



YRDSB

Transition Strategy

Toward Disability Justice



“Nothing about us without us.”

Adopted by the International Disability Caucus during the creation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (1990)



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Vision Statement

The *Transition Strategy: Towards Disability Justice*⁽¹⁾ aims to remove barriers, build equitable, inclusive, consistent evidence-based practices across the York Region District School Board (YRDSB) and improve access to essential information, support and resources related to transitions for students with disabilities and their families/caregivers.

The *Transition Strategy* emphasizes the importance of:

- centering the voice, choice and agency of students;
- starting transition planning early;
- collaborating with students and their families/caregivers;
- maintaining high expectations; and
- honouring all educational and life pathways.

Context Statement

The development of the *Transition Strategy: Towards Disability Justice* (*Transition Strategy*) has been informed by collaboration with students, families/caregivers, YRDSB staff, external partner agencies and organizations at the local, provincial and national levels. This strategy is also informed by listening to the lived experiences of students with disabilities, as well as key ministry documents, including transition policies and procedures. It incorporates insights from York Region District School Board documents and draws on research related to disability and transitions. By integrating these diverse sources of information, the strategy ensures that it is grounded in both the lived realities of students with disabilities and evidence-informed research, providing a comprehensive and evidence-based approach to supporting accessible, inclusive and equitable transitions.

This strategy was developed in alignment with the [Development of proposed Kindergarten to Grade 12 \(K-12\) education standards - 2022 final recommendations report](#) and [Accessible transitions for students with disabilities in kindergarten to grade 12 \(K-12\): to the workforce, the community and postsecondary education - final recommendations 2022](#) report issued to the Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility. While these reports' recommendations have not been formally included under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) legislation as an Educational Standard, the recommendations were a critical call to action in the development of the *Transition Strategy*. The strategy was also developed in alignment with the York Region District School Board's [Mission, Vision and Values](#), [Multi Year Strategic Plan](#), [District's Action Plan](#), and [Policy/Program Memorandum 156: Supporting Transitions for Students With Special Education Needs](#).

Background

Students with disabilities experience significant barriers within education and other sectors including social services, healthcare and employment.⁽³⁾ The *Transition Strategy* respects the diversity of lived experience, recognizing that disabilities can be visible or invisible, related to physical health or mental health conditions, and may or may not involve a formal diagnosis. Additionally, disabilities may not be permanent, they can be acquired, can change over time and the impact of disability can vary between individuals.⁽²⁾ Disabled students often face stigma, discrimination and experience the effects of low expectations and systemic barriers. When compared to non-disabled students, research demonstrates that students with disabilities can experience limited social, experiential learning or volunteer opportunities affecting their ability to achieve their educational and personal goals. Disability, as a social construct, intersects across all social identities. This intersectional experience can result in unique and amplified forms of bias, discrimination and oppression. This strategy acknowledges that transition planning needs to reflect the intersectional experience and should be co-informed by other identity-specific board resources and strategies, as well as provincial strategies inclusive of Indigenous protocols, specifically the [Student Transitions Protocol to Guide and Support Anishinabek Education System Students from Early Years to Post-Secondary and the Workforce](#) (Anishinabek Education System).

The *Transition Strategy* also acknowledges that non-specific terms, such as “differently abled” or “special needs” are outdated, fail to affirm disability identity, and lack specificity⁽³⁾. As a result, this strategy will use the language of “disability” as defined by Human Rights Code⁽²⁾. Disability communities have increasingly embraced the term “disability” as a way to affirm identity and advocate for justice. To respect the diverse ways people identify with disability, this strategy will incorporate both person-first (e.g. person with a disability) and identity-first (e.g. disabled person) language.

For the purpose of this strategy, educational transitions are defined broadly as “daily, short-term and long-term changes in a student’s life related to their educational experience.”⁽⁴⁾ This *Transition Strategy* encompasses disabled students’ transitions into school, throughout their educational journey and out of secondary school. Additionally, this *Transition Strategy* recognizes the importance of smaller or micro transitions for disabled students. When smaller, daily transitions are intentionally designed, students are more likely to have successful outcomes with larger transitions.

