One-to-One Training
- Classroom Teacher Support Session

The first session introduces students to their equipment and foundational software tools. This is followed by a personalized one-to-one session tailored to the student's specific learning needs. Based on the student's progress, the trainer may recommend additional sessions for further support. Upon completion of the student training, a support session is provided to the classroom teacher to ensure effective integration of the technology into daily instruction.

Students who receive SEA computer equipment receive training on software that has been identified as essential to their learning. The Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School board implements an "in-house" training model where training is completed internally. Students may receive training in any or all of the following programs: Microsoft Word, Microsoft Edge, Windows 10 text suggestions, Microsoft Word text predictions, Smart Ideas and Boardmaker. System Special Education Consultants are responsible for providing training at the schools they are assigned to. All Boardmaker training is completed with the student's Educational Assistant and provided by the IT Special Education Consultant.

To facilitate understanding and to ensure that support is provided to all those involved in the learning process, training is comprised of three phases: two student sessions and one classroom teacher support session. The first student session is an initial/introduction phase, followed by a one-to-one training session. The trainer will

decide if the student requires subsequent training sessions for additional support. Once the student training is complete, the trainer will provide a support session to the classroom teacher.

Phase One: Asynchronous Introductory Training

The initial phase of training is delivered asynchronously through the Computer Training course on Brightspace. All students requiring training are enrolled in the course and granted access to the relevant modules. Each module includes a lesson, a skill demonstration, and a corresponding hands-on activity. Students are expected to complete all modules independently prior to the scheduled second phase of training.

To accommodate diverse learning needs, the course offers two distinct training pathways:

Path 1: Provides a highly scaffolded, slower-paced learning experience with extensive modeling and support.

Path 2: Offers a more independent learning experience with broader exposure to accessibility tools and less scaffolding.

The primary objective of this introductory phase is to familiarize students with their SEA-funded equipment and to provide foundational training on the basic functions and operations of their device.

In addition to supporting initial training, the Computer Training course serves as an ongoing resource. Students may revisit the modules at any time to reinforce their skills and enhance their proficiency with the equipment and associated software.

Phase Two: Individualized One-to-One Training

The second phase consists of individualized, synchronous one-to-one training, typically delivered approximately one week after the completion of the initial training modules. This session is tailored to address the specific academic needs of the student, as outlined in their Individual Education Plan (IEP). It begins with a brief review of the foundational skills introduced during the initial phase, followed by a customized lesson that integrates essential assistive technology tools. These tools are selected to support the student in meeting their learning goals within the context of their IEP.

Additional one-to-one training sessions are scheduled on an as-needed basis to ensure continued support and skill development.

Phase Three: Classroom Teacher Support

The third phase involves a dedicated support session for the classroom teacher. The objective is to equip teachers with the necessary skills to effectively support students in using their assistive technology. The content of this session is tailored to the specific needs of the teacher and may include:

- Converting documents to accessible formats using Microsoft Word or the Microsoft Edge browser.
- Accessing educational resources via AERO.
- Sharing documents through Brightspace or OneDrive.

Ongoing Support and Resources

To promote the successful implementation of assistive technology, several support mechanisms have been established. These include:

- A comprehensive computer training course is available to both staff and students.
- “How-to” booklets that provide step-by-step guidance for using assistive tools.
- A follow-up email from the instructor to the classroom teacher and the school’s Special Education Resource Teacher (SERT), containing all relevant resources to support students using SEA equipment.

Additionally, Community of Practice meetings are held to enhance SERTs’ understanding of accessibility tools and software used by students with SEA equipment.

This training model was designed to deliver effective, student-centered instruction while building capacity among staff and students across the district. It ensures the sustainable and successful use of assistive technology. The model has proven to be both pedagogically sound and cost-effective, offering a highly efficient and impactful approach to training.

Special Equipment Amount Claims for 2024-25

During the 2024–2025 school year, a total of 273 SEA claims were processed and implemented. Of these, 76 were equipment-based (non-technological) claims, which included items such as sensory equipment, hearing support devices, vision support tools, personal care equipment, and physical assistance equipment. The remaining 197 claims were for computer-based equipment, supporting students who require assistive technology to meet their learning needs.

Training Services

All students who receive SEA-funded computer equipment are provided with comprehensive training on both the hardware and software components of their devices. A range of software applications and assistive tools are utilized to address the diverse learning needs of students and to ensure effective use of the technology.

Application	Software Application Tool
Word processing	Microsoft Word
Meetings and video conferencing	Microsoft Teams
Learning management system	Desire2Learn Brightspace
File storage	Microsoft OneDrive
Text-to-speech	Microsoft Word, Microsoft Edge
Text-to-speech on the Web	Microsoft Edge
Speech-to-text	Microsoft Word, Window's Dictation tool
Word prediction	Window's 10 Text suggestions
Concept mapping/graphic organizer	SMART Ideas 5
Visual symbols and schedules	Boardmaker 7
Converting documents to an accessible format	OCR scanning on photocopier, opening the PDF in Word, opening PDF in the Edge browser, OCR tool in Adobe Pro
Reading and writing on a PDF file	Microsoft Word, Microsoft Edge, Adobe Reader, Adobe Pro
Vision supports	Microsoft Word, Zoom-Text, Immersive Reader (in Edge and Word)

This year, 165 students and two Educational Assistants received training on a variety of software application tools. A total of 113 educator support sessions were conducted. During these sessions, educators were provided with resource materials via email to assist them in supporting students with their equipment. In some cases, additional in-person follow-up sessions were arranged to offer further guidance.

SEA Training completed in 2024-25:

School	Students	Educational Assistants	Educators
Blessed Sacrament	8	0	7
Christ the King	5	0	3
Holy Cross	4	0	2
Holy Family	1	0	1
Madonna Della Libera	8	0	3
Notre Dame Brantford	6	0	3
Notre Dame Caledonia	4	0	3
Our Lady of Fatima	1	0	1
Our Lady of Providence	5	0	3
Resurrection	0	0	0
Sacred Heart Langton	1	0	2
Sacred Heart Paris	15	0	8
St. Basil	4	2	3
St. Bernard of Clairvaux	2	0	2
St. Cecilia's	1	0	0
St. Frances Cabrini	7	0	5
St. Gabriel	8	0	4
St. Joseph's	22	0	6
St. Leo	5	0	3
St. Mary's Hagersville	4	0	3
St. Michael's Dunnville	4	0	4
St. Michael's Walsh	3	0	4
St. Patrick Brantford	4	0	2
St. Patrick's Caledonia	9	0	5
St. Peter	1	0	1
St. Pius X	7	0	4

St. Stephen's	1	0	1
St. Theresa	2	0	2
Assumption College School	4	0	0
Holy Trinity Catholic High School	8	0	0
St. John's College	11	0	28
TOTAL	165	2	113

Professional Development and Staff Training

Through our Community of Practice meetings, Professional Development in SEA and technology training was provided to Special Education Resource Teachers on the following topics:

- Soundfield systems – what models we have, how they operate and how to troubleshoot.
- The plan for the new special education laptops for schools.
- Edwin – the board approved literacy resource. Built in accessibility tools that support inclusion and universal design for learning (UDL).
- E.A. Chromebooks – process of acquiring, transferring and returning.
- Boardmaker and TD snap – practical applications.
- SEA on the IEP – process for cleaning up school data.
- Review equipment transfer process.
- Use of Board recommended assistive technology tools for EQAO.

Applied Behaviour Analysis

During the 2024-25 school year, there were four full-time Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) Program Leads providing support to principals, teachers, support staff and families for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other special education needs.

The ABA Program Leads shifted towards a tiered model of support to improve the effectiveness and quality of ABA service across the Board (the number of students that received Tier 1 supports may not be reflected in the total caseload number, as consent is not required).

ABA Tiered Model of Support



Within the 2024-25 school year, the ABA Program Leads carried a combined caseload of 240 students with ASD, as well as 59 non-identified students.

The ABA team collaborated with school and system staff on a variety of topics including:

- Behaviour reduction
- Self-regulation
- Student Safety Plans
- Individual Education Plans
- Essential Information Highlights forms
- Communication
- Social interaction
- Functional skills
- Strategies to promote independence and participation in school activities
- Structured learning systems
- Data collection systems
- Organizational skills
- Creation and use of visual supports
- Transition planning and supports
- Ontario Autism Program (OAP) Services
- Specialized classes

In addition, the ABA team collaborated with community providers and families involved in the OAP programs and services:

- Entry-to-School Program

- Connections for Students Program
- Urgent Response Services
- Extensive Needs Services
- Core Clinical Services
- Family Foundational Services
- Determination of Needs meetings

ABA Program Leads provided a variety of other services. Some of which include:

- Observation and analysis of collected data (i.e. Frequency) to inform individualized recommendations
- Staff training and support in the use of ABA-based strategies
- Classroom peer awareness presentations
- Building staff capacity with Boardmaker Online
- Collaboration with school staff and community partners (i.e. Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Services, Behaviour and Mental Health Services, Service Coordination)
- Development and planning for implementation of the Spectrum Abilities Program and Primary Learning Strategies Classroom
- Co-ordinating Sonderly training for all staff

Blind and Low Vision

During the 2024-25 school year, individualized orientation and mobility programming was implemented for 35 students in 17 different schools. The primary role of the Orientation and Mobility Instructor includes teaching students who are blind or partially sighted the necessary skills to travel safely, efficiently, gracefully, and independently, with or without the use of a mobility device, in any environment. To achieve this goal, instruction is provided in the following areas:

- Concept development
- Motor development
- Sensory development
- Visual skills
- Social skills
- Techniques of orientation and mobility
- Use of devices

Further involvement of the orientation and mobility instructor during the 2024-25 school year includes:

- Observations, consultation with school staff, and goal setting for Individualized Education Plans
- Direct one-on-one orientation and mobility training to students, educational assistants, early childhood educators, teachers, and administrators
- Classroom peer awareness presentations
- Collaboration with school mental health professionals (Social Workers, Child Youth Workers)
- Providing additional resources for teachers, support staff, and parents including documents from CNIB, daily physical activity adaptations, individualized orientation and mobility family booklets, and an environmental accessibility checklist
- Collaboration with school administrators and the Facilities Department to identify and remove barriers in schools. Implement physical changes in schools, such as marking stairs and addressing potential travel hazards, guided by the principles of universal accessible design
- Liaison between school and community agencies such as Vision Loss Rehabilitation Ontario (VLRO)
- Supporting students transitioning into kindergarten and high school (attending System IPRC meetings and providing transition visits to students)
- Presentations introducing students to the sport of “Goalball”

The role of the orientation and mobility instructor also facilitates collaboration between service providers and schools. As a result, seven new referrals to the W. Ross Macdonald School were submitted to complete a functional vision assessment. The objective of the assessment is to build teacher capacity when instructing students who are blind or partially sighted.

