



inclusionBC

EVERYONE BELONGS IN OUR SCHOOLS:

A Parent's Handbook on Inclusive Education



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Thanks to the Legal Services Society for providing a public legal education and information grant which allowed Inclusion BC to update and reprint this manual.

Funded in part by the Government of Canada's Social Development Partnership Program – Disability Component. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

A special thank you to Frances Kelly, Barrister and Solicitor with the Community Legal Assistance Society for her legal review of this updated manual.

Thanks to Emily Delaplace, Jason Konowalchuk, Mitchell Appleby, and Coltyn and Parys Liu for agreeing to be photo subjects. Thanks to Lord Byng Elementary School (Richmond), for generously allowing Inclusion BC to take photographs in their school. And many thanks to all the families who agreed to have their children participate in classroom photos.

We sincerely thank all those who have contributed to the success of previous editions of this handbook: Annie Rousseau, Cathy Anthony, Donna Diggins, Patty Gibson, Bonnie Petrowsky, Nancy Bleck, Inclusion BC, the Family Support Institute, St. Christopher's School Society Endowment Fund, and the Law Foundation of BC.

This booklet is available in print format from Inclusion BC's office, and on-line from the Resources – Publications section of Inclusion BC's website, www.inclusionbc.org. It will be updated on-line on a regular basis. Please check Inclusion BC's website for updates.

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SOURCES

Foreword

The school years of childhood are profoundly important: they're the source of lifelong memories. For the first time, children venture outside the safe circle of their families and become members of a larger community. During this time of learning, growing, sharing, exploring, and playing, children discover a world of friends, peers, and other adults who will deeply influence them. Memories from these years should be wonderful.

A generation ago, children with special needs were denied this positive experience. Many of their parents, however, had a vision. They lobbied and advocated for their children's right to an education. As a result, our children have the right to receive an education in inclusive school environments. Parents have made this difference!

As parents we're always working to ensure the best quality of life for our children. We wish for them to have friendships and opportunities. We wish for them to learn and grow to be the best they can be. We wish for them to be welcomed, to belong, and to participate in all aspects of community life. As parents we know our children's unique and individual needs as well as their strengths. Our knowledge and the skills we've developed on behalf of our children enable us to participate as valued partners in the education system.

As parents we're always working to ensure the best quality of life for our children.

We've also learned that cooperation works better than confrontation and that effective partnerships between parents and professionals take time and commitment. To participate confidently and knowledgeably in planning our children's education, we must be informed. We must also be seen as equal partners with school personnel and other professionals within the system. This handbook is yet another tool to assist you in understanding educational issues and structures and to provide information that can help you advocate for your child.

You're the most critical resource your child has, and you're also a valuable resource to everyone who comes in contact with your child! Stay true to your hopes and dreams and know that the difference you make for your child can help make a difference to other children along the way. I hope this handbook helps you in your most important job — being a parent!

CATHY ANTHONY
FAMILY ADVOCATE AND PARENT

Introduction

"It is clear that this move towards inclusion and social integration has required a major shift in our thinking... Most of us know in our hearts that we are moving in the right direction and that we are slowly becoming a more accepting and inclusive society. However, many of us find that we are still looking for tools to help us put our beliefs into practice."

ANNIE ROUSSEAU
FRIENDS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Ratified by Canada in 2010

Marking an historic moment in our country's history, Canada ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons (CRPD) with Disabilities on March 11, 2010.

An international human rights instrument of the United Nations meant to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, the document is also an important tool at a local level, relevant to the lives of students with disabilities and their families living in B.C.

The Convention deals with issues such as education, legal capacity, the role of families, living in the community and employment.

As we work together to ensure the education system is inclusive and meets the needs of students of all abilities, we now have an important tool to help us along the way.

Article 24 – Inclusive Education

“States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning.”

Who is this handbook for?

This handbook is for parents raising school-aged children and youth with special needs. As the parent of a son or daughter with special needs who attends school, you may have questions about the school system, how to secure the support your child needs at school, who does what at school, or what to do if a problem related to your child’s education arises. This booklet will help you work within the school system and support your child’s opportunities to learn and to be included as a valued member of the school community.

What is in this handbook?

This handbook will help you understand how the school system works, your role, and your rights and responsibilities as a parent within the education system. It will also help you learn to advocate effectively to support your child’s education.

It provides an overview of the school system and how it should operate. It includes personal stories of parents like you who have advocated for their children’s right to an inclusive education, as well as information on the development of inclusive education in BC.

Additional resources and support organizations are listed in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 includes policy and reference documents that may be useful when advocating for your son or daughter. Most of these are also available on-line. They are current as of the date of publication of this handbook (March 2014), but please check on-line for updates.

This handbook was produced by Inclusion BC, a province-wide, non-profit organization of individuals, families, volunteers, and over 70 local non-profit associations serving people with developmental disabilities throughout the province. Inclusion BC advocates for children, youth, and adults with developmental disabilities and their families to ensure justice, rights, and opportunities in all areas of their lives.

Inclusion BC, formerly the BC Association for Community Living was founded in 1955 by parents who wanted their children to learn in school, have friends, and be welcomed in their communities. Over the years, advocating for inclusive education has remained an Inclusion BC priority.

We hope that you find this handbook helpful as you advocate for your child's education. Advocacy work can sometimes be overwhelming but is always worthwhile. The payoff is a better future for your child.