Guiding Principle Statements: Rights and Justice Based Approach

The following guiding principles emphasize accessible, inclusive and equitable transitions within and across a students' educational journey. The guiding principles are also grounded in non-discriminatory practices as outlined in the [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#), [United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), [Ontario's Human Rights Code](#), [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act](#) and in Ontario's Ministry of Education guidelines and frameworks ([Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy](#) and [Learning for All](#)). The guiding principles were developed through a thorough review of Ministry reports, evidence-based research, resources and disability transition frameworks.^(1, 3, 5-16, 21-27) Incorporating the principles of disability justice in transition planning ensures that disabled students (acknowledging their intersectional identities) are empowered, supported, and provided equitable opportunities with dignity, autonomy, and meaningful inclusion.

Guiding Principles

Accessible, inclusive and equitable transition planning should:

1. Start early, be proactive, be ongoing, and include multiple checkpoints throughout a students' educational journey.
2. Be grounded in strong authentic relationships that build and sustain meaningful and collaborative relationships with students, families/caregivers, community partners and organizations while establishing clear responsibilities, roles and accountability measures.
3. Know the student, understanding their unique identities, strengths and needs while centering the student and family/caregiver voice, choice, and agency.
4. Foster a culture of high expectations that are specific to each student, that can change and adapt as their needs change.
5. Honour all pathways and acknowledge that all pathways have value, with each student on their own individual educational and personal journey.

Student Voice, Choice and Agency

During the consultation process, input from disabled students, their families and caregivers, as well as national, provincial, and local stakeholders, emphasized the need to prioritize and honor the voices, choices and agency of students. As a result, the strategy emphasizes the need to centre and respect voice, choice and agency, work in partnership, foster family/caregiver engagement, and ensure transparency with students at the centre.



*"The student is the best expert on their disability!
Some things work for one student but might not work for all."
– Student Consultation*

Priority Areas to Achieve Accessible, Inclusive and Equitable Transitions^(2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 13, 14, 16–27)

To achieve accessible, inclusive, and equitable transitions, the strategy focuses on four key priority areas: **Planning and Preparing**, **Accessible and Inclusive Environments**, **Building Knowledge and Capacity**, and **Collaborative Relationships**.



Planning and Preparing

Planning and preparing for accessible, inclusive and equitable transitions is proactive, individualized and is driven by the student's goals, interests, strengths, gifts and needs. Effective transition planning also includes core skills development and experiential learning, which are intentionally embedded throughout a student's learning and school experience. Core skills are skills that extend beyond the Ontario Curriculum and are the skills that may be needed for students with disabilities transitioning through their educational journey and into work, living and life.



"Transition planning needs to be throughout the school system and needs to be embedded. Also important is being part of the community, no matter what stage you are at in the process."

- Community Consultation

System Actions

- 1.1 Create and maintain a centralized internal YRDSB Transitions Hub with tools and resources to support staff with programming for effective transitions, core skill development, experiential learning and alternative programming.
- 1.2 Create and maintain a centralized external YRDSB Transitions Hub with program, placement and pathway resources for students and families/caregivers.



Classroom/School Actions

- 1.3 Share program, placement and pathway options with students and families/caregivers.
- 1.4 Co-plan and co-create individualized, actionable and time-bound Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Transition Plan goals with students and families/caregivers through regular and ongoing meetings.
- 1.5 Include daily (i.e. activity to activity) and larger (i.e. grade to grade and elementary to secondary) transition goals addressing the physical, cultural, social, emotional, spiritual and learning needs of students as they move through their educational journey.
- 1.6 Build intentional programming to develop core skills into daily learning opportunities throughout the school day.
- 1.7 Provide experiential learning opportunities that support participation in a variety of activities.