This year CNIB's Deafblind Community Services delivered presentations in 10 schools for Deafblind Awareness Month in June. The presentations offered a fresh look into the challenges and strengths of individuals with deafblindness. Through real-life stories and discussions, students and educators gained insight into how they navigate the world with adaptive technologies. A key focus was the vital role of deafblind intervenors, who provide tailored support and bridge communication gaps. The initiative sparked meaningful conversations and inspired schools to continue to create sensory gardens, promoting inclusivity and deeper awareness.



Elementary and Secondary Special Education Programs

System Special Education Consultants support students, staff, and families in elementary and secondary special education programs, aligning with the values and goals in the 2023-2027 BHNCD SB Strategic Plan, and focusing on student belonging, teaching & learning, and wellness. Students come to our special education programs with diverse strengths, needs, and learning styles. The System Special Education Consultants assist school staff in the development and implementation of individualized programs to ensure that all students reach their full potential and acquire the skills and knowledge needed for their secondary and post-secondary pathways.



Elementary Transition Classes

Spectrum Abilities Program Overview

The Spectrum Abilities Program (SAP) is a specialized classroom that supports six students from across the Board in grades three to five who have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder. This structured environment includes:

- Visual supports
- Integration opportunities
- Differentiated instruction
- Structured learning routines
- Proactive behaviour supports
- Cross-curricular opportunities to support generalization
- Data collection
- Access to technology
- Multisensory learning
- Independent work systems
- Authentic opportunities for interactions
- Alternative & augmentative communication supports

SAP classroom supports included:

- Special Education Teacher - 1
- Educational Assistants – 4

SAP School Board level consultative supports included:

- ABA Program Lead – 2
- Speech-Language Pathologist – 1
- System Special Education Consultant – 1

This multi-disciplinary team met regularly to collaborate on best practice and support communication between home and school.

This program is located at Madonna Della Libera School in Brantford. It is designed to provide a highly individualized and supportive learning environment.

Each student has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that is created to build upon their unique strengths and is tailored to address their specific needs.

Alternate Programming Focus Areas:

- Communication Skills
- Social Skills Development
- Functional Literacy and Numeracy
- Personal Life Skills
- Self-Regulation
- Gross and Fine Motor Skills



To better understand students' learning profiles, staff were trained in the administration and use of the Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skill (ABLLS) assessment. Once the students' individual strengths and needs were determined, the resource guided the development of targeted educational programs across a variety of domains.

To further support programming, job-embedded professional development was provided by the S-LP over the span of 12 weeks, using Story Champs as a foundational resource. With the regular support model, additional opportunities were created to further facilitate learning and programming within the classroom. The Teacher and S-LP were able to use this foundational knowledge to extend the programming to meet students' needs in the domains of language development, self-regulation and social skills.



To support sensory regulation, SAP has access to a dedicated sensory room adjacent to the classroom. This space features a variety of equipment that promotes proactive regulation as well as a calming space to regulate students.



To ensure an inclusive education experience for all students, the class participated in enriching community-based opportunities, including field trips to Spectrum Gymnastics and participation in the “Have A Go” track and field event, organized by the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board (BHNCDSB).

Primary Learning Strategies Class

During the 2024-25 school year, the Primary Learning Strategies Class (PLSC) supported 5 students in grades one through three. Students in this class benefited from the daily support of a teacher, educational assistants, and a behavioural specialist (Bartimaeus), as well as ongoing involvement with a Child Youth Worker (CYW) and consultation from two Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) Program Leads and a System Special Education Consultant. Throughout the year, the PLSC team worked hard to provide an educational setting prioritizing self-regulation skills, independent skill-building, and academic success. Strategies and supports the team has implemented include (1) environmental modifications (e.g., alternative work and calming spaces, highly structured and organized classroom set up, specialized seating options), (2) class-wide strategies (e.g., visual supports, availability of fidget items and noise-cancelling headphones, a high degree of consistency and predictability in both expectations and interactions), and (3) individualized strategies (e.g., reinforcement systems, coping strategies, social narratives, visual cues on a student’s desk, integration into grade-level classrooms). Students have responded well to the approaches listed above and have demonstrated growth in a variety of areas. Every learner has progressed in different ways, such as demonstrating more tolerance to environmental stressors, or transitioning away from preferred activities with increasing independence. As a group, students have become more confident with advocating for their own needs, they are increasingly able to express their emotions safely and are active participants in their own academic learning.

Secondary Special Education Classes

Special education classes exist at each of our secondary schools. Many of these learners have complex needs and are identified through the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) in one or more of the following categories: Intellectual, Physical, and Communication: Autism. To meet their educational needs, students access alternative courses, or a combination of alternative programming and modified expectations from the Ontario Curriculum. Some students earn credits toward the Ontario Secondary School Certificate or the Ontario Secondary School Diploma.



The following chart summarizes the total enrolment in each of the secondary special education programs for the 2024-2025 school year.

	St. John's College	Holy Trinity	Assumption College
Personal Active Learning (PAL)	7	5	8
Community Living	10	9	10
Job Skills	28	15	35

Alternative Courses (non-credit) are offered in all our special education programs. The *Secondary K Course Alternative Frameworks* continue to be used by our special class teachers to ensure that learning is meaningful, developmentally appropriate, and prepares students for their post-secondary pathways. Each course framework consists of pedagogical ideas, student learning competencies, assessment checklists, and supplementary resources.

Members of the System Special Education team build capacity by offering professional development and training to Special Education Classroom Teachers, Educational Assistants, Elective Teachers, and Special Education Department Heads. During the 2024-2025 school year, support was offered on the following topics: alternative and modified curriculum, IEP writing, navigating PowerSchool SpecEd software, assessment tools, preparing for Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) meetings, and evaluating learning expectations for report writing on the Alternative Report Card or Provincial Report Card. Secondary special class staff participated in a full-day workshop examining and implementing the Complex Communicator Guidebook which was developed by BHNCD SB Speech-Language Pathologists. Staff learned about modes of communication and how student communication can be expanded using many different methods. A collaborative approach was used to develop student “communication portraits” to better understand each student’s unique communication profile.

Secondary special education programs provide students with the opportunity to learn and practice essential employability and life skills. This year, students participated in a number of community and in-school work experiences. Some community work experiences included Canadian Tire, Sobeys, FreshCo, Farm Boy, daycare centres, pet stores, bakeries, restaurants, garden stores and elementary schools. In-school experiences included practice with employability kits, working in the school cafeteria, preparing and serving the Breakfast Program, and assisting custodial staff. Skills learned from these experiences are essential for success in many post-secondary pathways (e.g., employment, continuing education, and for independent/assisted living).

Through Job Links, students were able to participate in certification programs to develop skills including food handler and first aid.



During the 2024-2025 school year, emphasis was placed on helping families make informed decisions about secondary special education programs and transitions to post-secondary opportunities by:

- Meeting with families and arranging in-person tours
- Providing informational documents to help families differentiate between the special education programs offered (PAL, Community Living, and Job Skills), and their graduation outcomes
- Hosting an information night for families of grade 8 students considering the Job Skills program, to highlight key aspects of the program, including options for non-credit and credit bearing courses, preparation for entering the world of work (e.g., resume writing, interview skills) and opportunities for work experience
- Connecting families with community agencies to support the transition to various post-secondary pathways

Speech and Language

Speech & Language Services has provided a variety of supports to students and staff throughout the 2024–2025 school year. Aligned with this year’s Speech-Language & Audiology Canada (SAC) theme, *“S-LPs and Audiologists: Doing More Than You Think,”* the Speech-Language Pathology (S-LP) team advanced inclusive practices and strengthened communication supports across the district.

Recognizing that communication is foundational to learning, relationships, and inclusion, the S-LP team worked collaboratively to ensure all students, particularly those with communication challenges, had access to timely, effective, and appropriate support.

Advancing a Tiered Model of Support

The S-LP team deepened its implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), reviewing and refining service pathways to enhance access at the universal (Tier 1) and targeted (Tier 2) levels. Emphasis was placed on early, classroom-embedded interventions to reduce reliance on intensive Tier 3 supports. A restructured referral process for language concerns encouraged educators and SERTs to trial classroom strategies before proceeding to formal assessments.

A new class-based consent model was also introduced into secondary special education programs, allowing educators to access general strategies, visual supports, and programming tools for all learners. This model was established to increase access of services at the Tier 1 level.

Expansion to Kindergarten Year 1

Following a shift in Preschool Speech and Language (PSL) services, Board S-LPs assumed responsibility for Kindergarten Year 1 students. In collaboration with Lansdowne Children's Centre, the team supported transitions from PSL to school-based services, reviewed reports, consulted with educators, and implemented classroom strategies. This ensured continuity of care from the outset of their educational journey.

