

**Minister's Response to the  
Tuition Support Program Review**

**March, 2010**

**Nova Scotia Department of Education**

## **Preamble**

The recommendations found in the Tuition Support Program (TSP) Review are the result of a very comprehensive examination of the program, which was called for in the *Response to the Minister's Review of Services for Students with Special Needs*, December 2007.

As Minister, I am very appreciative of the work completed by the Review Committee which, was greatly enhanced by the thoughtful insights provided by the TSP students, parents and the staffs of Bridgeway Academy, Churchill Academy and Landmark East School all of which are included in the full report.

The recommendations fall into the five areas that formed the Review's Terms of Reference:

- Long term effectiveness
- Duration of Placement
- Interventions and Instructional Practices
- Transitional Outcomes
- Regional Accessibility & Eligibility Criteria

The importance of effective and on-going communication between Tuition Support Program students/families, the designated special education private schools (DSEPS) and their home school boards featured prominently in the feedback gathered during the review focus groups. Recommendations in this report will provide a mechanism for enhanced meaningful communication opportunities.

Focus group participants also identified issues around transition planning, whether back to the public school system, post-secondary or community. The importance of transition planning is a priority that has been identified by the Department of Education.

"Transition planning is essential if students are to be empowered to improve the quality of their independent lives." *Transition Planning for Students with Special Needs: The Early Years Through to Adult Life*, 2005.

While it is recognized that transition planning occurs throughout a student's years at schools, in direct response to the feedback from students, parents, Designated Special Education Private Schools and Boards, a final transition year will be available to all Tuition Support Program students with the primary focus on transition planning. Further, this transition year will be made available to all current Tuition Support Program students for whom transition outcomes have been identified through the program planning process regardless of their current funding year.

## Recommendations:

### Long Term Effectiveness

1. **It is recommended that the Department of Education collaborate with the Designated Special Education Private Schools (DSEPS) and Regional School Boards to develop a specific annual accountability reporting framework that demonstrates student progress as related to academic, physical and social development. *Education Act, Schedule "A", Section 69, (2) (b), (c), (d)***

The Department of Education accepts Recommendation 1, as currently stated in Governor in Council Education Act Regulation 69, 2 (b), (c), and (d). An annual accountability reporting framework similar to the framework utilized in the Regional Programming and Services for Students with Severe Learning Disabilities (SLD) to track student progress in relation to academic, physical and social development will be developed in consultation with Designated Special Education Private Schools and school boards.

The Department of Education's Learning Disabilities Consultant will support school boards and the DSEPS during the 2009-2010 school year in the development and implementation of this framework.

2. **It is recommended that the Department of Education provide professional development to Designated Special Education Private Schools regarding Program for Learning Assessment for Nova Scotia (PLANS) and Individualized Program Planning (IPP) and Reporting.**

The Department accepts this recommendation.

## **Duration of Student Placement**

- 3. It is recommended that the Department of Education support a maximum of three years. The funding may be extended beyond the three years in special circumstances as determined by the Tuition Review and Appeal Process.**

The Department of Education accepts the recommendation that the Tuition Support Program (TSP) be for a maximum of three years, with a potential additional transition fourth year in cases where transition outcomes have been identified through the program planning process.

The intent of the Tuition Support Program is to provide a short term alternative programming and support option for students which will assist them to meet their desired potential in their age-appropriate, neighbourhood school. As is the case for all students, transition planning is an integral component of individualized programming planning and is essential for students receiving tuition support.

The Department of Education does not support the extension of TSP funding in special circumstances as determined by the Tuition Review and Appeal Process.

The Department of Education remains committed to enhancing supports for students with learning disabilities. In an effort to increase equitable access to intensive supports the Department will work with school boards in the development of enhanced programming and services, as funding is made available. These enhanced programming and services will play a central role in a comprehensive provincial Learning Disabilities Strategy.

Enhanced programming and services will be designed to meet identified regional needs and may provide:

- Professional development opportunities: assessment and diagnosis; intervention strategies, pre-service training opportunities;
- Direct and consultative services to students, families and program planning teams;
- Opportunities for collaboration: inter-agency, intra-agency (SLD Program, early intervention initiatives).

This government is committed to honouring our responsibility “to provide for a publically funded school system whose primary mandate is education programs and services for students to enable them to develop their potential and acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy.” (Education Act, p. 3).

Our ability to do so will be greatly enhanced through the implementation of the recommendations made in this report and by the framework that they will provide to strengthen current inclusionary programming and services practices.

Further, it is my belief that these actions will provide a mechanism for a gradual reallocation of the tuition support program funding to enhance programming and services within the public school system.

In those cases where the program planning team determines that the student’s learning needs cannot be met within the board’s system a Tuition Agreement may be entered. {The Education Act, Section 64 (3) (c)}.

