



Information for Parents of Children with
Special Needs in School

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How Do I Find Out If My Child Needs Help?



- * If your child is just entering school with special needs, or if the teacher notes that your child is having trouble learning, there are certain areas that need to be considered. These may be: social, behavioral, communication, cognitive-learning, physical or sensory skills which will provide more information about your child and how he or she learns.

- * As a parent, you know your child best and it is important that the lines of communication between home and school be open, positive and active. Your child's profile will assist with an appropriate education plan that has been established with the strengths, abilities, needs and challenges. Parent participation will have a huge impact on your child's education. Foster this partnership as soon as possible. Visit the school often and get to know all the teachers/staff who work with your child.

Vision

Ministerial Directive on Inclusive Schooling 2006



- * Parents along with Educators share a common goal to ensure that the children with special needs are provided an education that is truly inclusive. This is where every child feels accepted, valued, and safe. Strengths and challenges are identified in each case.

- * Core values and beliefs include:
 - All students can learn.
 - Students learn in different ways, at different rates and in different places.
 - Students come from diverse backgrounds and want their differences to be respected.
 - Students have the right to an appropriate education program and required supports.
 - Parental involvement is essential.

Principals of Inclusion

Ministerial Directive on Inclusive Schooling 2006



- * **1. Inclusive schooling shall be characterized by** equal access to education opportunities.
- * **2. Inclusive schooling shall be characterized by** an approach to schooling which builds on student strengths and responds to student challenges.
- * **3. Inclusive schooling shall be** community-based.
- * **4. Inclusive schooling shall** promote the involvement of parents/guardians in their children's education.
- * **5. Inclusive schooling** shall be characterized by collaboration.

Where Do I Begin?



- * If you suspect your child is having difficulties, the first step is to speak to your child's teacher. Teachers have a number of methods to find out what your child's learning needs are and to discover the strengths as well. Some of these are:
 - * Observing your child during activities
 - * Talking to your child
 - * Analyzing your child's class work
 - * Assessing (Testing) your child's work in math, reading, etc.
- * Parents can collect information that may be helpful to get a complete picture such as medical reports, recent behavioral changes, observations made at home or in the community. This will help the teacher understand and get to know your child's needs better.
- * A recent vision and hearing screening tests should be completed on your child to rule out possible hearing or vision problems that would interfere with learning. Your public health or health centres can be contacted to ensure this is done. (If kindergarten screening tests have completed these, please provide the results)

What is an Assessment and How is it Carried Out?



- * **An assessment** is an evaluation or a measurement tool used to help identify the ability level of the child. It comes in different forms: formal and informal.
- * Your child will receive informal testing by teachers that is part of the curriculum delivery.
- * Formal testing is provided with your written consent if there is a referral to a psychologist, psychiatrist, occupational therapist, speech and language therapist, reading clinician, paediatrician, or other.
- * **The Program Support Teacher (PST)** will follow-up on the assessment plan for your child and make the necessary contacts with the school board , Inclusive Schooling Consultant, and forward the referral application.

The reason to complete assessments:

- * To find out if your child has a special learning need
- * To identify abilities, skills, needs
- * To find out how those special learning needs affect your child's ability to learn and function in school
- * To identify appropriate programming and services that will meet your child's individual needs

- * When all assessments are completed, the school will contact you to explain the results, discuss the recommendations, and involve you in related discussions. Often a written report is shared with you either in person, by Skype, phone, video conferencing, or other.
- * Note: ask questions if there are some areas that seem to be vague or unclear.

What is a School Team?



- * For children who have learning needs that require support, a team is often formed to develop a plan.
- * **The in-school team** is usually those people who are involved with the child on a daily basis at school.
- * **A support team** may be needed to provide consultation and expertise so that planning, assessment and programming are appropriate and in place.
- * A parent plays an essential role on the school team to ensure that the child has a successful educational experience.

The school team can:

- Take part in planning meetings
- Set goals
- Review your child's progress
- Make sure that the supports your child needs are in place
- Plan for transitions between home-school, early years-middle years; middle years to high school, and high school to college or vocational/employment training development.

What is an IEP?



- * The IEP is an acronym for **Individualized Education Plan**. It is a legal document that states the main things your child will learn in a school year. These are called goals, or annual student outcomes and are based on the strengths and needs of your child.
- * The IEP should also have a **SSP (Student Support Plan)** that is also a document that outlines how your child is supported in school and what interventions can be put in place for success.

- * **An IEP should include:**
 - What your child already knows and can do
 - What and how your child should learn next
 - Where your child will learn
 - Who will provide instruction to your child
 - How long it may take
 - What your child will do to demonstrate what they've learned
 - What support services or resources your child needs for active participation at school
 - Five ingredients: **SMART**: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-related goals

How Can I Help My Child at School or Home?



