



REPORT TO BOARD OF TRUSTEES

June 23, 2020

Deb Crawford, Director of Education

SUBJECT: Special Education During Distance Learning

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During distance learning, our central special education teams have been supporting staff, students and families. Special education teams have been sharing resources, strategies, individualized materials, attending virtual meetings for students, developing learning modules and tailoring learning based on student needs.

ABA SUPPORT TEAM

1. **Supporting Families:**

Since the beginning of distance learning the ABA Team has been sharing resources, strategies, links and materials, including individualized specific material to support the use of ABA Strategies at home, based on each child's unique needs.

Some examples of Support to Families:

[Parent Learning Hub - Special Education](#) - links to resources

[Learning at Home](#) - *Hi Amy, Thank you for the social story. I will put that in our morning routine to watch it.*

I appreciate it being made for us.

[Visual Schedule for at Home](#) - *Thank you so much for reaching out. He has been enjoying the activities that you've provided and we've been working through them along with some others at home.*

[Sensory Ideas for Home](#) - *Hi! Thank you so much for checking in. He has been awesome! Veryyyy talkative, naming things and pointing to them, saying hi and bye, and even singing songs! The kids are learning online and doing great! Hope you're doing well and I thank you for checking in again. I really appreciate it!*

[Handwritten Schedule turned Electronic](#) - *For a student who was accustomed to using a handwritten schedule at school, but whose family felt an electronic version would be most helpful at home as they wanted to display it on the computer so she would see WHEN she could have free computer time!*

[Interactive Calendar](#) - *For a student who was missing calendar time*

[Activities for at home](#) - *For a family that found out their child LOVED to be a helper and do different chores!*

2. **Supporting Students Directly:**

The ABA team has been connecting by phone, email, or remote learning platforms (Google Meet) to check in, and connect remotely with students based on their unique needs, strengths and abilities.

Both weekly and in one case daily google meets are occurring. Story about OM and goal to increase virtual meeting times (therapy etc.). Here is a video of how we have been doing this:

<https://youtu.be/IA-ZAaHbnII>

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Some examples of Direct Support to Students:

[Google Meet Schedule and Slide Deck](#) - For siblings (FDK and older) that the ABA Team meets on Google Meet once weekly to provide a 1:1 connection (as per parent goal) and informally talk about emotions.

[Breathing techniques to try](#) - For a student that is anxious about high school and wanting to learn calming strategies.

3. **Transition Support to Schools and Families:**

The ABA team has been attending both pre-school and secondary school transition meetings. The team continues to collaborate with school teams in the creation of transition supports such as videos, All About Me Sheets, Transition picture books etc.

Some examples of Transition Support:

[Welcome to St. Pat's](#) - Transition video for a specific grade 8 student to review prior to transition - he watches this daily

[A Day at St. Pats](#) - Transition video for Grade 8 students who will be in the life skills classroom

[Welcome to UCC](#) - Transition video for Grade 8 students entering the Life Skills program.

COLLABORATIVE SUPPORT TEAM (CST)

1. **Supporting Students**

- Connections have been made for 52 students and parents by the CST. The CST lead makes the initial connection and makes all of the arrangements with the school team and parent(s) prior to the scheduled virtual connection. The CST EA joins the scheduled visit and may or may not take the lead depending on the relationship that has been established while working together in the school environment.
- Some circumstances resulted in a one-time only connection. For example, if it was discovered that more than one school Board team as well as the classroom teacher, PRT, and/or principal were all trying to connect with a family, it would be determined who best to serve the family at the time, them taking the lead, while the other teams took a step back for the time being.
- Some circumstances resulted in multiple, on-going connections with the student and parent(s) whereby weekly or bi-weekly virtual meetings continue with the student.

2. **Supporting Families**

- The team is very flexible with their hours to help in meeting the students and parent(s) where they're at and with what is best for them. They are meeting with students and parent(s) at all times of the day, trying to stay within the hours of the school day.
- To make it as easy as possible for the parent(s) to connect virtually with the CST, the team first made arrangements with the parent(s) and provided them with step by step instructions on how to connect using Google Meet. They have also held practice sessions with the parent(s) in advance of the meeting to trouble shoot any problems that could arise with the technology. In circumstances where a virtual face-to-face meeting was not possible, other avenues have been explored and used. Things like a conference call. A perfect example of this in an email I received: "Dad is worried about the tech piece. I told him I'd send instructions through email and

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I will also call him before our meeting to walk him through how to join. He was really open to the idea and was honest about tech being hard for him. I told him we'd try and if it didn't work, we'd figure out another way to connect."