Engaging the Community

- 1.8 Plan with community partners and organizations to implement programs and services in support of pathways to foster disabled student autonomy and well-being.



Accessible and Inclusive Environments

Effective transition planning promotes accessibility, inclusivity and equity, while ensuring that disabled students have their identities centered, affirmed and reflected in the school, classroom, teaching and learning.



"Inclusive practices are embedded in the community of the school and the board, not an add on. It is important to have the entire school culture embedded in inclusivity, including students and staff."

- Community Organization

System Actions

- 2.1 Support accessibility and inclusive planning to take steps to prevent and remove barriers for students with disabilities.
- 2.2 Ensure access to a variety of secondary courses to support student development and pathways.
- 2.3 Review specialized programs for accessibility and inclusivity of disabled students.

Classroom/School Actions

- 2.4 Identify and address barriers to full participation for students in all aspects of the school environment.
- 2.5 Create accessible and inclusive learning environments that embody intersecting social identities, including disability.
- 2.6 Co-create and support leadership and identity affirming peer mentorship opportunities.
- 2.7 Ensure meetings, resources and information are accessible, inclusive and culturally responsive to students and families/caregivers.

Engaging the Community

- 2.8 Facilitate connection of students and families/caregivers with culturally relevant, identity affirming and/or disability specific community partners and organizations.

Building Knowledge and Capacity

Ongoing education, training and professional learning is essential to identify, remove and prevent barriers to create accessible, inclusive and equitable transitions for students with disabilities. Through building knowledge and capacity, YRDSB staff and community organizations work to identify and act against ableist and oppressive mindsets and challenge actions, perceptions and assumptions. Building knowledge and understanding of human rights, the education system, community programs, supports and resources helps to centre students and families/caregivers voice and choice in the transition planning process.



"Changing attitudes, values and beliefs of colleagues is essential."
– YRDSB Staff Member

System Actions

- 3.1 Build capacity of YRDSB staff through the provision of cross-panel professional learning, specific to anti-ableism, programming and transition planning.
- 3.2 Promote opportunities to involve people with disabilities in the development of professional learning opportunities for anti-ableism and transition planning.

Classroom/School Actions

- 3.3 Upon registration and throughout a student's educational journey, provide information regarding transition resources, processes, pathways and community resources.
- 3.4 Start long-term pathway planning early with students and families/caregivers in support of postsecondary pathway options and potential requirements for specific programs.

Engaging the Community

- 3.5 Develop collaborative relationships with community partners and organizations to share information to support learning about student needs, processes and supports available within the board and for the board to learn about what community supports are available to support students and families/caregivers.

Collaborative Relationships

Collaboration with students, families/caregivers, schools and communities provides the greatest opportunity for a comprehensive, individualized and supportive transition experience. Centering student and family/caregiver voice and choice by building and sustaining collaborative and trusting relationships is fundamental to ensure that students and families/caregivers feel supported throughout transitions.



"There is a network of people and there is a system and students can get lost if we don't 'centre their voice', it gets really big, really quickly."
– Community Consultation

System Actions

- 4.1 Support the implementation of Special Education Needs Transition Navigator position(s).
- 4.2 Build and sustain relationships with community organizations to develop and/or expand programs.
- 4.3 Strengthen communication and collaboration with postsecondary pathway programs.

Classroom/School Actions

- 4.4 Understand students' and families'/caregivers' long-term goals and collaborate to develop meaningful opportunities to achieve them.
- 4.5 Promote the consistent use of strategies, tools and resources with all staff involved in a student's program through regular communication with students, families/caregivers and school team.
- 4.6 Ensure members of the student and family/caregiver support team are invited to planning meetings.

Engaging the Community

- 4.7 Support students and families/caregivers in connecting with community organizations.

Accountability Framework

The successful implementation of the *Transition Strategy* depends on an effective and clearly defined accountability framework. Accountability for implementing this strategy will also help to create a lasting climate of commitment to supporting transitions for students with disabilities and their families/caregivers, while working on improving the outcomes for disabled students.