Supporting Inclusive Education and Building Capacity

Two Board-wide professional development days were led by the S-LP team, focusing on supporting complex communicators and building capacity in Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). In collaboration with the Technology Access Clinic (TAC), elementary Educational Assistants engaged in a full day of AAC training on January 20, 2025. At the secondary level, targeted sessions were provided on January 30, 2025, by the Board S-LPs and other members of the Special Education Team to Department Heads, Personal Active Learning (PAL) and Community Living teachers, and EAs, using the *Simple View of Complex Communication* framework.



Communicated
WHAT DOES COMMUNICATION MEAN TO YOU?
200 responses



Story Champs Support in Kindergarten

The team continued their implementation of job-embedded professional development using the *Story Champs*® narrative language program in 17 classrooms. Educators and S-LPs collaborated on:

- **Screening & Assessment:** Training in administration and interpretation of oral language and early literacy screeners
- **Instructional Cycles:**
 - Cycle 1: Story grammar elements
 - Cycle 2: Complex sentence structures
- **Gradual Release Model:** Transition from S-LP-led instruction to educator-led implementation
- **Differentiated Instruction:** Multi-sensory strategies supported a wide range of learner needs
- **Multi-Tiered Support Model:**
 - **Tier 1:** Whole-class narrative-based lessons
 - **Tier 2:** Targeted interventions for students identified as at risk for oral language delays
 - **Tier 3:** Individual/Small Group Instruction for students who received support in the 2023-2024 school year and still identified at-risk post-intervention

Complex Communicator Guidebook

To support students with complex communication needs, the S-LP team developed the *Complex Communicator Guidebook*, a comprehensive resource containing evidence-based strategies, partner communication tools, and visual supports. This new resource was aimed at building educator capacity and fostering inclusive communication practices across the district. This initiative reflects the team's commitment to honouring student dignity and supporting diverse modes of expression.

Designed for teachers, EAs, SERTs, and administrators, the guidebook promotes inclusive communication and supports the development of individualized communication portraits.

To complement the guidebook, additional Tier 1 visual supports were developed to promote inclusive communication environments. These included:

- Communication boards and books
- Routine visuals and adapted prayers
- Nutrition break placemats
- Theme boards and school location labels
- Sensory room choice visuals

A curated collection of visuals was compiled into a sample resource book and was provided to all schools. This resource offered a wide range of adaptable visuals for schools to select from and modify based on individual student needs. Transition Planning Funds were allocated to produce and equitably distribute these materials across all elementary schools, ensuring that educators had access to consistent tools to plan and collaborate effectively for students with complex communication needs.



Speech Support Initiatives

To address increased demand for speech assessments, the Board partnered with HearSay Speech and Hearing Centre to complete assessments for referral to Lansdowne Children's Centre's School-Based Rehabilitation Services (SBRS).

Additionally, SBRS piloted a new service delivery model offering in-centre therapy to kindergarten students on school waitlists. These small group sessions, led by Communication Disorders Assistants under S-LP supervision, addressed gaps created by shifts in preschool speech therapy provision.

Team Expansion

The team welcomed a fourth S-LP in Spring 2025, enhancing the team's capacity to balance caseloads and provide more responsive and collaborative supports.

Students Supported

The following student-directed services were provided this school year:

- Comprehensive assessments (i.e., full language evaluation) were conducted for 8 students, with follow-up consultation services provided.

- Targeted assessments (i.e., supporting one area of communication such as speech sound production, voice, fluency, narrative language) were conducted for 191 students.
- Consultation services were offered to 167 students with *complex communication needs*, including non/minimally speaking students. This involved individualized support, implementation of communication systems, and collaboration with educators and other professionals.
- Consultation services were provided to 34 students with reduced understanding and/or expression of language, early literacy difficulties, and/or speech challenges. This included educating the school team on the students' communication profile, developing home and school programming, IEP development (e.g., goals and accommodations), and collaboration with all team members.
- Targeted intervention (i.e., through narrative language pilot program, *Story Champs*®) was provided for 56 students who were identified by their classroom educators as at-risk of developing oral language difficulties.
- Transitioned service for 124 students from preschool to school board Speech & Language Services
- Collaborated with schools, families and/or community partners to support the transition for 50 students with complex communication needs entering the school system.
- Referred 126 students to School Based Rehabilitation Services for speech support and 19 students to the Technology Access Clinic for augmentative and alternative communication support.

Professional Development and Innovation

Ongoing professional development continued to inform and elevate the team's practice. Key learning opportunities included:

- SAC School Services Symposium 2025: Attended a variety of learning sessions related to communication, language and literacy practices in school settings
- ReadTopia: Engaged in learning about supporting literacy for students with complex needs
- Coaching to Inclusion Conference: Participated in learning related to inclusive practices

These initiatives will further enhance the team's tiered service approach and support inclusive communication and literacy practices across schools.

Ongoing collaboration was also fostered with diverse S-LPs across Ontario, facilitated by active involvement in the Association of Chief Speech-Language, as well as the S-LPs for Complex Communication Needs/Augmentative and Alternative Communication (CCN/AAC) in Ontario School Boards. Speech & Language Services were also invited to share about the board-wide *Story Champs*® project within the school board as well as multiple other school boards in the province.

Recognition: Champions of Inclusion

The S-LP team was honoured with the 2025 Champions of Inclusion Award at this year's *Coaching for Inclusion* conference. This recognition celebrates the team's outstanding contributions to advancing inclusive communication practices across the district. Guided by the belief that every student, regardless of communication ability, deserves to be heard, supported, and included, the team continues to partner with families, educators, and community agencies to remove barriers and build pathways to participation.




Gifted Education

Gifted Programming should promote the following skills: higher-level critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, communication, leadership, and creativity. During the 2024-25 academic year, Gifted Supplementary Modules were offered in terms 1 and 2 through Special Education Services to provide enrichment opportunities and challenges to extend learning and leadership skills to students identified in the area of Intellectual: Giftedness. Students from grades 4 to 8 were brought together in person to experience extended learning on a variety of topics. Twenty-six students participated in the 2024-2025 Supplementary Gifted Modules. There were 14 schools represented across the board. The students were divided into two groups, grades 4-6 and grades 7-8.

District Updates

- GIFTED 2024-25

Composition of the Program



Participation from Brant	Participation from Haldimand	Participation from Norfolk
8 Schools 69%	2 Schools 12%	4 Schools 19%
Grade 4s: 2	Grade 4s: 1	Grade 4s: 0
Grade 5s: 6	Grade 5s: 0	Grade 5s: 3
Grade 6s: 4	Grade 6s: 1	Grade 6s: 0
Grade 7s: 4	Grade 7s: 0	Grade 7s: 0
Grade 8s: 2	Grade 8s: 1	Grade 8s: 2

Supplementary Gifted Dates 2024-2025 TERM 1

Grade 4 – 6 Modules		Location of Module	
Stratford Film Festival: Wendy and Peter Pan	Wednesday, October 23, 2024	9:00 am to 5:00 pm	Drop off and pick up at St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre Avon Theatre, Stratford*
Junk Drawer Races: Cardboard Car Race, Paper Glider	Friday, November 1, Tuesday, November 5 and Thursday, November 21, 2024	9:00 am to 3:00 pm	St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre (SMCLC)*
Film Camp in a Box (virtual home school)	Tuesday, November 19, 2024 (virtual pre-meeting) 9:30 am	9:30 am Virtual	Virtual – from home school
The Museum Kitchener	Tuesday, November 12, 2024	9:00 am to 3:00 pm	St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre* Kitchener by bus
Film Camp in a Box	Tuesday, December 3, 2024	9:00 am to 3:00 pm	St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre*
The Museum	Tuesday, January 14, 2025	9:00 am to 12:00 pm	St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre*
Scientists in School	Tuesday, January 14, 2025	1:00 pm to 3:00 pm	St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre*
* All drop offs and pick-ups will be at St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre, 455 Colborne Street East, Brantford, Ontario *			
Grade 7-8 Modules		Location of Module	
Stratford Film Festival: Wendy and Peter Pan	Wednesday, October 23, 2024	9:00 am to 5:00 pm	Drop off and pick up at St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre Avon Theatre, Stratford*
Junk Drawer Races: Hydraulic Cranes	Friday, November 1, Tuesday, November 19, and Friday, November 29, 2024	9:00 am to 3:00 pm	St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre*
Film Camp in a Box (Virtual from SMCLC)	Tuesday, November 19, 2024 (virtual pre-meeting) 9:30 am	9:30 am Virtual	Virtual – from SMCLC
The Museum Kitchener	Tuesday, November 12, 2024	9:00 am to 3:00 pm	St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre* Kitchener by bus
Film Camp in a Box	Tuesday, December 3, 2024	9:00 am to 3:00 pm	St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre*
The Museum	Tuesday, January 14, 2025	9:00 am to 3:00 pm	St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre*
Scientists in School	Tuesday, January 14, 2025	1:00 pm to 3:00 pm	St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre*
* All drop offs and pick-ups will be at St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre, 455 Colborne Street East, Brantford, Ontario *			

Supplementary Gifted Dates 2024-2025 TERM 2

Grade 4-6 Modules		Location of Module	
STEM (St. Leo's School) Grades 4-5	Friday, February 21, 2025	9:00 am to 3:00 pm	**Drop off and pick up at St. Leo's School, 233 Memorial Dr., Brantford
Film Camp in a Box (virtual home school)	(virtual pre-meeting) at home school	March 4 – 9:15 am – 9:30 am home school	Virtual – from home school
Film Camp in a Box	Thursday, March 20, 2025	9:00 am to 3:00 pm	St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre*
The Museum Kitchener	Wednesday, April 2, 2025	9:00 am to 3:00 pm	St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre* Kitchener by bus
The Warplane Museum	Tuesday, May 20, 2025, Warplane Museum	9:00 am to 3:00 pm	St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre*
* All drop offs and pick-ups will be at St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre, 455 Colborne Street East, Brantford, Ontario, except below. *			
** Drop off for STEM days is St. Leo's School, 233 Memorial Dr., Brantford**			

