

Audits in High Incidence Categories 2005/06 to 2007/08, A Summary

Between 2005/06 and 2007/08, audit teams appointed by the Ministry of Education undertook special education enrolment audits in 16 districts. Several of these audits focussed on students reported in high incidence categories.

As a result of the audits, the auditors produce an audit report of observations and recommendations for each district.

SUMMARY OF AUDITORS' OBSERVATIONS

The following is a summary of the observations provided in the reports.

Student Files

- Seven audits made clear observations about the organization of student files: that the files were well organized (subsections for diagnoses and assessments, school reports, IEPs, and other related documents) in seven of the audits; four audits made clear observations that the files were not well organized (documentation missing or difficult to find, including special education).
- Documentation of the “rule out factor” (disorders are not due primarily to hearing and/or vision problems, social-economic factors, cultural or linguistic differences, lack of motivation, inadequate or insufficient instruction) was found not to be present or not well documented in student files in five of the audits.
- In two audits, auditors found that students moved or moving out of the district had no records remaining in the district being audited.

Assessment Information

- In five of the audits (four focusing on students with Learning Disabilities and or students who are Gifted, and one focusing on students in the two Behaviour categories), evidence of assessment was not found in individual student files.

IEPs

- IEPs that were not current or not dated were found in student files in four audits.
- In one audit, the IEPs were frequently called ‘learning assistance profiles’.
- In two audits (both concerning files of students with Learning Disabilities) clear observations were made indicating that the IEPs contained strategies for intervention that were generic in nature or were missing from the IEP.
- In seven audits, the auditors made an observation that files did not contain documentation about the nature and amount of special education services and learning activities provided to individual students in relation to their identified needs.

IEP Goals

- IEP goals that did not correspond to the special needs category or the needs of the student were found in 5 audits (files reviewed were for students with Learning Disabilities and or students who are Gifted); in one audit of students with Learning Disabilities, the IEP goals were found to consistently match the claimed special education category and needs of the students.

Methods for Measuring Progress in Relation to the IEP Goals

- In 13 of the 15 audits, methods for measuring student progress were not found in the IEPs reviewed.

Parent Consultation

- Evidence of the opportunity to be consulted about preparation of the IEP was found not to be documented/available in student files in six of the audits.
- Evidence of the opportunity for students to participate in the IEP planning was documented/available in student files, mostly secondary students, in four audits.

Other

- A number of districts (four) were complimented about the dedication of their staff to a student centered approach.
- A number of districts (four) were in the process of restructuring special education services or had intended to review files in the coming year.
- In four audits that focused on files in the Intensive Behaviour Intervention/Serious Mental Illness and Moderate Behaviour Supports categories, auditors found it difficult to find evidence of cross-agency planning and review in one district, many inter-ministry planning and review meetings were well documented in one district, and commended one district for being persistent and committed in its efforts to access inter-agency services.
- Three districts were noted to have district-wide processes for the identification of students with special needs.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

District Practice

- Establish a district assessment standard, including reporting guidelines, to ensure student records contain the information necessary to support reporting a student in a special education category and the information is current.
- Review district Form 1701 reporting practices to ensure optimal accuracy.
- Give assistance to teachers in writing appropriate IEP goals and objectives
- Give assistance to teachers in developing methods and measures for tracking student progress/achievement in relation to the IEP goals.
- Maintain a student record for students moving or who have moved from the district.

Student Files

- Organize all special education documentation into subsections so that the information is readily available to teachers and administrators
- Take steps to ensure all the necessary documentation/evidence is current and in place in the file.
- Review the files of students reported in the Learning Disabilities category to ensure both cognitive and achievement assessments are current.
- Review the files of students in the Intensive Behaviour Interventions/Serious Mental Illness category to ensure well-documented evidence of antisocial, extremely disruptive behaviour in most other environments and consistently/ persistently over time; and/or severe mental illness diagnosed by a mental health professional (psychiatrist, paediatrician, physician, registered psychologist specializing in this area).
- Place continued emphasis on the logical flow of information from identified needs and assessment to the establishment of IEP goals and interventions to methods of tracking progress.

Assessment

- Encourage school-based teams and teachers to use the 'rule-out factor' (disorders are not due primarily to hearing and/or vision problems, social-economic factors, cultural or linguistic differences, lack of motivation, inadequate or insufficient instruction) when considering students for the Learning Disabilities category.

IEPs

- Review IEPs to ensure they:
 - are current (dated after September 30, previous school year)
 - provide documentation that gives evidence that parents were offered the opportunity to be consulted about the preparation of the IEP
 - contain goals that correspond to the area of disability/demonstrated need of the student
 - state the level and type of special education service