Inclusion BC's role in inclusive education

Inclusion BC's work for inclusive education is guided by its board of directors and by Inclusion BC policies on inclusive education (included in Chapter 6 of this handbook). Our work is informed by inclusive education working groups comprised of self advocates, parents, and professionals with a broad range of experience and expertise.

Inclusion BC works in partnership with several organizations to advance inclusive education. One of our key partners is the Family Support Institute (FSI) (www.familysupportbc.com/), a province-wide organization whose purpose is to strengthen and support families faced with the extraordinary circumstances of having a family member who has a disability. FSI has made valuable contributions to this handbook.

Inclusion BC participates as a member of the Special Education Partners Group (SEPG), which also includes representatives from:

- Autism Community Training Society
- BC Teachers Federation
- Canadian Union of Public Employees
- Douglas College
- Family Network for Deaf Children
- Family Support Institute
- Gifted Children's Association of BC
- Learning Disability Association of BC
- Simon Fraser Society for Community Living
- Western Society for Children

CHAPTER ONE

The case for inclusive education



“Families around the world have the same kinds of hopes and dreams for their sons and daughters. The families of children with special needs are no different. The role of the school is to support families in the fulfillment of those hopes and dreams.”

MARSHA FOREST AND BRUCE KAPPEL
Labels Are The Handicap



A Magical Journey with Jason

The moment I saw the serious look on the pediatrician's face, I knew my life would change forever. Everything would be different now. Our second son, Jason, was born with Down syndrome. Many things went through my mind as I grappled with information overload.

I wondered how Jason would be accepted by family, friends, and the outside world. I felt sadness that some dreams I had for my newborn were lost. I thought of things far off in the future... would he drive a car, have a career, have friends, get married? As days became months, worries about the future faded and love, joy, and daily challenges whisked us away on a magical journey. From birth, Jason has attracted good people — and brought out the good in people. I knew that people were going to make a difference on our journey.

The years passed quickly, and before we knew it Jason was old enough for school. We weren't sure what to expect as Jason entered kindergarten. His language was limited. He used sign language and a few words and gestures to communicate. The school district had encouraged us to send Jason to a school with resource room facilities, but we chose to send Jason to our neighbourhood school. We wanted him to go to school with his older brother Kyle. We wanted him to get to know children in our neighbourhood. We wanted him to be fully integrated in a typical classroom.

Jason has attracted good people – and brought out the good in people.

Supported by a full-time special education assistant, Jason thrived in kindergarten. He "explored" everything at a very fast pace and enjoyed all the creative activities kindergarten had to offer. He learned a lot. Classmates came to know him. They celebrated his successes, enjoyed some of his more "creative activities," and friendships grew.

Jason is now in grade two. He speaks well enough to ask friends to come to his house. He is also invited over to their houses. In the schoolyard, when he's on the swing, girls rush over to give him a push, which always makes him smile. A daily soccer game is a favorite event at recess and lunch. In short, he's one of the gang.

Each day one student is given the privilege of being Jason's buddy. They sit beside each other and participate in learning activities. Even cool, sophisticated grade six and seven students will always say hi or give Jason a high five. Jason accepts this as a matter of course in his socially confident way. The 330 students in Jason's school have learned about people with disabilities. It has been our experience that inclusion definitely fosters acceptance.

BY SANDRA KONOWALCHUK

Inclusive education — how it started

Since the Inclusion BC (Inclusion BC) first came into being over half a century ago, education has been one of its central issues. In the early 1950s, children with developmental disabilities were entirely excluded from the public education system. In fact, medical and education experts advised many families to send their children with special needs to one of BC's large residential institutions for people with developmental disabilities. Those children often spent decades — even a lifetime — living in an institution, apart from family, friends, and community.

Change began in 1955, when groups of parents came together with a different vision for their sons and daughters. They knew their children were able to learn, and they knew the best place for them was in the community with their family, friends, and neighbours. Faced with segregated institutions as the only available option, they began to organize non-profit societies in communities throughout BC and to provide classes in church basements for their children.

The local associations created by these pioneers for “special education” formed a provincial network that eventually grew into today's Inclusion BC. The BC government then passed legislation that provided funding for the local associations to run schools for students with special needs. Funding for the programs was at the same rate as funding for public education — in 1956, \$25.36 per month per child.

In the 1950s, many changes improved education for children with developmental disabilities. In 1956, for example, the University of British Columbia held the first “special education” teacher training. Then in 1959, UBC became the first Canadian university to appoint a Professor of Special Education to train teachers of children with special needs. The Public Schools Act was amended to permit school boards to take over the operation of classes for “moderately handicapped children.” In the following years, further changes to the School Act allowed separate classes in regular schools.

During the 1970s and 80s, as we learned more about the untapped potential of people with developmental disabilities, the push to close large institutions gained momentum. Government services began to focus on providing supports to children, youth, and families in their local communities. This included a much greater effort to develop supports in public schools for students with special needs.

By the mid-80s, the Ministry of Education developed policy and procedures for including children and youth with special needs in regular classrooms. In 1989, Ministerial Order 150, the Special Needs Students Order, was added to the School Act. This order (available at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/) provides the legal basis for including special needs students in regular classrooms.

In 1995, a manual of policies, procedures and guidelines for special education provided an updated framework for inclusive education practice in BC. (This was revised in 2011 and can be found on-line at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/ppandg.htm.)

What is inclusive education?

“Inclusion is the value system which holds that all students are entitled to equitable access to learning and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their education. The practice of inclusion transcends the idea of physical location, and incorporates basic values that promote participation, friendship, and interaction.”