- When the CST lead and CST EA connect with the student and parent(s) on their own, a brief synopsis of the conversation is always shared with the school team. If areas of concern surface, this allows the school team and the CST to work together, using Collaborative and Proactive Solutions and Self-Reg. strategies in supporting the student and parent(s) during distance learning.
- The focus has been on the students and parent(s) with whom the team have worked in the past and have an on-going relationship. The nature of the team's work has been directed at maintaining the relationship with the student and parent(s) so that they know we care to provide a connection to a familiar face, to provide an opportunity to share what the student has been doing during distance learning – school based and play based (what's been keeping them busy all day, every day) and to help them troubleshoot areas in which they may be struggling.
- Flexibility to support families has been essential. There have been occasions where the student was not in a place to participate in a scheduled virtual meeting for whatever reason. The connection made with the team member allowed the parent to be comfortable enough to broach this situation with them. Often, the team member would then discuss with the parent what was making it difficult for the student and suggest strategies, conversation starters, methodologies, activities, etc. that may be helpful using the Self-Reg and/or Collaborative and Proactive Solutions lens. For example, if the parent shared the student had been trying to work on academic work prior to the scheduled virtual meeting with the CST and was too frustrated to sit for the virtual meeting, the CST may provide strategies for gross motor movement that can help the student when it is used appropriately. The team member would share suggestions in best practice as to how to break up the student's day with fun gross motor movements so that they were in a better place to sit and complete school work.
- There have also been times when a scheduled virtual meeting was replaced with the team member sharing photos of pets for example in a circumstance where the student couldn't bring him/herself to have the virtual meeting. The parent then shared the photos with the student when the timing was better, still allowing the CST to connect with the student. As well, a team member sent the student a pre-recorded message saying hello, telling him/her she missed them, asked what they've been up to, etc.
- Overall, the response has been extremely positive from students, parents and school staff. The students and parents have been very responsive and accommodating so that the scheduled virtual meetings could take place. The students have been extremely excited and responsive to the team members during the calls. One boy asked the team member if she could call him every day! It has proven to be another positive school connection for the student and parent(s) aside from the classroom expectations.
- Some feedback the team has received:
 - Parent - "He looks so forward to doing the video chats. He misses school and all his friends. He's been doing really well -some days harder for me to get him to do his work, other days no problem."

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- Parent - “The timing totally works for me, thank you. He was really excited this morning for the video chat. We’ll see you again next week, same time. Thank you for doing this for him.”
- CST to CST from a parent – “I just got off the phone with a parent and she had a message she wanted me to relay to our entire team...*She was worried that members of our team may not hear thank you enough so she wanted me to say just that to our team...THANK YOU! She said that she is so comforted to know that people are so invested in the students they work with within our school board. She has many people reaching out and is beyond grateful for the support for her son.*”

SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS

Our three Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) – Janice Cornell, Kayla Fielder and Heather Molyneaux have been very engaged with supporting staff, students and their families during this period of distance learning.

1. Fostering Collaboration

- Our SLPs have been fostering collaboration in a number of ways through the ongoing support they have provided to Classroom Teachers, Program Resource Teachers, Educational Assistants, and other Special Education Teams.
- They have attended **virtual school-based team meetings** with Classroom Teachers, EAs, Principals, and members of the ABA team to discuss student programming. In some situations, the Classroom Teacher has adjusted the distance learning goals for specific students based on feedback from the SLP. Typically, the format that is used for these virtual School Based Team Meetings is Google Meet.

2. Providing Direct Support to Students and Families

- During Phase 1, the Speech Language Pathologists not only provided resources on the Learning Hub for school teams, but they also compiled resources for the **Parent Learning Hub**. They created parent-friendly tip sheets and other resources that address specific needs (e.g. communication disorders and early literacy difficulties).
- During this time of distance learning, the team as well has been providing **direct virtual speech-language therapy** and **individualized home programming support** to students and their families. Data:
 - Initial Contact was made via email to 132 students (on their caseload) and their families to offer information regarding the link to the Parent Learning Hub and to offer support
 - The SLPs contacted 68 students (on their current therapy caseload) and their families to offer tele therapy
 - Of those 68 families, 27 accepted therapy via video sessions
 - 13 families preferred to receive weekly individualized home programming support
 - 28 families either preferred to wait, didn’t respond upon multiple attempts, or were sent one time resources.
- They are using TEAMS platform with great success to deliver the virtual therapy sessions. They are also providing printable resources (specific to the student) to parents to assist with the family’s participation in the sessions.

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- During the tele therapy sessions, because many parents are now at home, they are able to sit with their child during the session and share in their child's learning experience. For example: how to prompt their child's learning of a specific skill or how to model new vocabulary.
- Ultimately, many parents have become more directly involved in their child's learning and can identify with the difficulties the student is facing and why certain specific goals are targeted. For example, one parent commented after a session that she was surprised her child wasn't able to name categories of items and that was something she would keep practicing with him.
- Home programming consists of sending weekly resources and activities (tip sheets, worksheets) based on the specific goals of the student, as well as weekly check-ins via email or telephone to monitor progress and to inquire if any of the activities need to be adjusted with regard to level of difficulty. Some parents preferred this service delivery model to teletherapy sessions due to various factors including some students had difficulty attending to video, or some parents required the flexibility with their schedule that home programming provided in order to work with their child.
- The Speech Language Pathologists have also been busy facilitating regular contact with students and their families by:
 - Participating in **follow-up consultation with families and staff** for those students with assessed language delays to share programming supports (e.g., tips on modelling, prompting, following directions around the house, expanding vocabulary, phonological awareness games).
 - As well, to improve their expertise in their ability to offer consultation and support to students, families and staff regarding augmentative and alternative communication or (AAC) systems, Janice, Kayla and Heather participated in the "**AAC Strategies for Success**" **workshop** recently offered by the Children's Treatment Centre - Chatham-Kent. This virtual workshop also provided them with an understanding of the AAC resources that are available for our students through the CTC.
 - One SLP said: I've been seeing a little boy who has done amazing with tele therapy. His Grandma is always with him and is quite invested in the sessions. I think that helps! Every Monday he asks me to show him one of my child's toys and he will show me one of his. We use it as a show and tell and work on our oral language goals that way. He absolutely loves it. I think he is most proud that he gets to show off the things with which he enjoys playing and is given an opportunity to talk about them.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the St. Clair Catholic District School Board receive the report: *Special Education During Distance Learning*, for information.