



# Parent **TIP** Sheet #11

## SPECIAL EDUCATION OVERVIEW



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## SPECIAL EDUCATION OVERVIEW

### Supporting Students in Inclusive Schools

All students can learn, but not all students can learn in the same way, at the same time, or at the same pace. District schools support students through effective programming practices that may include the following:

- creating a learning environment that is safe, open, accepting and mobile, and has order and structure
- monitoring students' progress through ongoing assessments
- planning instruction tailored to what students will be able to learn, not what the teacher will teach
- providing instruction that considers social and emotional development, and physical needs of the students
- providing instruction that supports individual learning styles, skill levels, and rates of learning
- collaborating, to involve other school staff, parents, other professionals, and when appropriate, students

Special Education refers to the because of there behavioural, communicational, intellectual, learning or physical characteristics or a combination of those characteristics. Students with special education needs may have mild, moderate, or severe disabilities or may be defined as students who are gifted and talented. It is the belief of the District that all students can learn and reach their full potential given opportunity, effective teaching and appropriate resources. Instruction, rather than setting, is the key to success, and decisions related to the placement of students are best made on an individual basis in a manner that maximizes their opportunity to participate fully in the experience of schooling.

- ensure their child's regular attendance
- provide homework routines and a quiet space to study
- maintain open communication with teachers and the school
- participate in the development of the IPP

### Alberta Education Recommended Resources

These comprehensive resources can be downloaded free-of-charge at [http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k\\_12/curriculum/ParentResources.asp](http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum/ParentResources.asp) or ordered through the Learning Resource Centre at 427-2767.

*The Learning Team: A Handbook for Parents of Children with Special Needs (2003)*

*The Parent Advantage: Helping Children Become More Successful Learners at Home and School, Grades 1-9 (1998)*

*The Journey: A Handbook for Parents of Children who are Gifted and Talented (2003)*

*A Handbook for Aboriginal Parents of Children with Special Needs (2000)*

*Standards for Special Education (2004)*



cate that your child has special education needs, an Alberta Education Exceptional Learning Code may be assigned to your child in order to access specific support. The Learning Team will make decisions, develop an Individualized Program Plan (IPP), assign support services, and/or determine adapted or modified programming for your child.

- The assignment of a teacher assistant is dependent on assessed student needs, the resources available, and other needs in the school or classroom. Teacher assistants provide supportive services in the classroom in order to enhance the learning experiences of students, especially those with special education needs. Teacher assistants receive all directions and assigned responsibilities from the teacher or principal. Teachers are ultimately responsible for planning, implementing and assessing your child's program.

Prepare a list of questions to discuss with the principal and/or the Learning Team. Some of the information you are looking for may be found in the school's handbook or on the school's web site.

## How Parents Can Help

The most effective services are provided to students when the home and school work together as a team. To provide a positive learning experience, parents can:

- be prepared to share information about their child's strengths and needs
- share medical information and health procedures
- give written and informed consent for any specialized assessments
- be willing to discuss their educational and social goals for their child
- be respectful of those who are working on behalf of their child
- maintain a positive and supportive attitude about school and learning, homework, and school activities

Many students with special education needs can be supported through classroom or physical accommodations, instructional accommodations, or testing accommodations. The principal is responsible for ensuring that students with special education needs are identified and provided with appropriate educational programming. An Individualized Program Plan (IPP) is developed for each student who is identified as having special education needs. The IPP indicates a student's assessment data, current levels of performance and achievement, areas of strength, and areas to develop. The Learning Team sets meaningful long term goals and short term objectives, and effective strategies and accommodations to promote student growth are established.

The Learning Team is "a team that consults and shares information relevant to the individual student's education and plans special education programming and services as required. The team may consist of the classroom teacher, parents, students (where appropriate), other school and jurisdiction staff aware of the student's needs and others as required."  
*Standards for Special Education (2004)*

## Identification of Students with Special Education in Grande Prairie and District Catholic Schools

Students with special education needs are often recognized through teacher observations and informal assessments. Classroom assessments, parent checklists, reading observations, portfolios, and inventories may serve as initial screening tools to determine students' education programming needs.

Students are formally identified as having special education needs and assigned an Alberta Education Exceptional Learning code through a variety of assessment practices. Specialized assessments for achievement, reading, language, cognitive abilities, or behaviour may be used. Written informed consent from parents/guardians is required before assessments can be administered. Consultations with parents and school staff are part of the identification process.



## Program Unit Funding (PUF)

PUF is available for early childhood students who are experiencing severe difficulties in one or more areas of their development. Many students receive support for communication delays, behavioural and/or developmental concerns. Funding is available for students as young as three years old at specified schools within the District. Funds can be used to provide programs and access community resources according to assessed needs and program guidelines.

## Individual Program Plan (IPP)

- Each student designated as having special education needs will have an Individual Program Plan (IPP) in place in order to assist the learning needs of the student. Usually, the Learning Team coordinates efforts to produce this IPP. However, the teacher in direct contact with the parent and student usually has the greatest responsibility for this document.

Parents are encouraged to participate in the IPP process and are asked to sign the completed plan. It is the IPP that is the most important tool for assuring all stakeholders that the special needs of the student are being met.

Students who are identified as having special needs will have an Individual Program Plan (IPP) in place in order to assist in meeting their needs. Developing the IPP will be a collaborative team effort involving the student, parents, teachers and other staff who work closely with the student's programming.

## Student Services Support

To assist the 10 schools and the St. John Bosco Outreach School within the District with their special education programs and services, a staff person with the title of Supervisor of Student Services is provided. This person is directly responsible to the Deputy Superintendent. The major responsibility is to coordinate and facilitate all aspects of special services to students attending District schools. Services are coordinated for students, staff and families to provide the very best educational environment. Grande Prairie and District Catholic Schools Supervisor of Students Services provides support to each school regarding the programming needs of students with special needs.



By honoring the past, attending to the present and planning for the future, Student Services plays an essential role within the district in fostering quality Catholic education.

## What a Parent can do if Their Child is Having Difficulty in School

- If your child is having difficulty at school make an appointment for an interview with the classroom teacher to determine what might be causing the difficulties and decide what small changes could be made to improve your child's learning. The classroom teacher can share her/his observations, complete some informal assessments, and determine your child's learning preferences and current levels of academic performance.
- If you think your child needs more help there are further supports within the schools in Grande Prairie Catholic District. The learning team consults and shares information relevant to a student's education and plans special education programming and services as required.
- When it appears that school-based interventions aren't enough, then teachers, in consultation with parents, can make a referral for specialized assessments. Written informed parental consent is required.
- A variety of assessments may be used to determine a child's intellectual, social, emotional, sensory, communication and/or behavioral development. These assessments must be administered and interpreted by a qualified individual such as a chartered psychologist.
- A qualified individual will consult with parents about the assessment results. The information will likely identify your child's areas of strength and need. If the assessments indi-