A MANUAL OF POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

Ideas about inclusive education have changed and developed. BC began with separate schools run by parents, moved quickly to segregated classrooms within public schools, and then to schools where students with special needs are included in regular classrooms alongside their brothers, sisters, and neighbours.

The language we use reflects these changes, but sometimes old terms linger and influence how we think about inclusive education. Schools have advanced beyond the “mainstreaming” of the 1980s — merely physically placing students with special needs into regular classrooms. The talk now focuses on “integration” and “special education,” concepts acknowledging that students with extra challenges require supports, accommodations, and adaptations to succeed in the classroom.

However, integration is not the same as inclusion. While integration is a necessary step to create opportunities for inclusion, it is not enough on its own.

“Inclusion is not children with disabilities spending the majority of the school day in a special ed room, and being “included” in regular classes for art, PE, and music. This is visitation. Inclusion is not children with disabilities attending regular education classes, but being repeatedly pulled out for special services through the day. This is part-time mainstreaming. Inclusion is not children with disabilities being in regular classes, but sitting at the back of the room with full-time aides. This is physical integration. Inclusion is not typical children (peer role models) visiting children with disabilities in special ed classrooms. This is reverse mainstreaming.”

KATHIE SNOW, DISABILITY IS NATURAL

Inclusive education involves much more than integration. True inclusion only happens when a whole school embraces diversity and creates an environment where everyone belongs. Inclusion means being a part of the school community, both in and out of class. It means having friends and feeling welcome. It’s the bridge to the future we want for our children.

Who benefits from inclusive education?

Recently, the educational research community has taken great interest in inclusive education and has conducted research that is generating more support for inclusive education.

We now know that students with developmental disabilities who have been educated in inclusive settings have significantly better life outcomes than students without this opportunity. They enjoy a better quality of life that includes better social connections, increased community involvement, and greater earning potential. For a more detailed discussion of this research, see Inclusion BC’s booklet *Everyone Belongs in Our Schools: Making the case for inclusive education in British Columbia*, available at www.inclusionbc.org/resources.

We have also learned that all students benefit from inclusive education. Recent research has dispelled the notion that typical students “lose out” when students with special needs are included in regular classrooms. Rather, the research shows that all students do better both academically and socially when inclusive policies

and teaching practices are followed.

Studies show that support for inclusion has increased both among educators and among parents of typically developing children. While changes to funding for Special Education have reduced the resources and supports available to teachers in inclusive settings, teachers are still largely supportive of inclusion. Other research shows that parents of typical students recognize the benefits of inclusion more than ever.

Where are we today?

While much has changed since the 1950s and many children and youth with special needs in BC are now educated in regular classes, not all school districts throughout the province interpret Ministerial Order 150, the Special Needs Student Order, the same way. Because inclusive education is far from fully embraced, valued, or understood, parents continue to face challenges as they seek educational opportunities for their children. Although legislation supports inclusion in schools, many students with special needs continue to be excluded from aspects of school life because the necessary resources and supports are lacking.

Though challenges remain, opportunities for students with developmental disabilities continue to expand. Not only are most children and youth with special needs included in regular classrooms, supported child development programs enables preschool-aged children to participate in inclusive opportunities, and many colleges and universities in British Columbia now include students with developmental disabilities in their classrooms. (For more information, see the Inclusion BC policy on inclusive education in this handbook and visit Steps Forward Inclusive Post-Secondary Education Society at www.steps-forward.org). Including a diverse range of students in these educational settings has led to improved lifelong outcomes for students with special needs.

Support for inclusive education has increased overall. There is a Ministerial Order that mandates inclusion, and we have a body of evidence that demonstrates the benefits of inclusion. However, with limited resources and ongoing pressures on the educational system, we must continue to advocate for our children's rights to belong and for their right to a quality education.

Pressures on inclusive education – student placement

The intent of special education policy is that students with special needs receive their education in a regular class. The provincial government’s Special Needs Students Order states:

A board must provide a student with special needs with an educational program in a classroom where that student is integrated with other students who do not have special needs, unless the educational needs of the student with special needs or of other students indicate that the educational program for the student with special needs should be provided otherwise. (M150/89 amended by M32/04)

This order also indicates that a school administrator must offer to consult with a parent about their child’s placement in an educational program. Class placement decisions can profoundly affect a student’s ability to become a member of the school community.

While the Ministerial Order intends to ensure that students with special needs are included in regular classrooms, the second part of the section quoted above indicates that there may be circumstances that require a student with special needs to receive their educational program in an “alternate setting.” Alternate settings may be segregated programs within neighbourhood schools or programs in another school a great distance from a student’s home.

The intent of ministry policy is that placement in an alternate setting should be for a short period of time and for a specific purpose. Placement decisions should be based on a plan that is reviewed and updated, and should have the goal of returning the student to the regular classroom. However, this provision makes it possible for school boards and school personnel to place students in such settings on a long-term basis.

As a parent, you may agree at certain times that an alternate setting placement would benefit your child. But there may also be times when you don’t agree with such a placement. This handbook provides you with tools for finding ways to reverse a placement decision when you don’t agree with it (see Chapter 3 on Advocacy Skills).

Inclusive education — the foundation for friendship

“The practice of inclusion transcends the idea of physical location, and incorporates basic values that promote participation, friendship and interaction.”

