

OCDSB Proposes Removal of Specialized Program Classes for Students with Disabilities

A new program model to phase out 39 special needs education classes, proposed by the Ottawa Carleton District School Board, may begin in 2026.

Specialized program classes cater to the needs of students with disabilities, removing them from mainstream classrooms and placing them with students of similar abilities. Beginning in 2026, students projected to join a specialized program will remain in general classes with additional support.

Lynn Scott, the chair of the board, said that students currently enrolled in one of the 39 classes will be able to complete the program before integrating into a mainstream class.

“We are not suddenly snatching a child who’s in a class for pretty high-needs kids, and dumping them into a classroom with no support,” she said.

The proposal calls on removing the general learning program, the gifted program, the language learning disabilities program, the semi-integrated learning disabilities program, and the primary special needs program. These five programs have 42 teachers and 13 educational assistants who will be redistributed to community schools.

While these educators are equipped with training fit for students with disabilities, the board was unclear about the training and support that will be provided to other staff.

“We’ve been doing a lot of work with our teachers in professional development to help them become more culturally responsive in their instruction,” Scott said.

However, parents demonstrated doubt, suggesting that this slight increase in educational staff would not be enough to support their children’s specific needs.

“It’s the wrong place for my daughter and it’s the wrong idea that she could be successful,” said Jennifer Bliar, the mother of a general learning program student.

Bliar’s daughter is in a class with less than ten students covering grades four to six. Bliar said her daughter’s genetic condition makes her sensitive to overstimulation due to difficulty coordinating her senses, coordinating her body, and making sense of what is happening.

Before joining the general learning program, Bliar’s daughter demonstrated reactive tendencies, turning to aggression towards herself and others. Bliar said her daughter is currently thriving in the program, showing confidence and new learning tendencies.

“I think that comes from feeling like she has dignity and that she’s in a place with people who understand her,” Bliar said.

Bliar said that she worries about her daughter integrating back into a general classroom, noting the panic her daughter will experience and the stress her family will face.

Supt. Stoudt answered questions of concern from board members regarding the transition process for students like Bliar’s daughter. Stoudt said that OCDSB will provide classroom models dedicated to supporting specific needs including mixed-grade grouping for students with similar abilities.

Diane Pernari, the general manager of communications, said that the OCDSB’s next step would be to figure out how to accommodate each student’s needs. She said the students selected to move into the general classroom were likely to demonstrate “the same or greater success.”

Lynn Scott said the model will roll out in 2026 to ensure educational staff have sufficient training and special learning students receive the necessary support during their transition.

OCDSB Board of Trustees meets to discuss a new proposed program model. Taken by Brayden Murray





Journalist Brayden Murray sits in the gallery overlooking the OCDSB boardroom. Taken by Ella Corbin