Grade 7-8 Modules		Location of Module	
STEM (St. Leo's School) Grades 6-8	Wednesday, February 26, 2025	9:00 am to 3:00 pm	**Drop off and pick up at St. Leo's School, 233 Memorial Dr., Brantford
Film Camp in a Box (Virtual from SMCLC)	(virtual pre-meeting) at home school	March 4 – 9:15 am – 9:30 am home school	Virtual – from home school
Film Camp in a Box	Thursday, March 20, 2025	9:00 am to 3:00 pm	St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre*
The Museum Kitchener	Wednesday, April 2, 2025	9:00 am to 3:00 pm	St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre* Kitchener by bus
The Warplane Museum	Tuesday, May 20, 2025, Warplane Museum	9:00 am to 3:00 pm	St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre*
* All drop offs and pick-ups will be at St. Mary Catholic Learning Centre, 455 Colborne Street East, Brantford, Ontario, except below. *			
** Drop off for STEM days is St. Leo's School, 233 Memorial Dr., Brantford**			

Gifted Programming Report: 2024–2025 Academic Year

Gifted programming is designed to foster the development of higher-level critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, communication, leadership, and creativity. During the 2024–2025 academic year, Special Education Services offered Gifted Supplementary Modules in Terms 1 and 2 to provide enrichment opportunities for students identified with Intellectual: Giftedness.

These modules brought together 26 students from Grades 4 to 8, representing 14 schools across the board. The majority of sessions were attended by the full group, with the exception of two STEM-focused days, which were divided into Grades 4–6 and Grades 7–8 to better tailor the learning experience.

Program Overview

A total of 15 modules were delivered throughout the year, with 14 attended by the full group. Highlights of the program included:

- Stratford Festival Experience**

The year began with a group excursion to the Stratford Festival. Students participated in a workshop with professional actors and attended a performance of *Wendy and Peter Pan*.

- **Junk Drawer Races – Skills Ontario**

Over two full days, students engaged in hands-on engineering challenges. Grades 4–5 designed and built **Cardboard Car Racers**, while Grades 6–8 constructed **Hydraulic Cranes**.

- **Film Camp in a Box**

In December and March, students collaborated on short films using Claymation and silent film techniques. These sessions covered storytelling, scriptwriting, pitching, camera work, editing, and industry insights.

- **The Museum, Kitchener**

In November, students visited The Museum, explored the Maker Space, and designed **Bottle Rocket Launchers**. In January, The Museum team and Scientists in School facilitated a follow-up session at SMCLC, featuring science and coding activities.

- **BHNCDSB STEM Team Day**

Both groups spent a day designing and building **cars and drones**, applying engineering and design thinking skills. Students needed to follow a schematic drawing and solve problems along the way.

- **Final Module – Warplane Heritage Museum**

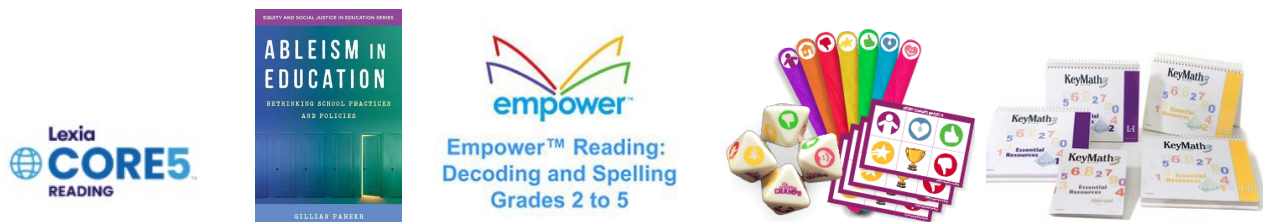
The culminating experience took place at the Warplane Heritage Museum in Mount Hope. Students worked in collaborative teams to build and test **flight-worthy drones** and participated in a guided tour and discussion about aviation history.



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Community of Practice Meetings

The 2024-2025 academic school year offered Special Education Resource Teachers (SERTs) and Secondary Special Education Department Heads professional development through five virtual and three in-person Community of Practice (CoP) meetings to enhance teacher practice and further support student achievement.



The meetings provided professional development and support to SERTs in key areas such as:

- Role of the SERT – duties, responsibilities, Tier 3 support, and accountability.
- PowerSchool and PowerSchool SpecEd – updates, curriculum changes, OnSIS reporting, review of Ministry and Board standards, accessing current and new documents in PowerSchool SpecEd.
- Individual Education Plan (IEP) – development, writing, reporting, and Jordan's Principle component.
- Transition Plans – internal IEP audit, key findings, updates, and next steps.
- Identification Placement Review Committee (IPRC) – process and required paperwork; 8 to 9 transitions, mainstream vs. special class considerations.
- Supporting Grade 8 to 9 Transitions – best practices and supports.
- Transition Navigator Resources – entry to school, within school, elementary to secondary, and post secondary resources, supports, release time, services, and summer visits.
- Secondary Special Education Programs and placement options.
- EDWIN – professional development on resources and supports.
- EQAO – accommodations, exemptions and the IEP.
- EQAO and OISE Research – best practices, impactful changes, and data-driven results.
- Lexia – program structure, best practices and leveraging data reports for intervention in Core5 Reading and PowerUp Literacy through interactive sessions facilitated by Greenfield Learning.
- Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) Services – shared relevant/new information regarding the Ontario Autism Program (OAP) and Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA), ABA model of delivery (supports and services), Entry to School Program, Student Safety Plans and Data Collection methods, escalation plans, and Sonderly.
- Special Equipment Amount (SEA) – updates, student training process, SEA on the IEP.
- Speech and Language Services – continued implementation of Story Champs, referrals, complex communicators, Board services, TAC, building language supports, TD Snap, Boardmaker, Complex Communicator Guidebook, and Champions of Inclusion award.
- Speech Screens – HearSay process, supports, and services.
- Considerations for external, third party supports – protocols and expectations.
- Special Olympics Ontario Summer Games – presentation and volunteer opportunities.
- Curriculum modifications and IEPs – specifically for language and mathematics.
- Key Math – training, administration, IEPs, progress monitoring, guidelines, and best practices.
- Orientation and Mobility – updates, O&M instructor role and referral process, deafblind community services.

- Gifted Program –information and updates about virtual gifted modules, as well as gifted screening.
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services – soundfield system repairs and troubleshooting guide.
- Secondary Special Programs – process, programs, student candidate criteria, classroom tours and program inquiries.
- Have A Go – consent process, eligibility, and event details.
- Sacramental Retreats – providing resources, activities, and opportunities for fellowship to students preparing for the Sacraments of Reconciliation, First Eucharist, or Confirmation.
- Student Support and Mental Health Services – whole school approach, Student Support Plan, Wayfinder, and School Mental Health Ontario.
- Medical Care Plans, Plans of Care and Essential Highlight Forms.
- Entry to School Case Conferences – school vs. system-level, process, protocol, reminders, and purpose.
- Community partner updates (Lansdowne and School Based Rehabilitation Services – OT and PT).
- Ontario Student Record documentation.
- Case Conferences – process, documentation, responsibilities, and minute taking.
- Modified Days – memorandum, process, and considerations.
- French Exemptions – policy and forms for initial requests and renewals for 2024-2025 school year.
- Nelson Psychological Assessment Reports – acquiring assessments, report shares and next steps.
- Kneer Psychological Assessment Team – considerations for cognitive testing, responsibilities, referral, process, report shares, next steps.
- Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement – administration tips and reminders, strengths/needs/strategies resources.
- Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) – grade 4 exemption considerations, training, administration.
- School Based Rehabilitation Services – referral process for occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and speech-language services.
- Amethyst Demonstration School – programs, facility, process, and eligibility.
- Lansdowne Children’s Centre Occupational Therapy Support Model and processes.
- Academic Planner updates.
- NVCI – training for all SERTs, and Safe Schools Incident Reporting.
- Principal/Vice-Principal Special Education Channel and access to resources.
- Empower Reading Program from Sick Kids – training, information, criteria, updates, success stories, assessment tracking, consents.
- Specialized Transportation Database –updates and training from Transportation Services.
- Spectrum Abilities Program – criteria, eligibility, goals, updates, and programming.
- Learning Strategies Class – criteria, eligibility, and goals, updates, and programming.
- Programming for Complex Behaviours – resource and guidebook.
- EA Allocation Process – process, meetings, student support rubrics, and criteria for advocacy.
- SERT Allocation Process.

District priorities were shared with SERTs and included:

- **Board Spiritual Theme – Pilgrims of Hope** – supporting the faith formation of students and staff by emphasizing that transformation through service is a call to put our faith into action. We are called to be part of the solution by inviting us to understand ourselves as a people on a journey – not standing still, not looking only inward, but moving forward together in faith, with hope guiding our steps.
- **Ableism Research Continued** – Guide our work through critical reflections on Special Education Systems, understanding disability, enabling vs. disabling systems, streaming, implications of special

education programming and modifications from an early age, ableism, flaws in assessment tools and practices, and the disproportionality of marginalized groups.

- **Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT) – The Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT)** was administered to all participating Grade 4 students this year. The CogAT is a group-administered assessment designed to measure students' reasoning and problem-solving abilities across three key areas: Verbal, Quantitative, and Nonverbal domains. It is not a test of what students have learned in school (academic achievement), but rather how they think and process information—skills that are critical for learning new material.
 - **Verbal Battery** assesses reasoning with words and language, including vocabulary, verbal analogies, and sentence completion.
 - **Quantitative Battery** focuses on numerical reasoning, such as understanding number relationships, patterns, and problem-solving using numbers.
 - **Nonverbal Battery** evaluates spatial and figural reasoning using shapes and patterns, making it less dependent on language and helpful for identifying strengths in students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

The Grade 4 CogAT is used to help identify gifted students, to inform instructional planning, and to better understand each child's learning profile. The results can highlight strengths and areas for growth that may not be evident through traditional academic assessments. This year, all Grade 4 teachers were trained on how to administer the CogAT in October 2024 which involved 802 junior students.