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES
A MANUAL OF POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

The parents of children and youth with developmental disabilities consistently raise the topic of friendship as a concern. Parents and educators recognize friendship as an important aspect of inclusion. Although parents of typically developing children are likely to take their children's friendships for granted, many parents of children and youth with special needs do not. A friendship with another child is often one of the most significant events to happen in their child's life. It's often one of the most important goals that a parent may have for their child with special needs.

Only inclusive settings offer the variety of opportunities for children to make choices about who they want to be with and what they want to do. Inclusive education in neighbourhood schools allows students to meet other neighbourhood children and youth, which can lead to friendships outside of school hours. Inclusion alone doesn't guarantee friends, but it can provide a foundation for accepting differences and fostering positive relationships.

Making friends isn't an instinctive ability. It's a skill that all people need to learn and practise. Student **Individual Education Plans** often incorporate the development of social and friendship skills as goals. Children and teens with disabilities who are part of inclusive settings have greater opportunities to learn and practise friendship-making skills. As well, friendly experiences with peers who are similar in age help young people develop an awareness about themselves and social reality.

Not surprisingly, when positive social interactions are fostered and peer acceptance increases, all students show improvements in social skills and self-esteem, transition and communications skills, and language and cognitive development. Children and young people without disabilities have reported that being with those who have disabilities has improved their self-concept, increased their social awareness and acceptance of others, reduced their fear of human differences, and

helped them develop personal principles and friendships.

Parents and educators can encourage interactions and support the possibility of friendship between students in a variety of ways:

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO BE WITH PEERS

We can't make friends without being around people, in particular those with whom we share interests. For children and youth this usually means their peer group.

PROMOTE CONNECTIONS AROUND COMMON INTERESTS

It's not enough for children and youth to be among peers. For successful connections to occur, it's important to build on common interests. This may be as simple as selecting certain students to travel together, teaming kids up for work projects, or using peer tutors in the classroom. Parents can invite other children and youth to their home and involve their child in community activities such as boy scouts, girl guides, recreational clubs and teams, or after-school clubs.

ENCOURAGE CONTINUITY

For friendships to develop, we must have ongoing contact with each other. Inclusive classrooms provide opportunities for ongoing connection. Remember that isolated opportunities alone won't provide the continuity necessary for successful friendships to develop. Sometimes people need several opportunities to be with potential friends before they can connect.

VARY CONNECTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

It may take a variety of activities and experiences before we discover another person's interests. Exposure to diverse experiences and potential connections will increase the likelihood of friendships.

SUPPORT FRIENDSHIP DEVELOPMENT

After providing ongoing and diverse opportunities for friendships to develop, we may find that more is still needed. Parents and school personnel can encourage a student's attempts to make friends by providing words of encouragement, discussing friendships, offering guidance about appropriate behaviour, and talking about feelings.

PROVIDE POSITIVE MODEL AND RESPECT INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Modelling respect, caring, patience, and positive interactions with all students is the most effective tool we have. Teaching respect for individual differences can be part of the classroom curriculum and our everyday conversations with children and youth.

TEACH SOCIAL SKILLS

The explicit teaching of social skills may help some young people participate more effectively. However, some children or teens may never learn certain social skills, or they may have mannerisms or behaviours that need to be accepted and understood rather than “fixed.” Such behaviours shouldn’t prevent them from making and keeping friends, especially when efforts are made to promote understanding among their peers. Even when children or teens don’t have extensive friendship-making skills, we can still facilitate and support positive interactions by emphasizing their qualities or abilities that might appeal to their peers and potential friends.

FOSTER PEER SUPPORT

The peers of a particular child can, at times, be called upon to support that child. It may simply mean suggesting that two children play together or team up for an activity. It may also mean asking a student to look out for another student who is vulnerable. This strategy can benefit a student with special needs, but research shows that students who act as peer tutors or helpers for their classmates with disabilities also experience personal benefits.

STRUCTURE MORE SUPPORTS WHEN NECESSARY

Sometimes structured or facilitated supports are needed to enhance or help maintain friendships. One relevant model is the “circle of friends” or personal support network. Parents and educators may need to identify a facilitator and a group of individuals willing to provide support. They might also need to establish a time frame and location, and develop activities based on mutual interest. If you’re interested in learning more about developing a circle of friends for a child or youth, you can contact the Family Support Institute or Inclusion BC.

To learn more about friendship building, see *Friends Make the Difference*, a guide focused on younger children, and *12 Inclusive Activities: A guide for youth group leaders* (Inclusion BC 2004), which provides tools for supporting youth connections. These are available from the Family Support Institute and Inclusion BC.

Information on friendship was gathered and adapted from *Friends Make the Difference* by Annie Rousseau and *Delicate Threads* by Debbie Staub.

Building inclusive communities together

The goal of inclusive education is to create schools where everyone belongs. By creating inclusive schools, we ensure that there's a welcoming place in the community for everyone after their school years end. Students educated together have a greater understanding of difference and diversity. Students educated together have fewer fears about difference and disability. An inclusive school culture creates better long-term outcomes for all students.

Typical students who are educated alongside peers with developmental disabilities understand more about the ways that they're all alike. These are the students who will be our children's peer group and friends. These students hold the promise of creating inclusive communities in the future for all our children. These students will be the teachers, principals, doctors, lawyers, and parents who build communities where everyone belongs.



Jason's Journey Continues: School Days and Friendship

When Jason started kindergarten, I had many questions: Was I making the right choice when I decided to opt for full inclusion at our neighbourhood school? Where would Jason learn best? Where would he develop the best friendships? Where would he learn the best social skills? How accepting would other parents be?