This monitoring framework includes both internal and external processes and data sources. Within the organization, the Coordinating Superintendent of Student Services and Well-being has key responsibilities for oversight, allocating resources and monitoring implementation. The Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) will advise and support the implementation of the *Transition Strategy*. The Special Education Advisory Committee will receive updates and information from YRDSB staff regarding implementation of the strategy, as well as receiving feedback from SEAC member organizations regarding gaps and opportunities specific to the disability community that member organizations represent.

At the local school level, schools can include action items from this strategy within their School Improvement Plans. While board-level data is helpful to identify system-wide issues, program and practice data at the school level allows for school-level interventions and strategies that will reduce and eliminate gaps for students with disabilities.

Students, families/caregivers, community members and specifically members of disability communities are also important partners that will play a role in the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of this strategy. Information on the strategy can be obtained from public SEAC meeting minutes and will be shared on the public facing board site (e.g. the Transitions Hub).



Key Performance Indicators

To effectively monitor implementation of the *Transition Strategy* the following data sources will be used to assess Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

1. YRDSB Every Student Counts Survey (ESCS) data specific to students with disabilities and those with identified Special Education Needs will be reviewed including data related to feelings of mattering and belonging.

2. Annual monitoring of real time transition data will be reviewed from:

- Student Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and Transition Plans within the IEP;
- Transition to School Reports for students entering education from the Early Intervention Sector;
- Guidance data on postsecondary pathways;
 - Ontario College Application Service (OCAS)
 - Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC)
 - Other sources for additional pathways (e.g. workplace, skilled trades) as they become available
- Work Experience Transition Coordinator annual reports; and
- My Blueprint data (i.e. course selection data, cooperative education credits).

The specific KPIs will be developed from action items identified in the *Transition Strategy* and included in the implementation plan. The accountability framework and KPIs will:

- Focus attention on opportunity gaps related to transitions;
- Provide accountability data;
- Assess the impact of the initiatives contained in this strategy; and
- Identify adjustments to this strategy as needed.

When reviewing data from the above and other sources, the Key Performance Indicators will be used to assess the efficacy of the implementation of the *Transition Strategy* and reviewed annually.



"Begin with the end in mind"
– Community Consultation

Glossary

Ableism

Ableism is discrimination towards persons with disabilities. Ableism involves systemic barriers as well as person-to-person interactions, stereotypes and negative attitudes. Ableism can be conscious or unconscious. Ableism is embedded in institutions, systems and the broader culture of a society. In this system of oppression, persons with disabilities are assumed to be less worthy of respect and consideration, less able to contribute and take part, and of less value than other people. These attitudes, beliefs and actions in society devalue and limit the potential of persons with disabilities. Developed by an internal YRDSB interdepartmental working group in 2023.

Accommodation

Teaching and assessment strategies, human supports, and/or individualized equipment required to enable a student to learn and to demonstrate learning. The provincial curriculum expectations for the grade are not altered for a student receiving accommodations. [YRDSB Special Education Plan](#)

Alternative Expectations

Statements on the Individual Education Plan (IEP) describing expectations developed to help students acquire knowledge and skills that are not represented in the Ontario curriculum expectations. Because they are not part of a subject or course outlined in the provincial curriculum documents, alternative learning expectations are considered to constitute alternative programs or alternative courses. [YRDSB Special Education Plan](#)

Barriers

“Barrier” refers to anything that prevents a disabled person from fully participating in all aspects of society because of their disability, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an information or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy or a practice (“obstacle”). [Development of Proposed Kindergarten to grade 12 \(K-12\) Education Standards – 2022 Final Recommendations Report](#)

Core skills

Core skills are skills that extend beyond the Ontario Curriculum and play a key role in students' development.

