Inclusion Policy

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School – Halton Catholic District School Board (applicable to IB programme)

IB & Inclusive Education

St. Thomas Aquinas is a welcoming, inclusive, Catholic faith community. We provide a supportive learning environment for all students in the IBDP Programme. Diversity is a crucial part of the fabric of St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Secondary School, and as such it enhances the school's ability to provide quality education in a Catholic context, and provide opportunities for the development of international-mindedness in our students so that they can value different perspectives, cultures, and identities.

As per the HCDSB Equity and Inclusive Education Policy, all people are created equal, in the image of God, each with inimitable characteristics deserving of dignity (Genesis: 1:27). In accordance with the Church's teachings, it is the policy of HCDSB to provide in all its operations an educational environment which supports and fosters diversity, equity, and inclusion within its Catholic community.

HCDSB recognizes that any form of discrimination is incompatible with Catholic moral principles and is in violation of the Ontario Human Rights Code. HCDSB recognizes that the school system gives pre-eminence to the tenets of the Catholic faith, consistent with the protection afforded in the Ontario *Human Rights Code*, the *Constitution Act, 1982* and confirmed in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.*

HCDSB and its staff are committed to the elimination of systemic barriers. Barriers to learning may be found in:
- school organization and resources
- cultures and policies
- approaches to teaching and learning
- buildings and physical obstacles
- relationships among the members of the school community.

The St. Thomas Aquinas staff and faculty are committed to removing systemic barriers to learning wherever possible and consistent with the HCDSB's *Equity and Inclusive Education Policy* (Policy No. II-45), and HCDSB's *Inclusion and Range of Placement Options for Identified Exceptional Students* (Policy No. II-29).

IB Viewpoint – Quality Education for All

For an educator to be an educator of all students, instruction must be differentiated to meet the needs of all learners. Four practices guide differentiation at St. Thomas Aquinas (IBO 2015):

Affirming identity and building self-efficacy

In order to be engaged in the learning community, students must see themselves as capable of contributing to the learning process. Teachers help students understand their strengths and challenges and empower them to leverage their strengths to confront their challenges, contribute to the school community, and develop the traits of the *IB learner profile.*

Valuing prior knowledge

When teachers value prior knowledge, every learner has a foundation for the development of further learning. Students will not start with the same knowledge, so teachers must "meaningfully assess existing knowledge, strengths, and interests" (IBO 2015), activate prior knowledge before building in new learning, and take prior learning into account when designing curriculum.

Scaffolding

Learning is more inclusive when students are given supports that are then gradually removed to foster independent use of new understandings and skills. Teachers can scaffold learning by breaking the development of complex understandings and skills into smaller pieces, each with increasing independence, and providing constructive feedback at each stage in the process.

Extending Learning

Once learners can use their knowledge independently, they are free to extend their learning. St. Thomas Aquinas CSS strives to support extension of learning in six ways (IBO 2015):

1. **Optimal learning environments** – the classroom environment needs to be a positive, safe space for members of the school community to explore new ideas. Learning in environments beyond the classroom walls also provides opportunities for enriching learning.
2. **Technology** – "The sound and balanced use of multiple technologies" (IBO 2015) enables learners to extend their learning when their use is "evident but seamless in the curriculum." (IBO 2015)
3. **Collaboration –** The school can lead in creating a culture of collaboration. Collaborative learning activities can involve any combination of teachers, students and administrators.
4. **Approaches to Learning –** By explicitly teaching learning skills, the school better equips students to become independent learners who "set learning goals, ask good questions, self-interrogate as they learn, generate motivation and perseverance, try out different learning processes, self-monitor the effectiveness of their learning, reflect on achievement, and make changes to their learning process where necessary" (IBO 2015).
5. **Assessment –** Assessment provides opportunities for students to extend their learning when:
   - the purpose of the assessment is clearly understood
   - it allows for meaningful feedback throughout the process
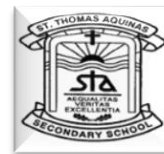
- measures both product and process
- allows learners to take an active role in the assessment process (IBO 2015)