I've learned in the last three years that we made the right decision. I'm reminded of this every time I hear that one of Jason's classmates has shared a "Jason story" at their dinner table; when Jason's friend Martin gives Jason a Polar Express puzzle "just because"; when two boys rush over to Jason to see if he's okay after he gets a soccer ball in the face; when Jason sits down and writes out 28 Christmas cards without pause; when the kids rush up to tell me one of Jason's successes; and most of all when I see the enthusiasm, pride, and big smile on Jason's face as he rushes to school in the morning.

We've come to see that the day-to-day interaction at school is tremendously important for Jason to develop friendships.

Jason met Karley in kindergarten. She lives six blocks away, so it's unlikely that they would have met if Jason didn't go to his neighborhood school. Today Jason and Karley's friendship extends beyond the classroom. On the weekend they

Day-to-day interaction at school is tremendously important for Jason to develop friendships.

participate in a Kids 'n Africa drumming and dancing class. Karley enjoys coming over to our house to play after class and sometimes after school. Karley's mom tells me that Karley and Jason's friendship is special and that she hopes it will last a long, long time. Their friendship is based on equality and complete mutual acceptance.

Jason and Karley also play together in the summer, and one day they put on a musical show. Karley was the lead singer, Jason jammed with a rake guitar, and his little brother Christopher joined in. When I heard Karley's lyrics that told of meeting Jason in kindergarten, and how their friendship and love had grown in grade one and then in grade two, I was overwhelmed.

Our journey does have its challenges. There are times when, as parents, we will be required to stand our ground and make tough decisions for our kids. We will advocate for our children as we never knew we could. As I look to the future, I know I still have work to do, and there are still some questions, but I know now that Jason is in the best place — with his friends. His triumphs at school, friendships, acceptance, and good education are all the benefits of inclusion. I'm holding on and can hardly wait to see what's next on our magical journey!

BY SANDRA KONOWALCHUK

CHAPTER TWO

Your child's school and you. Who does what?



“As places of education, schools are responsible for promoting positive values about the global community, about children, about unique gifts and needs, about the future. Our school should inspire a view of the future based on the finest values of humankind.”

MARSHA FOREST AND BRUCE KAPPEL
Labels Are the Handicap



Rahim's Legacy

Twelve years ago, while working as an advocate for parents of children with autism, I got a call from a mother who asked the familiar question: "What can I do about the continual bumping of my son's education assistant? He has had a parade of educational assistants in his life without being the cause of any of the changes."

Freida Lalji's young son had Duchenne muscular dystrophy and was severely affected by autism. Rahim couldn't speak, use sign language, or walk. It often took many weeks for an educational assistant to begin to understand his needs and desires. Yet Rahim, when able to attend school, frequently faced new educational assistants for a variety of reasons, none of which had anything to do with him.

It seemed that once an educational assistant (EA) was trained, understood Rahim's efforts to communicate, and was fully ready to provide quality support, she was bumped or moved voluntarily somewhere else. Over the period of a few years, Rahim had six different education assistants. When presented with another change of EA, Rahim, unable to effectively communicate any other way, would bang his head against his wheelchair. There was a real fear he'd break his neck; this behaviour was life-threatening.

Over a period of a few years, Rahim had six different education assistants.

I asked the mother what steps she'd already taken to try to stop the frequent replacements. She stated she had discussed this with Rahim's case manager, who couldn't help. I urged her to write the principal a letter outlining that Rahim needed a consistent EA and that ideally it should be the EA who had just moved to another school.

The principal responded by explaining that the contract with the union (CUPE) representing EAs took priority over Rahim's needs and that he couldn't help. Freida appealed this decision to the school district's assistant superintendent, who responded by saying he'd speak to the union president. (The union president said later in a hearing that he didn't receive a call.) Eventually the assistant superintendent said he too couldn't help. The next stop was the superintendent. After many, many months, he responded in a similar fashion: "No."

Our only choice was to make a formal appeal to the school trustees. Almost a full school year after the initial letter to the school principal, a formal meeting with the trustees took place. The trustees, of course, had legal counsel in attendance along with the assistant superintendent and superintendent, both of whom had already denied Freida's appeals to reverse the principal's decision. Each party described the situation, and we were then sent off to wait for a decision. Several weeks later a letter from the chair of the board arrived, refusing the appeal.

Having exhausted all levels of internal appeal, Freida turned to the Human Rights Commission. After several attempts to clarify the issue with an intake worker, the worker agreed the case was worthy of investigation. School District 43, Coquitlam, and CUPE Local 561 were named in the complaint. I contacted the Deputy Chief Commissioner's office to alert them that this individual case might have systemic implications. Upon review, the Deputy Chief Commissioner declared this was a systemic case. This meant that any decision made by the Commission would have implications for all children in the District, not only Rahim. By this time, another school year was almost at a close.

In June 2001, a provincial election was held, and a new provincial government was elected. They disbanded the Human Rights Commission and replaced it with a new Human Rights Tribunal which had very different rules and processes. We were told that Rahim's case remained on the books, but we knew this would delay any investigation considerably. Indeed it did.

In March 2005, after several delays due to the change in the administrative process, a court hearing on a related matter, many meetings, proposed offers, counter offers, and consultations with lawyers, the School District and the union finally agreed on a settlement that would adequately address the issues brought forward by Rahim's mother.