- **The Empower Reading: Decoding and Spelling Program** continued to be implemented for all schools but 2, by 24 instructors during the 2024-2025 school year. This Tier 3 program is designed to address the academic challenges faced by children who have or are at risk of having a reading disability. It is a multi-component intervention program designed by SickKids that teaches struggling readers effective strategies for decoding, spelling words, and understanding text, equipping them to build confidence in their reading skills, expand their levels of independence, and empower them to become active readers.
- **Lexia:** Built on the science of reading, Lexia® Core5® Reading is a research-proven program that accelerates the development of literacy skills for students of all abilities, helping them make the critical shift from learning to read to reading to learn. 300 licenses are monitored across the district for students in grades 2 to 5 (Lexia Core5) and grades 6 to 8 (Lexia PowerUp) with demonstrated needs in the area of reading to ensure they are meeting usage targets daily and acquiring growth through the implementation of supplemental lessons and interventions.
- **Partnership with Bartimaeus Incorporated:** Partnering with outside behaviour specialists has enabled us to support students in reaching their full potential by addressing dysregulation and complex behaviours that interfere with learning and achievement. These behaviour specialists have supported school teams in situations that require interventions with students experiencing moderate to extreme behavioural, emotional, psychological and developmental challenges both in the school and in the community. With their support, we have been able to continue to create and maintain safe and positive school environments.
- **Story Champs:** *Story Champs*® is an evidence-based program that uses a systematic and explicit approach to promote the development of oral language skills, such as vocabulary, sentence structure and oral narratives. Strong oral language skills are an essential component to later reading and writing success. Story Champs is currently in Year 2 of a 3-Year phase roll out across the district. For a total of

twelve weeks, Board Speech-Language Pathologists work alongside Kindergarten educators through a gradual release model (i.e., I Do – We Do – You Do) to provide whole classroom support as well as targeted small group intervention to target oral language through storytelling.

- **KeyMath-3:** KeyMath-3 is a diagnostic assessment tool that assesses a full spectrum of essential math concepts and skills, including a comprehensive math instruction and intervention program for students in grade 3 to 12. KeyMath-3 resources have been provided to every school in our board and Special Education Resource Teachers have received formal training on how to administer the assessment, interpret results, plan and deliver intervention lessons to fill in gaps and monitor progress. Students eligible to receive this diagnostic assessment must have significant difficulty acquiring age-appropriate numeracy skills, despite receiving differentiated instruction and universal design for learning in the classroom as well as tiered supports. The KeyMath-3 assessment has also been administered to determine the appropriateness and precision of the modified programming for students on an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and to adjust the expectations on the IEP as required.
- **Math Modification Process:** In response to last year's IEP audit, the Superintendent of Special Education and Student Achievement Leader for Special Education continue to oversee all requests to place students on a modified math program (below grade level) via an Individualized Education Plan by analyzing:
 - tier 1 to 3 supports in the classroom
 - use of UDL and DI strategies
 - the accommodations in place
 - progress monitoring
 - ongoing assessments and data
 - whether all required steps have been taken
 - required formal assessments to be completed to pinpoint acceptable areas to modify
 - evidence of documented conversations with parents informing them of the implications of being on a modified math program
 - the length of time that a student has attempted grade-level modifications

It should be noted that although the district grew in enrollment by 10%, modified math IEPs dropped from 319 in 2024-2025 to 247 in 2024-2025.

- **Below-Grade Level Modification Process for all Subjects:** In response to last year's IEP audit, the Superintendent of Special Education and Student Achievement Leader for Special Education continue to oversee all requests to place students on a modified program (below grade level) via an Individualized Education Plan by reviewing the supports, data, and information outlined above in order to minimize the potential impact of strictly professional judgement.
- **Self-Contained Classes: Primary Learning Strategies Class:** The Primary Learning Strategies Class opened to support students with an identification of Behaviour by allowing them to participate in a one-to-two-year program focused on developing skills in self-regulation, social skills, communication skills, independence skills, and academic skills. After year one, six students were enrolled in the program. Two students will transition back to their homeschool where the students will be able to apply and generalize their new learning (in the areas of coping, stress management, resiliency, self-advocacy, independence, executive functioning, and self-regulation) to their usual mainstream classroom environment. After year 1, three students will remain in the program with two new students joining the program.
- **Self-Contained Classes: Spectrum Abilities Program:** The Junior Spectrum Abilities Class began this year to support students with an identification of Communication: Autism by allowing them to learn in a highly specialized learning environment. These students had an opportunity to develop their academic skills, social skills, communication skills, self-regulation skills, independence skills, and other

goals outlined in their Individual Education Plan through explicit instruction around emotion and behaviour regulation and a modified learning environment routed in ABA principles. The classroom is designed to provide a higher level of structured monitoring, individual attention, and planning around their particular learning style and modifications to the environment including specialized resources and supports. After year one, five students will remain in the program for the 2025 -2026 school year.

New SERT Training Program

This professional development opportunity focuses on providing new Special Education Resource Teachers with in-depth training and knowledge around the role and responsibilities of a school-level Special Education Resource Teacher. Professional development was provided to seven SERTs who were new to the role in the 2024-2025 school year. Training included five full-day in-person sessions, one of which included training in the administration of the Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement, and another in the administration, scoring and intervention for the KeyMath-3 assessment/intervention tool. Teacher practice was enhanced through formal training, opportunities for small-group activities and discussions, and 1:1 mentorship that focused on writing an Individual Education Plan. The following topics were covered through in-person discussion and training, and/or were addressed through resources, guidelines and materials that were included in a SERT reference binder:

- Individual Education Plan and Transition Plan development process.
- IPRC process (Initial and Review; system and school level).
- Special Equipment Amount (SEA) claims.
- Developing SERT and EA schedules.
- PowerSchool and PowerSchool SpecEd.
- Structured Learning.
- Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement training.
- KeyMath-3 training
- Scoring the “Writing Samples” subtest of the WJ-IV Tests of Achievement.
- HELP (Hawaii Early Learning Profile) alternative curriculum and assessment tool.
- Updating student information forms (Safety/Seizure/Medical Plans, Essential Highlights forms).
- Locating resources in the SERT channel in Teams.
- Best practices for the Ontario Student Record (OSR).
- Updating assessment data on IEPs.
- Accurate recording of student data in the Ontario Student Information System.
- Safety Plans.



Professional Development for Lead and Consultants

This year, our Student Achievement Leader for Special Education along with all System Special Education Consultants participated in three impactful professional learning conferences: *Coaching to Inclusion* (London), *OCASE* (Mississauga), and *SERCC* (London). Each experience strengthened their capacity to lead inclusive, equitable, and supportive learning environments.

A powerful and emotional thread ran through both *Coaching to Inclusion* and *SERCC*, centered on the story of Joe Lambert. His firsthand account of institutionalized schooling for individuals with disabilities illuminated the lasting harm of exclusion and segregation. His message served as a compelling call to action - reminding educators to center dignity, compassion, and belonging in all aspects of our work.

Coaching to Inclusion also emphasized peer-mediated supports as a foundation for inclusive school communities. Presentations highlighted the importance of intentional peer interactions, structured support systems, and student empowerment. Programs like *School on Track* reinforced the critical role of relationships in fostering student success and well-being.

At the *OCASE* conference, staff gained legal and structural insights into special education leadership. Sessions led by legal counsel offered practical guidance on the IPRC process and the Duty to Accommodate. Additional presentations explored systemic change, inclusive policy development, and brain-based approaches to supporting students with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, including Denise Kollee's *Think Brain, Not Behavior*.

The *SERCC* conference focused on neurodiversity, empowerment, and inclusive programming. Dr. Adam Davies' keynote challenged deficit-based models and promoted strength-based approaches. Sessions explored effective assessment and programming for students with intellectual disabilities and emphasized building transferable life skills in secondary classrooms. These insights align with the Safe and Supportive Schools framework, promoting autonomy and well-being for complex learners.

Collectively, these professional learning experiences have deepened our ability to lead with empathy, apply inclusive frameworks, and support school teams in creating environments where all learners can thrive. The knowledge gained continues to inform our practices and reinforce our commitment to equity and inclusion across the system.

Educational Assistants' Professional Development

Based on the direction provided by the Ministry of Education and on the needs across the system, some newly designed sessions were created to further support the work of Educational Assistants. Additionally, Educational Assistants also participated in board-wide professional development day training which focused on the following key topics.

Curriculum - September 13, 2024

Educational Assistants had an opportunity to plan and prepare for the students they support by engaging in some of the following tasks:

- developing activities to accompany any established alternative programming goals
- developing any social stories to accommodate skills that are posing early challenges such as: sharing, transitions, washroom routines, etc.
- creating tracking/data collection documentation
- creating agreed upon communication tools to travel between home and school.
- making a list of resources/EA lending library materials/PPE that may be required moving forward
- creating calming/sensory spaces/work task areas within the classroom environment
- creating an “Essential Highlight” form based on what they know about their learner
- updating and revising any “Occasional EA Support Plans” for causal educational assistants
- preparing materials using Boardmaker or work task resources (e.g., Task Galore) for structured learning tasks, visual supports, and other hands-on activities
- preparing materials for the students they serve in the building as required or as assigned by the classroom teacher

System Faith Day - October 8, 2024

This site-based day provided an opportunity for staff to come together and launch the Board’s Spiritual Theme for the 2024–2025 school year: *“Catholic Education: Pilgrims of Hope.”* The day began with all staff gathering as a community of faith, followed by encouraging words on the “Year of Prayer” by Dr. Josephine Lombardi. Her address emphasized the theme of hope and explored how the Lord’s Prayer can serve as a guide for living. The day also included moments for personal reflection and faith-based activities, thoughtfully led by school administrators.