The *Tuition Agreement for Students with Special Needs Guidelines, 2007* will be shared and reviewed with the Special Education Programs and Services Committee.

- 4. It is recommended that the Department of Education, in collaboration with the Designated Special Education Private Schools and the regional school boards establish a Tuition Support Program Review Process framework for applications for a funding extension beyond three years. An appeals process would be included.**

The Department of Education supports a maximum of three years with a potential of an additional fourth year where the focus will be on supporting a documented transition plan. Applications for a fourth year must focus on transition outcomes and the documented plan must accompany the application.

## **Research-Based Interventions and Instructional Methods Used**

- 5. It is recommended that the Designated Special Education Private Schools supply the Department of Education with a listing of the interventions and instructional strategies utilized in their annual accountability framework.**

The Department of Education considers that this recommendation is a component of Recommendations 1 and 2, and, therefore, is contained within the annual accountability framework to be developed as stated in the response to Recommendation 1.

- 6. It is recommended that the “Best Practices in Teaching Students with Learning Disabilities,” report by Dr. Anne Price, Ph.D. be shared with the Designated Special Education Private Schools as a useful reference tool when programming for students with learning disabilities.**

The Department of Education accepts this recommendation.

## **Transitional Outcomes for Students Receiving the Service**

- 7. It is recommended that the Department of Education collaborate with the Designated Special Education Private Schools and the Regional School Boards to develop and implement a formalized communication process for both transition entrance into, and out of, the Tuition Support Program.**

The Department of Education supports the intent of this recommendation, specifically an enhanced communication process between the Designated Special Education Private Schools and school boards. The development of transition plans for funded Tuition Support Program students returning to the public school system is currently stipulated in Governor in Council Regulation 69 (2) ( c) and (d).

Students will now have the opportunity to access a fourth year of additional programming and services through the Tuition Support Program in cases where transition outcomes have been identified through the program planning process. In cases where a fourth year of Tuition Support Program funding is granted the focus will be on supporting a transition plan for return to the public school, post-secondary education or their home community.

This opportunity will be made available to all current Tuition Support Program students regardless of their current funding year for the 2010-2011 school year only.

- 8. It is recommended that the guidelines outlined in the Transition Planning for Students with Special Needs: The Early Years through to Adult Life (2005) form the basis for this process.**

The Department of Education supports this Recommendation.

## **Regional Accessibility and Acceptance Criteria**

- 9. It is recommended that the Department of Education provide each regional school board with targeted funding to establish Learning Disabilities Centers.**

*\* This recommendation is in addition to, and not instead of, existing Regional SLD Services and Tuition Support Programs and ideally these centres will allow for a dynamic collaboration and connection between programming and services.*

The Department of Education supports this recommendation, in principle, subject to funding availability, and will consider the provision of enhanced Learning Disabilities programming and services as a component of the development of a Provincial Learning Disabilities Strategy.

For greater clarity regarding enhanced programming and services please see Recommendation Three.

- 10. It is recommended to the Department of Education that programming for students with LD, ADHD or ASD attending Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) Schools be delivered in CSAP schools. However, students meeting the criteria for the Tuition Support Program may apply the funding to French First Language Special Education Schools outside of the province.**

The Department of Education supports this recommendation to ensure linguistic accessibility to this program. Furthermore, the Department of Education would prioritize that when funding becomes available the CSAP be among the first boards to be supported in the provision of enhanced programming and services in the area of learning disabilities.

- 11. It is recommended that students with ASD meeting the criteria for the Tuition Support Program may apply the funding to Special Education Schools outside of the province if that Special Education School has as a primary mandate the providing of programming specific to ASD.**

The Department of Education does not support the recommendation to fund students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to attend a school outside the province of Nova Scotia. However, ASD will continue to be one of the exceptionalities included in the Tuition Support Program eligibility criteria.



**12. It is recommended that the application criteria for the Tuition Support Program and Guidelines be revised as follows:**

- **the current requirement that an applicant have an IPP be changed to “demonstrated involvement in the program planning process”**
- **that the eligibility criteria for the TSP include ADHD, ASD, LD and be expanded to include: cognitive impairments, emotional/ behavioural disorders, physical disabilities and/or health impairments, speech impairments and/or communication disorders, multiple disabilities or giftedness**

The Department of Education accepts the modification of the requirement of an Individual Program Plan (IPP) as an eligibility requirement to be replaced with “documented evidence of involvement up to Stage 4 in the Program Planning Process including the decision to proceed with the development of an Individual Program Plan”.

(Policy 2.2: Program Planning Process, *Special Education Policy*).

The Department of Education does not accept the recommendation to include an expansion of the exceptionalities currently included in the Tuition Support Program eligibility criteria.