District 43 and CUPE Local 561 agreed to a new job classification that provides a minimum of 30 hours of work per week for all EA positions. Thirty hours is the maximum available per week for an EA, so this removes the incentive to bump or post out to a position with more hours. The new job classification for EAs who serve children who demonstrate a need for consistency will ensure that the EA won't be bumped by a more senior EA during the school year. An EA taking the position will commit to not leaving the position during the school year, and the District will provide adequate training for the position. In addition, every child with special needs will be individually assessed by the School District as to their demonstrated need for a consistent EA for the school year. The union agreed that the collective agreement wouldn't interfere with the process.

Over the last six years, Rahim's life continued in the way expected for a child with muscular dystrophy. He moved from the elementary school where the appeal first began to a middle school where his mother reported he was treated "like a prince and the red carpet was laid out." He did well at this school. This was a relief for his family. Someone with Duchenne muscular dystrophy has a life expectancy that often doesn't extend into adulthood, so every positive experience was particularly precious.

Rahim's muscular dystrophy progressed rapidly. He died in early March 2005, at the age of 13, two days after the School District's offer to settle. The decision was no longer about Rahim. His mother had known this for a long time, but persisted for six years in an effort to improve the lives of other students with the need for EA consistency.

Freida's courage and commitment not only to her own children, Rahim and Karim, but to all students with special needs, means that all students are one step closer to realizing their right to be treated with respect and compassion.

BY CLAIR SCHUMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AUTISM COMMUNITY TRAINING (ACT)

Your role as a parent

Parental involvement is an important part of making inclusive education work. While the government of BC supports inclusive education through policy and law, and schools and school districts support it through policy and daily decisions, as a parent, you play the key role in your child's education. A formal educational process may not begin until your child enters kindergarten, but you've been guiding your child's learning from the beginning.

For most parents, being involved in their children's education can feel overwhelming — sometimes time-consuming, difficult, or exhausting. Parents of children with disabilities find that participating in their children's education is even more demanding. Participating in your child's education means trying to understand and influence a complex system of policies, laws, and priorities. It means working closely with people within the system. You'll need to understand your child's rights and your rights and responsibilities, and also the roles and responsibilities of the professionals who work within the system.

This section of the handbook outlines the rights, roles, and responsibilities of the many people involved in your son's or daughter's education. Knowing the roles of each of these team members will allow you to build positive relationships, solve problems, and create the best possible future for your child and family. Building positive relationships and creating a team that works together to plan for your child's education will make your journey to an inclusive future possible. For guidance on effective advocacy strategies that help build positive relationships, see Chapter 3.

Remember — your child has a right to be in his or her neighbourhood school and a right to be in a regular classroom. Your child should also receive the supports he or she needs to be successful in that classroom.

The school isn't doing something extra by providing those supports; it's the school's job to provide your child with an education. Keep in mind that most teachers and other professionals working within the system support inclusive education, but sometimes don't have the necessary supports for students with special needs. Teachers and other professionals sometimes have to take extra steps to make sure the system is doing its job — just as sometimes you have to go the extra mile to make sure the system is working for your child.

Remember, too, that as a parent you know your child best. That is why your role is so important in decisions that affect your child's education. You've watched your child grow and learn. You've witnessed their successes and challenges. You've learned about their likes, dislikes, strengths, and gifts. This knowledge is important for understanding how to teach your child. It will benefit the professionals who participate in your child's education.

You have a lot of valuable information to share with your son's or daughter's school. You can begin by writing down everything you know about your child. You likely already have records of tests, reports, and correspondence that may be important to share. Before any meetings at the school you may want to write down notes about the following:

- your child's likes and dislikes
- your child's strengths and needs
- your child's communication style
- your concerns and questions
- your child's hopes and dreams
- your hopes and dreams for your child's future

Student rights and responsibilities

The student is an important member of the educational team. How each student contributes to planning and decision-making will vary. This contribution may also vary over time as a student develops. Youth participation in planning positively affects outcomes, and the BC school system supports the inclusion of youth in planning.

The School Act says students are entitled to:

- consult with a teacher, principal, vice principal, or director of instruction with regard to that student's educational program, and
- appeal the decision¹ of an employee of a board if it significantly affects the education, health, or safety of a student, within a reasonable time from the date that the parent or student was informed of the decision.

¹ Under the School Act, the failure of an employee to make a decision is also considered a decision.

The Ministry of Education policy says students have the following rights:

- to learn in safe and welcoming environments
- to have their needs identified in a timely manner
- to have these needs assessed in a comprehensive manner
- to receive an appropriate educational program to respond to identified strengths and needs.
- when possible, to contribute to planning for their own educational programs, especially for transition planning
- when possible, to provide an evaluation of the services they receive

Students have the following responsibilities:

- to follow the school rules authorized by the principal
- to follow the code of conduct or any other school board rules and policies

Parent rights and responsibilities

Parents play a vital role in the education of their children with special needs by working in partnership with educators and other service personnel.

The School Act says parents are entitled to:

- be consulted about the placement of their children with special needs
- be involved in the planning, development, and implementation of their children's education program
- be informed of a student's attendance, behaviour, and progress in school
- receive annual reports about the effectiveness of educational programs in the school district
- examine all records kept by the school board pertaining to their children
- register their children in an educational program through a school district, independent school, home school, or regional correspondence program
- belong to a **parent advisory council (PAC)**
- appeal the decision² of an employee of a board if it significantly affects the education, health, or safety of a student, within a reasonable time from the date that the parent or student was informed of the decision.

Inclusion BC promotes the following rights and responsibilities for parents, although some may not be recognized or protected.