NVCI; Health & Safety; Various Topics - November 15, 2024

Select Educational Assistants participated in a full day of Nonviolent Crisis Intervention (NVCI) training, led by certified staff. The NVCI program (3rd Edition) is recognized globally as the standard for crisis prevention and intervention. It equips educators with proactive strategies and practical skills to safely and effectively manage challenging situations. At the heart of the program is the commitment to ensuring the care, welfare, safety, and security of everyone involved in a crisis.

Participants learned preventive strategies, de-escalation techniques, and effective communication skills. They also received instruction on physical interventions—such as disengagement and holding techniques—which are to be used only as a last resort when an individual poses a safety risk. The training was delivered by four members of the Special Education Team. This year, the training model transitioned from a blended half-day format to a full-day, in-person classroom model. In alignment with this shift, relevant policies and forms were updated to reflect current language and safety practices. A new document was also introduced to help school teams record discussions and outline next steps following the use of safety interventions.

Remaining Educational Assistants participated in professional development around mandatory “Slip, Trip, and Fall Training” as dictated by the Occupational Health and Safety Act. This was followed by “Verbal Intervention Training” provided by the Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI). This training provided employees with the skills to

identify, respond to, and verbally de-escalate challenging behaviour in a safe, hands-off manner. In addition, each Educational Assistant was required to join one of the professional learning sessions below:

IEPs 101 – Educational Assistants had a chance to explore the Individual Education Plan (IEP) as it relates to their role. They then investigated relevant sections of the IEP and discussed how to interpret and integrate them into their work with students.

SMoRRRES: Getting “Some More” Out of Communication Partners

Participants learned effective communication partner strategies to support students who use Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) systems.

Supporting All Learners: Exceptionalities, Student Profiles, and Inclusive Strategies

This presentation focused on understanding and supporting students with diverse exceptionalities.

Participants explored a variety of student profiles to better understand the range of learning needs present in today's classrooms. Practical strategies and tools to foster an inclusive, equitable learning environment where every student has the opportunity to succeed were offered. Other key topics included how to support:

- Accommodations
- Differentiated Instruction
- Universal Design for Learning

Tips for Using a Chromebook and Boardmaker

In this session, participants learned some tips, tricks, and features that would help them use their Chromebook more effectively and efficiently. Additionally, they reviewed Boardmaker basics and learned how to save and print activities from their Chromebook.

Understanding Cortical Vision Impairment

Participants engaged in a presentation on CVI, where they explored its impact on daily life and learning. Conditions such as traumatic brain injury, stroke, congenital infections, and neurological disorders can lead to CVI. EAs heard from experts about innovative strategies and discovered how we can empower individuals affected by this condition.

Elopement: Why do they Wander? Why do they Run? How do I Stop Them?

Participants had an opportunity to expand their knowledge around students who elope. They learned how to identify and use appropriate proactive strategies and function-based interventions to support the safety of all students.

Building Language Together - January 20, 2025

All BHNCDSE elementary educational assistants participated in a full day of in-person professional learning at the Marriott TownePlace Suites in Brantford, focused on advancing Special Education goals. The training aimed to enhance instructional practices in oral language, while fostering collaboration with community partners. With a growing number of students identified as complex communicators, the session emphasized practical strategies to support nonverbal and minimally verbal students through visual supports and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems. Katie Angle, a Speech-Language Pathologist from Hamilton Health Sciences' Technology Access Clinic, led participants through an engaging session focused on key strategies for supporting communication. Topics included building communication and interaction skills, using visuals to structure routines and support language development, and effectively implementing Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). The session aimed to promote equity, empower students, and strengthen collaboration among staff, families, and community agencies.

Complex Communicator Guidebook - January 30, 2025

Secondary Educational Assistants, PAL core teachers, Community Living core teachers, and Special Education Department Heads participated in a professional development session hosted by the Special Education department at each of their respective school locations. The focus of the session was on supporting students with complex communication needs through the use of the newly developed Complex Communicator Guidebook. Facilitated collaboratively by the school's Speech Language Pathologist and System Special Education Consultant, the session provided educators and support staff with tools, strategies, and capacity-building opportunities to better support students who express themselves through a range of communication methods. Staff explored Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) practices and neurodiversity-affirming approaches, with an emphasis on fostering inclusive classrooms where all student voices are valued. The session also introduced a new communication support model, which empowers educators to collaborate directly with Speech Language Pathologists. Department Heads were present to ensure consistent implementation of the guidebook's strategies across their schools.

Mental Health & Well-Being Day - April 11, 2025

On Friday, April 11, 2025, the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board held a system-wide Mental Health & Well-Being Professional Development Day, aligned with its commitment to fostering mentally healthy and inclusive learning environments. The day began with a keynote presentation by *Dr. Kristen McLeod* on Trauma-Informed Schools, providing staff with strategies to support students impacted by trauma. Educators and school-based staff then engaged in reflective activities using the *Mentally Healthy Classrooms Reflection Resource* and the *Leading Mentally Healthy Schools Audit Resource*, which informed both school-level Student Achievement Plans and the Board's 2025-26 Mental Health Action Plan.

In the afternoon, the focus shifted to staff wellness. Sessions included an exploration of self-regulation, an overview of wellness resources provided by the Board's *Wellness and Abilities Department*, and participation in self-care activities designed to promote well-being and community among staff. The day concluded with a dedicated time block encouraging staff to take actionable steps to prioritize their own mental health. The PD Day supported the Board's ongoing efforts to build trauma-informed, mentally healthy classrooms while promoting staff resilience and well-being.

NVCI Training & Resource Development - June 6, 2025

On June 6, 2025, the Special Education Department organized Nonviolent Crisis Intervention (NVCI) training for selected permanent and casual Educational Assistants (EAs). EAs who were not required to update their training, remained in their home schools to support staff and students by assisting with report card attachments, updating data and support plans, preparing transition materials, and developing visual supports and structured learning resources.

Nonviolent Crisis Intervention

The Nonviolent Crisis Intervention training program (3rd Edition) is considered the worldwide standard for crisis prevention and intervention training. The program provides educators with the proactive strategies and skills to safely and effectively respond and handle difficult situations. The core of the program is learning how to provide for the *care, welfare, safety, and security* of all those who are involved in a crisis situation. Preventive strategies, de-escalation skills and communication skills are taught along with learning the physical interventions, including disengagement, and holding skills, to be implemented as a last resort, when a person is engaging in unsafe behaviour. The training is provided by 4 trainers within the Special Education Team. This year, the training model has shifted from a Blended half-day model to a full day, in person Classroom Training Model. Relevant policies and forms have been updated to include language and safety interventions, and a new document has been created to record school team discussions and next steps following use of safety

interventions. Our board took a significant step forward by delivering Verbal Intervention Training to staff across all the schools in our board, reinforcing our commitment to safe and supportive learning environments.

Educational Assistants' Lending Library

The Educational Assistants' Lending Library provides the opportunity for Educational Assistants (EAs) to borrow materials which may not be available at their school. There are currently more than 400 items available, with items ranging from professional reading to children's books, toys and games, to sensory and cause-and-effect materials. New resources are purchased based on needs arising from areas of system focus, and on suggestions from EAs. 2024-2025 was our first full year using Insignia, a digital library catalogue. This new system enabled users to view and request items online and allowed for tracking of items which are out on loan.

SPECIAL PROJECTS/EVENTS

Inclusionary Practices

Transition to School

Transition into School (Kindergarten)

We recognize how critical the transition into kindergarten is for many of our young students who have specific needs. The partnership between parents and agencies can assist with getting to 'know our learners' and further promote a seamless transition. This process was enhanced by the following initiatives:

Information Sharing by Community Agencies for Entry into School

'Entry into School' meetings were held with Haldimand Norfolk REACH personnel beginning in February 2025, where students with various needs were presented. The Student Achievement Lead for Special Education and a System Special Education Consultant attended and dialogued about each student to gain a better understanding of their profiles and to initiate transition planning. Lansdowne Children's Centre, Brantford, presented students with various needs through written communication and phone conversations with System Special Education Consultants. With parental consent, both agencies provided valuable information regarding incoming Year One and Two Kindergarten students currently receiving agency support. The agency resource consultants provided student background, strengths and needs, agency involvement (i.e., speech, occupational therapy, physiotherapy), any diagnoses (if applicable), and a report containing a summary of helpful information and agency contacts.

Parent Resources

To build capacity and develop parental trust, a 'Special Education Brochure for Parents' was created and mailed to families prior to the system - level case conference. The brochure outlined what to expect when preparing for a case conference and provided a link to our 'Ready to Learn Catholic Elementary School Guide for Parents' which shares valuable information about the kindergarten program and helpful tips on transitioning to school, roles and responsibilities, community contacts and ways to further promote speech-language and fine motor skills prior to school entry.

In addition to the kindergarten guide, an 'All About Me' booklet was also mailed to parents prior to the case conference. This booklet gives parents the opportunity to share personal information (e.g., names of people in their family, pets), likes, dislikes, preferred method of communication, etc. Parents were asked to fill out this booklet and return it to the classroom teacher at the end of June as part of the transition process.

System Level 'Entry into School' Case Conferences – The Multi-Disciplinary Team

Case Conferences, held in April, May and June of 2025, were attended by parents, Student Achievement Leader: Special Education, members of the System Special Education Team, home school team, agencies and daycare providers. At this meeting, the student was introduced, and information was gathered and shared with the school. It was also an opportunity for parents to share information and to meet with the school team. This year we hosted all of the system level case conferences virtually. There were 30 meetings held for the Brant, Haldimand, and Norfolk schools.