6. **Differentiated Instruction** – Teachers must plan for the variability in learning styles, strengths and challenges in their classrooms. "Differentiated teaching may involve using collaborative and cooperative learning, a variety of learning practices, creative approaches to teaching and learning, and differing formats and modes of exploring and presenting knowledge and understanding being made available to students" (IBO 2015)

IB Definition – Inclusive Access Arrangements

Inclusive access arrangements are changes or alterations introduced to learning, teaching and assessment to remove or reduce barriers. They do not change what the student is expected to learn and do not lower expectations, but instead provide the optimal support to address a range of barriers and to enable the student to work around them. At a fundamental level, they address equal access and fairness to learning and teaching and in addition, validity and meaningfulness to assessment. (IBO 2022)

Inclusive Access Arrangement Requests

At St. Thomas Aquinas, IBDP staff and the Special Education department work collaboratively to meet the needs of the IB student. Special Education Resource Teachers oversee the support plan (Individual Education Plan) that is used in the classroom to support the IB student. Special Education Resource Teachers also support the process of requesting inclusive access arrangements for the IBDP program; this is completed on a case-by-case basis.

All requests for inclusive assessment arrangements are submitted by November 15th, in each academic year, using the online application in IBIS. It is mandatory to register a candidate before submitting requests for inclusive assessment arrangements.

What Is Needed?

- Supporting documentation (psychological/psycho-educational/medical report);
- Standard scores requested in psychological reports;
- Individual Education Plan (IEP);
- Educational evidence (teacher(s) observations);
- The above documentation should establish the 'history of need' and the 'evidence of need for access.'

All requests are made to the IBO with the support of STA special education staff.

The following is a sample list of inclusive access arrangements that may be granted once IBO has reviewed the required documentation:

- additional time – 10 to 50% more time is allowed for the candidate, as outlined within the IBDP Access and Inclusion Policy;
- rest breaks – supervised rest time may be allowed, during which time the candidate is not allowed to work on their exam;
- information and communication technology;
- scribes – a person who writes down dictated answers from the candidate;
- readers – a person who reads aloud the questions to the candidate and can also read back answers the candidate has provided. The reader cannot explain a question or give advice on how to answer the question;
- communicators – a person who can convey information to a candidate with a hearing impairment, using lip reading, or sign language;
- modifications to examination papers – normally made for candidates with hearing or visual issues, such as providing enlarged print, printing on colored paper, modifications to the visual complexity of the exam, or modifications to the language of the exam paper;
- electronic (PDF) examination for students with reading or visual challenges who require access to reading software;
- calculators;
- transcriptions – A candidate's response to an assessment component is submitted in a form other than the candidate's own handwriting. Transcription is justified when a candidate with a specific learning issue, or a physical disability, has very poor handwriting skills and cannot use a computer. Transcription is not available to candidates with poor handwriting for whom some form of special need cannot be diagnosed;
- alternative venues for examinations – if a candidate is too ill to attend school, but on medical advice is able to take the examinations at home or in hospital, authorization may be given for the examination to be taken at an alternative venue. In principle, the examination should be taken at the same time as other candidates in the group. A qualified invigilator must be present;
- extensions to deadlines – this arrangement applies to cases of illness or accident when a candidate is genuinely prevented from completing work in time for the coordinator to submit the work to the examiner.

Policy Review

The policy is reviewed and revised as necessary in conjunction with the Special Education Department, IBDP coordinator, HCDSB Special Education staff, and school administration. Revisions are communicated during IB staff meetings, and the policy is then posted on the school website.

References

Approaches to Teaching and Learning. Geneva: International Baccalaureate Organization (2015).

Access and inclusion policy. Geneva: International Baccalaureate Organization (2022).

Halton Catholic District School Board. (2021). *Inclusion and Range of Placement Options for Identified Exceptional Students.* Policy No. II-29.

Halton Catholic District School Board. (2021). *Equity and Inclusive Education Policy.* Policy No. II-45.