Parents have the right to:

- be informed and involved in education decisions that affect their children
- be consulted, and to give consent, regarding the type and nature of all **assessments**, and to be informed of their results
- have concerns listened to, and responded to, promptly and respectfully
- have access to personnel such as teachers, teaching assistants, principals, board administrators, and board trustees for information and collaboration
- have concerns treated with confidentiality
- be able to observe their children in the classroom
- receive progress reports that can be understood
- be involved in the planning process and review of their children's **Individual Education Plan (IEP)**. (See Chapter 4 on Individual Education Plans.)
- have trained teachers and appropriate support for their children
- appeal a school district employee's decision that affects the education, health, and safety of their children
- educate their children at home

Parents have the responsibility to:

- be aware of school policies, programs, rules, and routines
- share concerns openly and immediately with the appropriate person
- keep concerns confidential and share information only on a "need to know" basis
- respond to notes, memos, requests, etc.
- tell the teacher and the school when things are going well, and when they aren't
- describe concerns clearly and objectively
- be reasonably patient and respectful with the people and the process

² Under the School Act, the failure of an employee to make a decision is also considered a decision.

School roles and responsibilities

The following sections describe who you'll need to know in the school system, and how school supports are organized. The descriptions of school personnel are generic. Different schools may use different terms to describe similar positions. Included are questions you may want to ask school personnel.

School-based team

Most schools in BC have school-based teams that assist classroom teachers and help plan for special needs students. A teacher may contact the team with concerns about any aspect of a child's progress or behaviour.

The collaborative school-based team usually includes the following people:

- the principal
- the classroom teacher
- a learning assistance or resource teacher
- other specialists such as counsellors

The school-based team may also include the following:

- school district personnel such as specialists and teachers to provide assessments, support, and consultation
- professionals from other ministries
- support staff from community services

If your child has been referred to the school-based team for help, you should be consulted. If the school-based team is unable to resolve an issue, they can seek help from school district personnel, community resources, and/or other professionals. The school-based team is different from the Individual Education Plan (IEP) team. If your child requires an IEP, a team will be developed to carry out the planning. (See Chapter 4 for more information on planning and IEPs.)

You may want to ask your child's principal or teacher the following questions:

- Is there a school-based team?
- Who are the members of this team?
- What is their function?

- What types of assistance does each member provide?
- How is a student referred to the school-based team for consultation?
- How will I be involved in the school-based team meetings?
- How will I be informed of planning meetings?
- How often does this team meet?

Principal or school-based administrator

The principal, who is responsible for managing the school, is often the first person you meet, after the secretary, when you register your child for school. The principal or vice-principal may be involved with planning for students with special needs.

The School Act says the principal has the following responsibilities:

- overseeing the educational programs for all students
- staff assignment
- student placement
- ensuring that a student's IEP is developed, implemented, and reviewed with appropriate revisions

The principal's duties include the following:

- publicly announcing the philosophy or mission of the school district and ensuring that teachers, support personnel, and students follow that philosophy
- providing leadership for the staff, parents, and students
- monitoring the school's educational programs
- communicating with school district personnel
- managing the placement and conduct of students
- ensuring that teachers get the information they need to work with students with special needs who are assigned to their classrooms

ROLE IN INCLUSION

The principal is usually the key player in ensuring that an inclusive philosophy is in place in a school. As one teacher stated in *Learning Together* by Donna Bracewell, "I couldn't have made it through some of those rough spots this year if my

principal hadn't been backing me every step of the way" (is available through Inclusion BC at www.inclusionbc.org/resources).

Principals should make sure that teachers receive the information they need to work with students with special needs. They should also make sure that the school is organized to provide needed resources and support on site, and that staff are supported in the areas of release time, problem solving, and appropriate supports to further inclusion.

A review of special education in BC in 2000 notes that the principal is critical to successfully implementing inclusion.

The principal's leadership role includes the following duties:

- selecting special education staff who embrace the philosophy of inclusion
- recognizing the need for program and staff development
- supporting the school's responsibility for the education of all students
- recognizing that all students benefit from inclusion
- recognizing the extra support needs of special needs students, and advocating for the supports

If the principal doesn't know about or support inclusion, it may be harder to get support for your child when it's needed. Not all principals have expertise in this area, but it's often possible to help them learn by sharing your knowledge.

Teacher

In elementary school, the classroom teacher is usually the next person you get to know at your child's school. In secondary school, it may be a learning assistance teacher, resource teacher, or the school counsellor. Classroom teachers are responsible for each child's progress.

Their duties, which may be shared with a resource teacher or learning assistance teacher, include the following:

- evaluating and reporting on students' progress
- collaborating with students and their parents to plan, create, and sustain a safe learning environment

- collaborating with other professional and auxiliary personnel
- planning instruction for the class and for individual students
- implementing the goals and objectives of the Individual Education Plan and making revisions as necessary (see section on IEPs in Chapter 4)
- communicating with parents about their children’s education
- coordinating and managing information provided by support personnel (speech therapists, social workers, etc.)
- supervising and coordinating the work of teaching assistants
- adapting their teaching style, activities, and curriculum to facilitate each student’s success
- facilitating peer interactions

Teachers should be offered training on how to supervise, schedule, and coordinate activities involving teacher assistants. Teachers should also have access to in-service education about the inclusion of children with special needs. The principal or school district usually have the responsibility for making sure that teachers have these training opportunities.