The skills listed below were identified throughout community consultations, [Development of proposed Kindergarten to Grade 12 \(K-12\) education standards – 2022 final recommendations report](#) and [Accessible transitions for students with disabilities in kindergarten to grade 12 \(K-12\): to the workforce, the community and postsecondary education – final recommendations 2022](#), Expanded Core Curriculum and the interdepartmental working group. The list is suggestive and not exhaustive, and is to be further developed throughout the implementation stage. These skills include:

- Daily Living Skills
- Executive Function
- Functional Communication
- Interoceptive Awareness
- Leisure/Play Skills
- Personal Wellness and Safety
- Self-Advocacy
- Self-Regulation/Co-Regulation

Cultural Responsiveness

Cultural responsiveness is recognizing, acknowledging, and reflecting students' multiple social identities in their learning and environment. In order to ensure that all students feel safe, welcomed, accepted, and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning, schools and classrooms must be responsive to culture which goes deeper than ethnicity, race and/or faith.

[Development of Proposed Kindergarten to grade 12 \(K-12\) Education Standards – 2022 Final Recommendations Report](#)

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated Instruction (DI) is a process where educators vary the learning activities, content demands, and modes of assessment to meet the needs and support the growth of each child. DI provides different learning experiences in response to each student's needs. It is a method of teaching that adapts instruction to suit the differing strengths and needs, interests, learning styles, and readiness to learn of individual students.

[Development of Proposed Kindergarten to grade 12 \(K-12\) Education Standards – 2022 Final Recommendations Report](#)

Disability

Disability refers to the interaction between the individual and the barriers that exist within schools, communities, and systems. Disabilities can be both visible and/or invisible. A disability may have been present at birth, caused by an accident, or developed over time and can be permanent, temporary, situational or episodic. Disabilities can be experienced without a diagnosis and should be understood/considered in such a way that values how the person self-identifies. This document will refer to the [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) for its definition.

Disability Justice

Disability Justice is the cross-disability (sensory, intellectual, mental health/psychiatric, neurodiversity, physical/mobility, learning, etc.) framework that values access, self-determination, and an expectation of difference. An expectation of difference means that we expect difference in disability, identity, and culture. To be included and part of society is about being able to be our “whole self” (all of our identities together). Disability Justice includes space for self-care, reflection, and hard discussions. Based on the work from Mia Mingus, Patty Berne and Stacey Milbern (2005).

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is an opportunity for students to engage in hands-on, real-world learning that helps them develop their understanding of the curriculum and prepare for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

[YRDSB Pathways Programs](#)

Identity Affirming (Spaces)

Identity affirming spaces ensure that all individuals have their identities represented, feel welcomed, and have a sense of belonging. Ethnicity, gender, friendship circles, race, talents, language(s), social media involvement, expectations of self, aspirations, beliefs, spiritual beliefs, socio-economic situation, degree of self-awareness, passions, interests, and a sense of self-efficacy, are all factors that form an individual's identity.

[Building Capacity Series Secretariat Special Edition #20](#)

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected.

[Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy](#)

Individual Education Plan

An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is an individualized program for an exceptional student developed in response to identified strengths and needs. It is written within 30 school days after the student's placement in a special education program and a copy is given to the parents. [YRDSB Special Education Plan](#)

Intersectionality

Intersectionality acknowledges the ways in which people's lives are shaped by their multiple and overlapping identities and social locations, which, together, can produce a unique and distinct experience for that individual or group, for example, creating additional barriers or opportunities.

[YRDSB Equity Action Plan](#)

Identification Placement Review Committee

An Identification Placement Review Committee (IPRC) is a committee of a school board that decides whether or not a child should be identified as exceptional, identifies the areas of a student's exceptionality according to the categories and definitions of exceptionalities provided by the ministry, decides an appropriate placement for a student, and reviews the identification and placement at least once in each school year.