Supporting Our Faith Journey

Supplementary Activities/ Resources

Special Education Services remain committed to nurturing the faith journey of all students. Our retreats are tailored to meet the unique learning needs of our exceptional learners.

The retreats are designed to provide differentiated instruction that enriches the understanding of the sacraments. Through accommodations and guided mentorship, we empower students to actively engage in their faith, fostering a connection with Christ.

The retreats offered an array of hands-on activities, games, songs, prayers, storytelling, baking, and opportunities for fellowship. These experiences allowed students to immerse themselves in the rituals of the sacraments through meaningful engagement, visual aids, and direct instruction. Although communication and self-regulation have long been priorities, this year's approach was marked by increased intentionality. A calming area was introduced to support self-regulation, and activities were designed with multiple entry points to ensure accessibility for all learners. Stories and learning experiences were carefully paced to sustain engagement. Aided communication was embedded throughout, including the consistent use of low-level core boards, to honour and amplify every student's voice. These supports ensured that all participants were recognized, respected, and meaningfully included, helping to cultivate and deepen their faith experience.

This intentional and responsive planning was made possible through a retreat survey distributed to all schools. The survey gathered information on student attendance and specific needs, which directly informed the design of the retreat experiences, ensuring they were tailored, inclusive, and meaningful for all participants.

This year four students attended the Reconciliation retreat and six students attended First Communion retreat.

We extended the learning environment beyond the classroom with a visit to St. Mary's Catholic Church, conducted by a member of the church community, thereby bridging connections with our valued community helpers.



Elementary 'Have a Go'

'Have a Go' is a modified track and field event for students with physical, intellectual or communication disabilities. The focus of this event is on participation, interaction, and friendship.

'Have a Go' Philosophy

Rooted in the spirit of equality and team unity, "*Have A Go*" is a celebration of inclusive participation and personal growth through physical activity. This initiative is designed to create a welcoming environment where every individual is encouraged to engage, explore, and excel—regardless of ability.

'Have A Go' promotes:

- Inclusive physical activity that welcomes and supports all participants.
- Physical fitness and the pursuit of personal athletic achievement.
- The formation of new friendships through shared experiences.
- A culture of participation, dedication, effort, and team spirit.
- The development of self-confidence, a positive self-image, and a strong sense of personal worth.

Through this initiative, we aim to inspire joy, resilience, and connection—empowering every participant to truly "have a go" and discover their potential.

The Athletes

This event is designed for students in Grades 4 to 8 who have an intellectual disability, a physical disability, or who are on the autism spectrum. Each school is invited to nominate a team, selected in collaboration between the school principal and the Special Education Resource Teacher.



To foster inclusion and support, each participating athlete may be accompanied by a peer buddy from their school. These buddies play an important role in encouraging and assisting athletes throughout the event, helping to ensure a positive and engaging experience for all participants.

The Events

Athletes participate in 12 adapted track and field events. The events are adapted from the regular track and field Board meet. A rest station was also included where freebies and water were provided.

2025 'Have a Go'

The Elementary *Have a Go* event took place on Wednesday, June 4, 2025, at the Burford Arena, bringing together students from across the district in a celebration of inclusion, athleticism, and school spirit. A total of 23 schools participated, with 81 athletes in attendance, each accompanied by a peer buddy of their choice.

The day began with a formal procession of athletes onto the field, followed by an inspiring opening ceremony that included the singing and signing of the national anthem, a prayer, a land acknowledgement, and a group warm-up activity.

Throughout the day, athletes rotated through 12 engaging and inclusive activity stations, each designed to promote physical fitness, personal achievement, and enjoyment. Participants were recognized for their efforts with ribbons awarded at each station, and each athlete received a commemorative medal in celebration of their accomplishments.

To mark the occasion, every athlete was presented with a special event T-shirt, worn proudly throughout the day as a symbol of their participation and success.

Secondary Tri-High Games



Secondary students in the Personal Active Learning (PAL), Community Living, and Job Skills programs at St. John's College, Holy Trinity Catholic High School, and Assumption College School came together for a fun-filled day of team sporting events and friendship! The Leadership and Fitness/Recreation students and teachers at St. John's College did an amazing job with creating the activities and hosting the 2025 Tri-High Games event. There were eight different events; and while the teams created a sense of fun competition, high-fives and cheering could be seen and heard by all!

Transition Navigator Project

With funding from the Ministry of Education, the Special Education Department has developed and implemented a series of strategic initiatives designed to support and enhance transitions for students with special education needs and/or disabilities. These transition supports encompass the full educational journey—from entry into school, progression between elementary and secondary education, to pathways beyond secondary school into post-secondary education, the workforce, and community life.

We are pleased to highlight the following initiatives developed to facilitate successful transitions for students with special education needs and/or disabilities:

Transition: Entry to School

- **Complex Communicator Guidebook:**

Developed by our team of Speech-Language Pathologists, this resource is designed to foster inclusive learning environments for students who use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). In addition to the guidebook, pre-made communication theme boards and visual supports have been created. For the 2025–2026 school year, approximately 197 students have been identified as AAC users, each of whom will receive a Complex Communicator Guidebook. The goal is for this guidebook

to accompany each student throughout their educational journey, supporting ongoing learning, planning, and programming.

- **Kindergarten Planning Sessions:**

Kindergarten educators (teachers and Early Childhood Educators) have been offered up to three full days of planning time to prepare for incoming students with high needs. These sessions include access to the Complex Communicator Guidebook, enabling early dialogue about student profiles and the development of visual supports and structured learning tasks. This proactive planning approach is intended to facilitate a smoother and more successful transition into kindergarten.

- **Social Stories:**

Custom “Welcome to School” and “Moving to a New Grade” social stories have been developed to help students prepare for school transitions and feel confident and supported throughout the process.

Transition: Elementary to Secondary

- **Secondary Program Visits:**

All Grade 8 students entering self-contained secondary programs (PAL, Community Living, Job Skills) were provided multiple opportunities to visit their future classrooms. These visits allowed students to become familiar with the new environment, meet staff, interact with peers, and participate in classroom activities. Transition support was coordinated with elementary staff to facilitate up to five visits for PAL students, three visits for Community Living students, and one visit for Job Skills students.

- **Teacher Collaboration:**

Secondary PAL teachers were invited to visit the elementary schools of their incoming students. These visits enabled teachers to collaborate with current educators and observe existing supports, resources, and programming in place for each student.

- **Customized Social Stories:**

School-specific social stories were created to help students better understand and anticipate their transition to secondary school, promoting a sense of familiarity and reducing anxiety.

Transition: Post-Secondary Education, Employment, and Community Integration

- **Community Partnership:**

A partnership with Crossing All Bridges Learning Centre (CAB) has been established to support graduating students transitioning to community-based day programs. For the 2025–2026 year, three students (one from St. John’s College and two from Holy Trinity) will participate in CAB’s summer camp and year-long day program.

- **Online Resources for Families:**

Comprehensive information and resources will be made available on the BHNCDSB website to assist families of children and youth with special needs and/or disabilities in navigating key transition points.

- **Transition Information Fair:**

An Information Fair will be held to support families in planning for life after secondary school. This event will showcase post-secondary education opportunities, employment programs, and community services. Families and students will have the opportunity to engage with local service providers and agencies essential to successful lifelong transitions. Participating organizations will include:

- Developmental Services Ontario (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services)
- Community Living Brant
- Contact Brant
- Willowbridge Community Services
- Crossing All Bridges
- Special Olympics
- Brantwood Community Services
- Conestoga College (Community Integration through Co-operative Education)
- Mohawk College (Community Integration through Co-operative Education)

EQAO and OISE Presenters

The Superintendent of Special Education and Student Achievement Leader for Special Education were invited to present at this year's #DataInAction Symposium to highlight how the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board implemented intentional, system-wide changes to improve reading achievement among students identified with learning disabilities. Grounded in equity-driven research and a commitment to dismantling ableist practices, the board moved beyond a deficit-based approach to special education. Through the use of structured literacy interventions, targeted professional learning, and redesigned support structures, the board created more inclusive learning environments and enhanced access to grade-level curriculum. The session highlighted practical strategies and measurable outcomes—including significant gains in EQAO Grade 6 reading scores—that demonstrate how thoughtful, scalable interventions can drive success for all learners.

Interventions

LEXIA

Lexia Core5® Reading and *PowerUp® Literacy* are personalized web-based reading curriculums for students from Kindergarten through Grade 12. Students learn, practice, and consolidate fundamental literacy skills by interacting with the online, adaptive program, receiving teacher-led Lexia Lessons, and by completing independent, paper-based activities using Lexia Skill Builders. Student data is captured through reports that assist teachers in making informed instructional decisions to help students achieve grade-level benchmarks.

Lexia Core5 is intended to be used by students from kindergarten to Grade 5. The online activities support and build on the classroom curriculum while developing reading skills in phonological awareness, phonics, structural analysis, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Online activities should be used for a daily maximum of 20 to 25 minutes.

Lexia PowerUp is intended to be used by students in Grade 6 and higher. The online activities support and build on the classroom curriculum, developing literacy skills in word study, grammar, and comprehension. Online activities should be used for a daily maximum of 30 minutes.

The system special education team recognizes the need for an intensive literacy intervention program that addresses learning difficulties associated with reading and decoding text.

Criteria

Criteria, developed by the Student Achievement Lead for Special Education and the System Special Education Consultants, were used to determine which students would be assigned a Lexia license:

Students in grades 2-6, with demonstrated needs in the area of reading, and who met at least one of the following additional criteria:

- identified with a Learning Disability or Mild Intellectual Disability.
- on a non-identified IEP to address reading needs.
- not identified (no IEP), but with demonstrated needs in the area of reading.

Due to the intensive supports already being provided, students involved with Empower were not considered. Students in grades 7 and 8 were considered on a case-by-case basis.