- * As a parent of a child with special needs, there will be a variety of decisions you will have to make throughout your child's education. It is important that you actively become involved in all aspects of your child's life. Here are a few tips to guide you:

- * 1. **Resolve issues at the local level** with your child's teacher first as most times problems are taken care of effectively and efficiently within the school. This also promotes a cooperative attitude and a positive liaison with all team members.
- * 2. **Attend IEP/School meetings.**
- * 3. **Talk with your child about their school day**-what they are learning, how they are learning, and what they like and dislike.
- * 4. **Read to your child daily** and allow your child to read to you either through pictures, words or both.
- * 5. **Ask questions at meetings** and keep in touch with your child's teacher.
- * 6. **Share information with the teacher:** medical, phobias, eating, sleeping, or health related issues, etc.
- * 7. **Ask for support or assistance** if needed in implementing the goals identified to work on at home and or in the community.
- * 8. **Talk about long term goals (five year plan)** for your child with the school team. Some goals may not be agreed upon by all team members but at least they can be discussed. You can appeal any decisions made in writing.
- * 9. **Keep a routine for school nights** with set bedtimes, curfew, homework, and nutritional snacks and meals provided. A child learns best with enough sleep and a balanced diet.
- * 10. **Limit the number of hours on computer devices**, watching television, and doing passive activities. Encourage physical interactions: playing, sports, arts and crafts, participation in community or school events.

Who Can Help Me With My Child?



- * The in-school team made up of teachers, program support teacher, guidance counselor, educational assistant, parent, principal, etc. will certainly be one major support group that will provide information related to the needs of your child. This could be services such as: Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Educational Psychology, Psychiatry, Speech and Language, tutoring or specialized equipment, etc.
- * The Student Support / Inclusive Schooling Consultant at the school board can assist with obtaining the specialist services and provide guidance and training that are needed for those who are directly involved with the child. Formal assessments are coordinated through the consultant in contracting outside agencies.

What does the School Offer My Child?



- * The school offers a safe, caring inclusive environment that allows for a positive learning experience in partnership with others. This allows for a successful plan that provides two planning tools: (**MAPS** and **PATH**)

- * **MAPS** (Making Action Plans) is a process that takes place after your child has been in the classroom for a period of time. Informed teachers and peers can join you and your child, and help develop a plan that answers seven questions:
 - * 1. What is your child's history?
 - * 2. What is your dream for your child?
 - * 3. What is your nightmare?
 - * 4. Who is the child?
 - * 5. What are your child's strengths, talents, interests?
 - * 6. What are your child's needs?
 - * 7. What would your child's ideal day at school look like, and what must be done to make it happen?

What does the School Offer My Child?



- * **PATH (Planning Alternatives Tomorrow with Hope)** can also be used as a planning tool. It works well when your child has a group of people around them who are committed to making things happen. Inclusive schooling in the NWT can include contributions by many agencies and partners, such as Band Councils- Gwich'in and Inuvialuit, CNIB, RCMP, Health and Social Services, BDEC-Beaufort-Delta Education Council, Aurora College, Regional Hospitals and Health Boards, etc.
- * The **PATH** process allows people to describe a dream, set goals, and take steps to reach those goals.

Glossary



Accommodations / adaptations:

Changes made to help students achieve from the teaching & learning process, learning environment, materials, time demands, assistance and progress reporting or student products of work. This is considered as supports which is an additional service or device provided to a student to enhance learning, or remove obstacles to ensure success.

Annual Student Outcomes:

These are very precise descriptions of what a student with an individualized education plan will know and be able to do by the end of the school year. Parents call these goals. They should be “SMART”-specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time related.

Assessment:

Collecting information about students through an ongoing process. It determines the appropriate education program and necessary supports. There are two kinds: formal and informal that test intellectual, social, physical, interests, learning styles, or general learning ability.

Glossary



Credit System:

Course credits are given to students based on the schooling they have completed towards fulfilling formal graduation requirements. NWT students normally receive 35-40 credits in each school year.

Inclusive Schooling:

Students access the education program, and required supports with their age peers, in a regular classroom setting, in their home community.

Individualized Education Program:

A student's specific program as outlined in an IEP (individualized education plan). It is a legal document with complete battery of tests or assessments written with an in-school team. It has agreed upon long and short term goals or objectives. It is based upon the child's strengths, needs and interests. It may or may not contain outcomes from the NWT curricula.

Glossary



* **Modified Education Program:**

An education program that has the outcomes outlined in NWT curricula, but at a grade level other than the assigned grade level. Based on student strengths, challenges and interests, a collaborative process is used to determine and document / record necessary program changes, in a Student Support Plan (SSP).

❖ **Program Support Teacher (PST):**

A teacher who is knowledgeable about the curriculum at all levels and who assists classroom or subject teachers with appropriate educational programming for students. The PST role is varied but usually includes consultation, assessment, and providing guidance about modelling of instructional techniques, resources, and accommodations / adaptations. PSTs usually coordinate the in-school IEP team, sometimes referred to as the case manager.

❖ **Student Support Plan (SSP)**

- ❖ A one/two page written plan that documents:
- ❖ Accommodations for difficulty, or enrichment strategies required for success in a regular program for a student who performs near or at grade level, or
- ❖ Targeted curricular outcomes for subjects that the student is on a Modified Education Program because they are working on curricular outcomes either above or below grade level ; and necessary accommodations / enrichment strategies, if any.

References



- Healthy Child Manitoba, Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth Cataloguing In Publication Data, "**Working Together,**" Information for Parents of Children with Special Needs in School, 2004
- "**Ministerial Directive on Inclusive Schooling**", Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Northwest Territories, March 2006
- Yellowknife Association for Community Living, "**Parent and School Partnerships Making it Work**", A resource for parents of children with developmental disabilities, March 2008