[YRDSB Special Education Plan](#)



Modified Expectations

Modified expectations on the Individual Education Plan reflect changes made to the grade-level expectations for a subject or course in order to meet a student's learning needs. Modifications may include the use of learning expectations at a different grade level and/or an increase or decrease in the number and/or complexity of expectations relative to the curriculum expectations for the regular grade level. Modified expectations must represent specific, realistic, observable, and measurable goals, and must describe specific knowledge and/or skills that the student can demonstrate independently, given the appropriate assessment accommodations. At the secondary level, a credit may or may not be granted for a course, depending on the extent to which the expectations in the course have been modified.

[YRDSB Special Education Plan](#)

Modified expectations can impact a student's educational pathway, graduation and postsecondary education opportunities.

Postsecondary Pathway Options

Postsecondary pathway options refer to the available options for students leaving secondary school. These may include:

- Apprenticeship
- Community Integration through Co-operative Education (CICE)/Vocational Programs
- College
- Community Participation
- Day Programs
- Employment Programs
- Supported/Independent Living
- University
- Volunteering
- Workforce (Part-time/Full-time)

School Improvement Plan

A School Improvement Plan (SIP) is used to set goals and targets and determines how resources are used with a school. The SIP is aligned with other board specific priorities, strategies, and policies and is updated on an annual basis in consultation with staff.

Specialized Programs

Specialized programs are educational programs that help students gain skills and experiences, as well as explore different pathways. These programs may include the following:

- Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM)
- Healthy Active Living Education (HALE)
- French Immersion (FI)
- International Baccalaureate (IB)
- Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP)
- Exploring Opportunities Program (EOP)
- Arts
- Dual Credit
- School Within A College (SWAC)
- Outdoor Education
- Co-operative Education Program (Co-op)

Transitions

Transitions are daily, short term and long term changes in a student's life. It is a coordinated set of actions that includes macro and micro level transitions.

Adapted from [Educator Support Guide for Transition Planning](#)

Macro Transition

Significant transitions that are more complex and include significant changes to many aspects of a student's routine. They may include:

- First entry to a Canadian school
- Entry to school
- School to school
- Elementary school to secondary school
- Secondary school to postsecondary pathway
- Between First Nations school boards and communities and provincially funded school boards
- Grade to grade

Micro Transitions

Changes that occur on a regular basis between activities and settings within the routines of the school day.

Transitions Hub

The online [Transitions Hubs](#), both internal and external, serve as central locations to locate resources and evidence-based practices about disability, human rights, ableism, programming and pathway options, community support, resources and services and transition planning to support student transitions throughout their educational journey.

Transition Navigator

The role of the Transition Navigator is to work collaboratively across their boards, as well as with community agencies and employers to support students with special education needs and/or disabilities in their transition to postsecondary pathways and share best practices/resources/tools that will help support successful transitions. [Ministry of Education 2024/25 Responsive Education Programs](#)

Transition Plan

The Transition Plan is developed as part of the Individual Education Plan. It is a detailed plan to help ensure that school and board staff are prepared to meet the needs of the student, contributing to smooth transitions (micro and macro) and paving the way for the student's future success. Policy/Program Memorandum No. 156 requires that a transition plan be developed for all students who have an IEP.

The Transition Plan must include the following components:

- specific goals for the student's transition
- the actions required, now and in the future, to achieve the stated goals
- the person responsible for or involved in completing or providing assistance in the completion of each of the identified actions
- timelines for the implementation of each of the identified actions

[YRDSB Special Education Plan](#)



Transition Planning

The process of coordinating a set of actions that prepares students for change and helps them adapt to a variety of settings. The starting point for transition planning should be the student's goals. The transition planning process itself may assist the student in developing and refining their goals.

[YRDSB Special Education Plan](#)

Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a teaching approach that focuses on creating a learning environment that is open and accessible to all students inclusive of their intersectional identities. Instruction based on principles of universal design is flexible and supportive, can be adjusted to meet different student needs, and enables all students to access the curriculum as fully as possible.

[YRDSB Special Education Plan](#)



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Notes







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