School teams were asked to consider a student's attendance record in their selection process. A student is required to work on Lexia approximately 20-25 minutes every day to fully benefit from all that the program has to offer - regular attendance is fundamental for this to happen.

Selection Process - 2024-2025

Step 1

Elementary school SERTs reviewed their current Lexia roster and additional candidates with their school team to determine which students would be considered for a license. Factors considered included student attendance and motivation, usage history and progress, student needs and other interventions, which program is most appropriate (Core5 or PowerUp), SERT and classroom schedules, and total number of licenses being requested (ensuring there is protected time to support students accessing the program and to deliver Lexia intervention lessons as required).

Step 2

Elementary school SERTs shared student profiles with their System Special Education Consultant to confirm that a student met criteria and was a suitable candidate. Elementary student profiles included a current diagnostic reading assessment, intervention history, report card grades and comments, and Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement assessment (if applicable).

Step 3

Available Lexia licenses were assigned by the Lexia District Administrator. SERTs were informed of the student candidates who were added to the Lexia license waitlist.

Step 4

All students were required to complete the auto-placement activity at the beginning of the school year. Monthly progress monitoring of student minutes and levels occurred. At the end of the year, **all** licenses will be reviewed, and students with consistent usage and gains of at least 3 levels will be considered for an additional year on the program if the school team wishes.

As of April 27, 2025:

- 282 elementary students and one secondary special class student were accessing a Lexia license
- 28 elementary schools and 1 secondary school had students on Lexia
- Student gains were on track to meet the goal of at least 3 levels of progress:
 - 38% of students had achieved gains of 3+ levels
 - 48% of students had achieved 1-2 levels with a target of 3 levels by June 2025
 - 14% of students were still in their starting level

Tracking Student Progress

Elementary school SERTs and the Lexia District Administrator monitored student progress throughout the time students worked on Lexia. Student progress was measured by analyzing the data provided in Lexia reports, specifically looking at the number of Lexia levels completed, as well as the overall usage minutes and units completed during a school year. A student must demonstrate proficiency in each unit in order to progress to the next unit or skill. When an error is made, the program provides scaffolded support and instruction on that specific skill. Students who demonstrate mastery progress through units move onto more advanced skills and continue in this way until a Lexia Level is completed. A Lexia Level takes approximately 4-6 weeks to successfully complete. A guide was developed to assist school teams in identifying trends, areas for growth and

successes based on Lexia reports and student usage data. The Superintendent of Special Education also monitored the use of this Tier 2 reading intervention alongside school administrators and school SERTs.

Student Success Stories

The Primary Learning Strategies Class experienced tremendous growth through consistent use of Lexia Core5. With support from staff, students gained up to 8 levels, representing up to 2 years of skill development. This growth is associated with improved diagnostic scores, increased confidence and class participation, and greater classroom success and interest in reading.



EMPOWER

The **Empower™ Reading and Decoding Program** is an intensive, research-based literacy intervention designed to help struggling readers in elementary and secondary school improve their decoding and reading comprehension skills. Developed by the Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) in Toronto, Empower uses explicit, systematic instruction to teach students flexible decoding strategies, including phonological awareness, phonics, and morphology. The program emphasizes mastery through repetition, guided practice, and scaffolded support, helping students build confidence and independence as readers. It is typically delivered in small groups by trained educators and has demonstrated strong outcomes in helping close the reading achievement gap for students with reading difficulties, including those with learning disabilities.

Criteria

Students eligible to receive instruction in this program must:

- Be in grades 2 to 5.
- Be having significant difficulty acquiring age-appropriate reading skills, particularly decoding, word identification, and spelling skills but have solid comprehension skills.
- Be developing in all ways except decoding, word identification, and spelling.
- Speak in English as a first language *OR* are English Language Learners.
- Have low average to above average cognitive ability.
- Have a 'learning disability' profile but do not have to have a medical diagnosis of dyslexia or a formal identification of a learning disability in reading.
- Attend school on a regular basis.
- Not have significant behavioural issues and safety concerns.

Impact

This year, 24 SERTs in all schools except Our Lady of Fatima and Blessed Sacrament were involved in delivering this Tier 3 intervention to a total of 165 students across the district.

Tracking Student Progress

The following assessments were measured pre-Empower, mid-Empower and post-Empower to all participating students in order to measure growth and monitor progress throughout the learning cycle.

- Woodcock-Johnson IV raw scores for the Broad Reading subtests
- Woodcock-Johnson IV raw scores for the Phoneme/Grapheme Knowledge subtests
- Empower Screening Data for:
 - Sound Symbol Test (Letter Sound Identification Task and Sound Combinations Task)
 - Keyword Test
 - Test of Transfer
 - Challenge Word Test

KEYMATH-3

KeyMath-3 is a diagnostic assessment tool that assesses a full spectrum of essential math concepts and skills, including a comprehensive math instruction and intervention program for students in grade 3 to 12. Prior to the administration of *KeyMath-3*, tiered approaches in numeracy must have been trialed with students.

Eligibility

Students eligible to receive this diagnostic assessment must:

- Be in grades 3 to 12 (grade 2 is acceptable in unique circumstances)
- Have significant difficulty acquiring age-appropriate numeracy skills
- Be receiving differentiated instruction in the classroom
- Be receiving universal design for learning in the classroom
- Have been exposed to ongoing, high-impact instructional practices through the classroom teacher including:
 - Learning goals, success criteria and descriptive feedback
 - Direct instruction
 - Problem-solving tasks and experiences
 - Teaching and problem solving
 - Tools and representations
 - Math conversations
 - Small group instruction
 - Deliberate practice
 - Flexible groupings
- Receive increased progress monitoring that demonstrates limited ongoing progress despite Tier 1 and 2 supports
- Be receiving increased intensity of dedicated instruction
- Be accessing more intensive mathematics instruction and supports as needed through the SAT Team and/or School-Based SERT
- Be supported through evidenced-based resources such as Math Up, Eyes on Math, Leaps and Bounds, Knowledgehook, Number Talks, Number Sense Routines etc.

Who is eligible for a Key Math Assessment?

Pathway 1:

Where a classroom teacher can demonstrate significant use of systematic and explicit instructional strategies as noted above through ongoing and intense support, and the student continues to demonstrate significant difficulties in math, Key Math - 3 can be used prior to an achievement test to determine areas of needs and/or deficit. Intervention lessons are to be implemented immediately to fill learning gaps in order to attempt to have the student resume grade level instruction and avoid further testing or the development of a non-identified IEP. Ongoing progress monitoring will dictate whether individualized supports are working. Progress monitoring that demonstrates little to no progress over time indicates that further formal assessments may be warranted (e.g., Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement to measure Broad Mathematics).

Pathway 2:

As part of the modified mathematics IEP audit, some students may require additional testing in Key Math to determine the appropriateness and precision of the modified programming and to adjust the IEP as required. Future decisions around modifications will include future Key Math assessments (administered by trained Special Education Resource Teachers).

Intervention Program

Special Education Resource Teachers (SERTs) develop an instructional plan based on the comprehensive score report that is generated, using the essential resources provided. Lessons are linked to the KM-3 assessment results and are delivered to students on a Teacher Easel Display with engaging graphics. Lessons can be delivered by the SERT, teacher and/or educational assistant and can be delivered individually or in a small group. Students are engaged in Guided Practice activities, bridging the gap between instruction and student practice. Independent Practice opportunities are provided to students to reinforce and extend their learning. Assessment of learning and progress monitoring includes various assessments which are found in each math concept cluster. After a period of intervention and after lessons have been delivered, an alternate form of the diagnostic assessment is administered to pinpoint skill development and areas that may still require intervention.

CONTINUITY OF SUPPORT FOR SUMMER LEARNING AND TRANSITION

The following supports will be offered again throughout July and August 2025 to support students with special needs and/or mental health needs.

Professional Learning, Training, and Capacity Building

- Training from the LDAO
- Training for Autism through 'Sonderly' for select staff
- Non-Violent Crisis Intervention Training for select staff which may include administrators, educational assistants, or Child and Youth Workers
- Summer NTIP session for new educators (TBD)

Closing Gaps and Mitigating Learning Loss

- Review of assessment results for program planning and transition.
- Scheduled daycare or preschool visits for incoming Kindergarten students with complex needs.

- Collaborate with school teams to help identify students who would benefit from attending Camp Blast (a virtual, faith-based literacy program for students in grades 1 & 2).
- Bartimaeus supports for select students throughout the summer months to support behaviour challenges (TBD).

Summer Transition Support Programs

Identification and Transition Planning

Identify students with complex special education needs and mental health or engagement concerns at each school. Design and implement individualized, targeted transition sessions to support these students as they move into new learning environments.

Development of Visual and Digital Resources

Create visuals, videos, and other resources (e.g., social stories) for both classroom and individual use. These tools will assist students, families, and staff in understanding expectations related to the new learning environment, classroom routines, instructional modifications, and physical classroom layout.

Staff Training and Capacity Building

ABA Leads and other specialists will provide professional learning for staff focused on effective transition strategies, social skill development, facilitating transitions from home to school and within new environments, fostering safety, and promoting self-regulation.

Summer Programming Opportunities

Provide summer camp opportunities for select secondary students to experience the programming and supports offered through *Crossing All Bridges*.

Resource Distribution

Distribute the *Complex Communicator Guidebook* and accompanying resources to all classrooms supporting complex communicators to promote consistent communication strategies.

Collaborative Planning Time

Provide dedicated planning time for SERTs, ECEs, and classroom teachers working with incoming students with complex needs, to ensure thoughtful preparation and alignment of supports.

Continuity of Support Services

Engage Bartimaeus services to provide individualized support to select students during the summer months. These services will help sustain progress, maintain established routines, and preserve relationships to ease the transition back to school.