LEGISLATIVE RETURN

SUBMITTED BY: Tracy-Anne McPhee, Minister of Education

1. On November 9, 2017, the Member for Porter Creek North

    ☑ asked the following question during the Oral Question Period at page(s) 1585 - 1586 of *Hansard*

    ☐ submitted the following written question – WQ No. _____

    ☐ gave notice of the following motion for the production of papers – MPP No. ____

    RE: Student support services

    Yesterday we asked the minister how long it takes for a student to receive an assessment after they are referred. We then asked how long it takes for a student to receive services after they have been assessed. Can the minister tell us: What is a service standard in response to a referral? Is her department meeting this service standard?

    I'm wondering if the minister could tell us what the current backlog is for referrals waiting for follow-up from the Student Support Services.

    Just to follow up on yesterday, I highlighted that the minister said that the Student Support Services division was to be reviewed in the fall to ensure they were adequately resourced. I had asked the minister if she could update us on this review and if there are enough resources to properly support all the students. She has just said that she is waiting on the review, so I think my question here kind of leaves it open because I was going to ask if that update was available for review today.

OR

2. This legislative return relates to a matter outstanding from discussion related to:

    _____

    on _____ at page(s) _____ of *Hansard*.

The response is as follows:

The *Education Act* provides the framework under which students with special needs receive special education programs, as set out in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The IEP establishes the educational measures to support the educational programming for students with special needs to enable their learning. In cases where changes do not need to be made to the curricular content of the student's educational program, supports for those students may be outlined instead in a Student Learning Plan or Behaviour Support Plan.

As each student and their assessment needs are different and unique, the assesment times vary depending on the specific situation of the student involved. The process for requesting support for students begins at the school and follows the steps below. This process ensures that staff focus formal assessments on priority cases and work with schools to assess and support other cases through consultation, informal assessments, recommendations for specific interventions and other assistance as appropriate.

Due to the individuality of cases, the department does not have a specific service standard, however the following is a description of the process.

Summary of Process for Referral to Student Support Services

1. A concern or issue is identified by the educator or parent.
2. The school-based team consisting of principal, teacher, and learning assistant collect and review the relevant information (from various sources).
3. The school-based team invites relevant Student Support Services staff to participate, based on the nature of the concern or issue that has been identified.

4. Student Support Services staff and the school-based team collaborate on recommendations to support the student. If further investigation of the student's needs is required, a joint decision for a referral to Student Support Services is made, including for formal assessment and other types of support. Parental consent is required for formal assessments.
5. Based on the referral, Student Support Services staff respond by providing the services needed to support the student. Priority is given for a formal assessment when the student's learning is being severely impeded.
6. Student Support Services staff continue to work with school staff to support the student's learning by monitoring the student's needs and collaborating on programming to support the student's learning.
7. Once the plan and support is in place for the student, Student Support Services staff (in consultation with the school) discharge the student from their caseload. At any time the school can consult with Student Support Services staff if they have a concern about the student's ability to learn.

The Act provides that it is the school administration, in consultation with professional staff and the student's parents, who determine whether a student has special educational needs, and if so, the special education program that is appropriate to meet those needs. This process is facilitated by a school-based team that is made up of the school principal, learning assistance teacher, classroom teacher, and other school staff and specialist teachers. A parent may request a school-based team meeting at any time for their child through their school.

A student may be referred by the school-based team to the department's Student Support Services unit to determine whether a psychological or other specialized assessment should be performed. Student Support Services staff work with school-based teams to prioritize referrals for assessment, and students are considered as a priority when their ability to learn is severely impeded as demonstated by their lack of learning success.

This fall, Student Support Services refined its approach to service delivery for referrals, starting in September 2017. The service delivery for referrals to Student Support Services is based on the following five service indicators:

1. Assessment – the consultant has worked with the school and has prioritized a referral for a formal assessment. Informed consent must be obtained from the parent and the timeframe for the assessment is prioritized into the consultant's schedule.

2. Monitor complex cases - the consultant is called upon on a regular basis (or when needed) to monitor and support school staff who are implementing recommended strategies.

3. Intervention – a specific tool, equipment, or strategy is being used on a trial basis to support the identified need.

4. Block Therapy – this service is provided to students who are receiving specific articulation therapy from communication assistants as recommended, programmed and scheduled by a Speech Language Consultant.

5. Hold - students unable to receive services from Student Support Services – usually due to long term student absence, inability to get consent from parents, or other unforeseen circumstances.

The below table outlines how many referrals the Student Support Services team are currently involved with as of November 21, 2017. These numbers reflect the cases that have reached a referral stage after a number of initial steps have already happened at the school level for the case (see above process).

When new referrals come to Student Support Services after the initial steps are completed at the school level, staff initiate a response within 4 weeks. Formal assessment timelines vary based on the unique context and needs of specific students. During this time, the student would still receive ongoing support at the school level in consultation with Student Support Services staff to ensure there is continual support for their needs. Student Support Services staff and school staff share the responsibility of following up on these cases as needed in these stages.
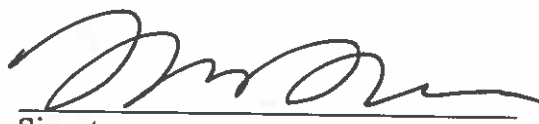
Consultant	Assessment	Monitor	Intervention	Block Therapy	On hold	Total
Educational Psychologists (5)	20	32	1	0	28	81

Speech and Language Pathologists (4)	21	126	0	169	45	361
Occupational Therapists (3)	9	170	27	0	28	234
Physiotherapist (1)	6	81	3	0	3	93
Total	**56**	**409**	**31**	**169**	**104**	**769**

The department's goal is to continue to increase the knowledge and capacity of educators in the schools so that they have resources and strategies to support their students' needs. The department recognizes that although improvements have been made to the ways in which referrals and services are managed by Student Support Services, there are still improvements to be made. The department has not yet formally evaluated the improved service delivery approach as it is still quite new, but initial feedback from schools, parents and staff has so far been favourable.

November 22, 2017
_____
Date

_____
Signature