



ONTARIO
ASSOCIATION
OF CHILDREN'S
REHABILITATION
SERVICES

OACRS Submission to the Ministry of Education Consultations: “Building the Next Phase in Ontario’s Education Strategy: from Great to Excellent”

Submitted to:
The Honorable Liz Sandals,
Minister of Education

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Introduction

The Ontario Association of Children's Rehabilitation Services (OACRS) is pleased to offer feedback to the Ministry of Education's consultations, "Building the Next Phase in Ontario's Education Strategy: From Great to Excellent." As the provincial organization representing the 21 Children's Treatment Centres (CTCs) in Ontario, we support a vision for the education system that ensures that ALL children and youth have access to the rehabilitation supports they need to optimize their success in school. Children's rehabilitation centres are willing partners and have the infrastructure and expertise to work with school boards, schools and other partner organizations to ensure that specialized services are available within the school environment.

We commend the Ministry of Education for taking bold steps to implement Full Day Kindergarten throughout the province. This initiative has produced positive results for children starting school, including children with special needs.

We are taking this opportunity to respond to a selection of the consultation questions as further improvements can be made to the education system to ensure a more equitable, cohesive and inter-disciplinary approach to education for children with rehabilitation service needs.

We believe that the education system must provide each child with the tools he or she requires to be a success in the school setting. Supports must be in place to address the unique learning needs of each child. Ultimately, the goal of the education system must be to support the WHOLE child in coordination with other organizations, in a consistent way across the province.

Question #1

What are the skills, knowledge and characteristics students need to succeed after they have completed school, and how do we better support all learners in their development?

Every child and youth has a voice – students need to develop skills to participate in decision making, to develop leadership skills and to foster adaptive living skills.

Recommendations:

1. Help youth with disabilities prepare for the transition to adulthood by supporting early transition planning.
 - Transition plans for children and youth with disabilities are important throughout all stages of their development and support their long term success.
 - CTCs can play a role in planning for these transitions for youth in coordination with families, schools and other service providers to ensure the right supports are in place, especially during the transition to adult services.
2. Provide integrated pediatric rehabilitation service supports within the full day learning environment for all children who require specialized services.
 - Successful entry into school is an important milestone for all children. For those with special needs, it can set the stage for a lifetime of learning or struggle. Children with physical, communication and/or developmental needs require the specialized supports provided by pediatric therapists in order to remove barriers to their full participation in the classroom.

Examples of Successful Innovations:

- One CTC has found great advantage to working together with school staff to assist teens with complex needs during the transition to adulthood. A joint school and CTC process that assists the student with identifying long term goals, building functional skill development and planning, increases the chances of success.
- Another CTC has found that a local partnership and protocol for planning transitions into school (supported by school leadership and ownership of a single plan of care) has improved outcomes significantly for children with specialized needs.
- Another CTC works together with their regional service partners to provide transitioning support to teens with long term developmental disabilities. Key features of the program include functional skills development and strong integrated planning with school partners. This program provides both Centre and community based services.

Question #2

What does student well-being mean to you, and what is the role of the school in supporting it?

Student well-being means that every child and youth is resilient. The role of the school in supporting this goal is ensuring every child and youth receives personalized services by strengthening service interconnectivity, designing and delivering services based on a continuum and improving service interactions.

Recommendations:

3. A goal of the education system should be to establish a seamless system of supports that provide optimal learning opportunities for children with physical, communication, and/or developmental disabilities.
 - CTC's have found that children and families gain resilience by learning within a solution-focused approach to problem solving and with a team approach (service interconnectivity). Schools and service support agencies have an opportunity to evolve towards greater collaboration to best serve children and youth with disabilities.

Examples of Successful Innovations:

- One CTC has partnered with the local Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) and school board to integrate speech and language therapy into schools. The Speech and Language Pathology therapist works with children who require augmentative communication, and serves as a key player in developing a liaison role between the schools and the CTC. In addition, the therapist assists with integrating communication goals into the education plan that is specifically tied to the curriculum.

Question # 3

From your perspective, what further opportunities exist to close gaps and increase equity to support all children and students in reaching their full potential?

To enable more successful learning experiences for every child in a whole-of-government approach is needed. Education outcomes need to be embedded in the service sector mandate, actively promoting school attachment, and developing partnerships to support school success.

Recommendations:

5. Level the playing field for children with disabilities by ensuring that specialized supports and equipment are available to students in a timely manner in all schools across province.
 - Specialized supports help close the gaps for children with disabilities by helping them learn in the classroom setting. Providing additional supports gives them the opportunity to take advantage of all our public education system has to offer.
6. Provide pediatric rehabilitation therapists who deliver specialized service supports within schools with access to internet information.
 - Another opportunity to close a gap is to maximize technological internet connectivity in schools. For pediatric therapists delivering specialized services in schools, providing them with access to internet information and the necessary therapeutic tools (resources, contacts, and clinical records) helps create service efficiencies.

Examples of Successful Innovations:

- The Full Day Kindergarten (FDK) pilots developed by three CTCs across the province have demonstrated that previously hard to reach families can have equitable access to rehabilitation services in the full day kindergarten environment. Teacher initiated referrals and on site screenings result in a high percentage of consent for service from families that previously may not have engaged in preschool resource programs. System effectiveness and efficiency is realized as teachers develop more skills in addressing the developmental needs of children and over time, the needs of children with mild needs can be addressed by teaching strategies versus individual referrals to therapy programs. Further, the needs of mild, moderate and high needs children are all served through this model, resulting in equity to support all students.
- One CTC leads a program that addresses assessment at the time of the preschool to school transition using a shared electronic record platform. This initiative helps coordinate activities and share client information between the developmental service sector and the educational sector at a pivotal transition point for children and families. This partnership is delivered in a variety of locations outside the CTC and includes teachers and special education staff.

Question #4

How does the education system need to evolve as a result of changes to child care and the implementation of full-day kindergarten?

The education system needs to evolve by further integrating with outside service agencies. It is optimal if everyone involved in service delivery contributes to achieving common outcomes, with transparent accountability, open and informed dialogue, support skills and leadership development across the workforce.

Recommendations:

7. Develop a broader, inter-agency and cross-sectoral approach to the WHOLE child's educational and learning goals by employing a variety of supports that reduce barriers to learning.
 - Reduce barriers by: giving consideration to before and after school supports; integrating therapy strategies into classroom activities; designing a system that is flexible and responsive to needs of the family and the team supporting them; initiating early planning for children's seamless transition into school; and, enhancing the vital role of families at school, or addressing family goals.

Examples of Successful Innovations:

- For example, FDK pilots are working to close gaps by ensuring access to therapy for children no longer able to access preschool service programs. Working jointly with education staff in the classroom, therapy strategies can be integrated into learning outcomes to increase equity for children with special needs to help them meet their full potential. The initial provincial findings of improved performance of pupils in FDK will be strengthened with this integrated rehabilitation services model. As the child and family are considered the client, the pilots also recognize that service must evaluate and address home and community need, in addition to classroom supports. It is the goal of the rehabilitation service delivery model to create innovative approaches focused on integration across the province.

Question #7

In summary, what are the various opportunities for partnership that can enhance the student experience, and how can they benefit parents, educators and our partners too?

Although there are examples and structures in place that encourage partnerships within the school setting, not all children with rehabilitation service needs have every opportunity to optimize their learning success because of fragmentation.

Recommendations:

8. The education system should build partnerships with community providers and embrace innovative approaches to improving services for children with special needs.
 - There is a great opportunity to use evidenced-based practices through partnerships between teaching staff and specialized services professionals (such as occupational therapists, speech language pathologists and physiotherapists.)
 - Therapy supports for children with disabilities need to work within seamless partnerships that include schools, children's treatment centres, other community organizations and most importantly, families. These collaborations should ensure that all children have the supports they need to reach their full potential. In places where partnerships already exist, children have been able to make more successful transitions to school. In addition, families have been more engaged and new children have been identified and treated sooner. Overall these partnerships have strengthened the capacity and planning between schools and community services.
9. Information technology within the education system should be linked to the CTC client information system to improve collaboration and family-centred care.
 - An important part of seamless partnerships is ensuring all partners can access the plan of care for an individual child. CTCs are implementing a new client information system across the sector that delivers a family-centred electronic client record that can be used as a coordination tool amongst providers throughout the system. It connects the different services a child needs and supports service providers with the ability to measure and set service goals for the child in coordination with the family. The system focuses time and resources back into supporting children and families by providing a better link and use of data within and across service partners and the sector.

Examples of Successful Innovations:

- Within the full day learning pilot experience, partnership between CTC's and schools facilitates continuity for the child with special needs. For parents, this alleviates the constant stress and inefficiency they experience when changing from one service system to the next. Formal partnership agreements have provided a supportive structure leading to efficiencies through use of shared materials, strategies and resources. This partnership takes advantage of combining the expertise of therapists concerning early developmental milestones and therapy strategies with the expertise of teaching staff to achieve improved learning outcomes.
- In one full day learning pilot, there has been great benefit to putting together a geographical service team model. This team model allows professionals to get to know one another and ensures that they are able to approach each other to plan, problem solve and address needs. This concept of inter-disciplinary and interactive geographically-based teams exists in other parts of the province as well and should be leveraged to provide comprehensive specialized supports to children and their families.
- One CTC is working in partnership with municipal partners to use an electronic client record that supports the coordination of care and services for children and their families. Providers from education, health, rehabilitation, and community services are able to share clinical information electronically in real time. By being able to access information about the work of other Child and Family Team members, clinicians save time, build on the work of colleagues and minimize the need for families to repeat information. The shared record supports integrated care and the transition from one service team to another by making assessment and care plan information visible to all members of the child's care team.
- Another CTC has formed an important partnership with the local school board to provide CTC assessments early in the school year. Children are assessed by the service providers from the CTC in coordination with the classroom teacher. A comprehensive individualized education plan is then developed and used to combine both the educational and therapy goals for the individual child.

Conclusion

OACRS and its members are committed to ensuring that no child is left behind. Every child with special needs should be given every opportunity to achieve their full potential. If we are unable to effectively transition ALL children to take advantage of all Ontario has to offer, children with special needs WILL be left behind.

Who we are

Since 1978, the Ontario Association of Children's Rehabilitation Services (OACRS) has represented the interests of Children's Treatment Centres in Ontario. Through our services as a membership organization, we provide a powerful united voice for our member centres, influencing policy, programs, and funding to maximize the potential for all children and youth facing physical, communication and/or developmental challenges. OACRS currently represents 21 Children's Treatment Centres (CTCs) across Ontario.

OACRS is committed to advancing an integrated, inclusive, and family-centred sector. OACRS's members provide innovative therapies and extensive treatment options to children with physical, developmental and communications needs annually in cities, towns and rural areas across the province.