Several inclusion resources are available to teachers. Many can be found on the Ministry of Education website, and the BC Teachers Federation has developed an inclusive education website called Teaching to Diversity: (www.bctf.bc.ca/teachingtodiversity).

ROLE IN INCLUSION

Classroom teachers have a very important role in setting the tone for inclusion in the classroom. Inclusion works best when the teacher knows how to help other children respond to your child. To make inclusion successful, teachers have to create the sense that everyone belongs, regardless of ability. Teachers need to work collaboratively with others to facilitate inclusion for your child. They also need to recognize when they don’t know what to do, and ask for appropriate support.

You may want to ask your child’s teacher the following questions:

- What’s the best way for a parent to keep in touch with you? By phone, email or scheduled meetings?
- Can I provide you with any helpful information?

Teaching assistant (TA) – or classroom assistant (CA), special education assistant (SEA), educational assistant (EA)

Your child may or may not require the support of a teaching assistant. Teaching assistants work with teachers as part of the classroom team and play key roles in the education of students with special needs. They're usually assigned to work in a specific classroom and may work primarily with one child or they may work with several children. They are responsible for performing duties under the direct supervision of the teacher, principal, or vice-principal.

Their duties include the following:

- personal care (personal assistance with toileting, positioning, mobility, feeding, grooming, dressing, etc.)
- safety and supervision
- communication and technical aids
- classroom observation
- assisting individual students or small groups with learning activities
- following behaviour management programs as set out by the teacher or other specialists
- following therapy programs as set out by the therapist
- facilitating social interactions among students
- data collection and record keeping as requested by the classroom teacher and/or principal

Due to the diversity of tasks and student needs, pre-service training for teacher assistants is very desirable. School districts should ensure that appropriate job descriptions are in place for the various functions being performed and that in-service training is provided.

ROLE IN INCLUSION

For inclusion to be successful, teaching assistants must have a strong belief that everyone belongs. There's no provincial standard for a TA's education or qualifications. However, TAs should be well-trained in several areas, including behaviour management and supporting students to develop social and communication skills.

Parents often report that the TA's commitment and skills are key to their child's successful inclusion.

Over the past 15 years, the number of TAs in the province of BC has increased dramatically. In 1990, there were 1,630 TAs compared to 7,161 in the 2004–05 school year. Without provincial standards for training and experience, each school district has its own criteria and process for hiring. Additionally, the collective agreements between the TAs' unions and School Districts include clauses that sometimes lead to disruptive staff changes. Parents have reported several concerns and difficulties about this. See "Rahim's Legacy" for an example of one parent's long struggle to resolve staffing disruptions.

You may want to ask your principal the following questions about the role of a TA:

- What qualifications does the TA have to assist my child?
- How will the TA be supported to develop specific skills to work with my child?
- What is the philosophy and experience of the teaching assistant?
- What is the hiring process for TAs?
- Who is involved in the hiring process?
- Will union seniority affect the placement of the teaching assistant?
- What happens when the teaching assistant gets sick?
- How will an appropriate substitute be arranged?

Learning assistance teacher (or resource teacher)

In some schools certain teaching staff provide valuable support to the classroom teacher. These teachers aren't usually responsible for a classroom of students. They're often referred to as "non-enrolling teachers." The most common support teachers are the learning assistance teacher and resource teacher.

They may have distinct roles, or their roles may vary as they share the workload in the school. They may be assigned to a school full-time or part-time, depending on the school's need. Support teachers and resource teachers usually have some specialized training or experience that enables them to provide teacher and student support.

Their duties include the following:

- suggesting strategies to school and family to support student learning
- providing service to students with special needs in a particular area of their education
- providing ongoing curriculum adaptation and/or intervention for physical or behavioural needs
- coordinating the team of professionals who work with your child
- assisting classroom teachers
- coordinating release time for staff involved in planning
- coordinating the IEP (see section on Individual Education Plans in Chapter 4)
- assisting with the transition of your child to a new classroom or school (see section on Transition Planning in Chapter 4)

ROLE IN INCLUSION

Support teachers have an important role in including children with special needs because they can provide suggestions on how to work with any child who needs assistance. They can introduce staff members to planning tools like MAPS and PATH (see Chapter 4). They can promote an inclusive philosophy in all classes and provide support to staff by liaising with the school district or other professionals. They help organize and maintain support services in the school. They can also provide access to district-level support services. They can communicate with parents regularly about their children and can work directly with a child when appropriate.

Resource room teacher

Although we've been working toward creating inclusive schools for a long time, there are still several school districts and schools that operate resource rooms. Resource rooms are segregated classrooms that only children with special needs attend. There are more resource rooms at the secondary school level than in the elementary level.

The resource room sometimes functions as a home room for high school students. Some students receive support for specific subjects in the resource room, while the rest of their program is in regular classrooms. The beliefs and skills of the teachers who support students in these classrooms shape the success of an inclusive program.

ROLE IN INCLUSION

Depending on the philosophy and attitudes that guide each school's special education programs, the resource room teacher may provide specialized assistance to promote and support inclusive experiences. Or, by providing all instruction in a segregated class, the resource room teacher may create a barrier to inclusion.

You may want to ask your child's resource room teacher the following questions:

- What is your philosophy on inclusion?
- Does my child have an opportunity to interact with other students in the school? When?
- How will I be involved in my child's educational plan?
- How much teaching assistant support will be assigned to your class?

Other professionals

Teachers work as part of a multidisciplinary, collaborative team with other professionals. These may include psychologists, speech and language therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, child care workers, and nurses. Sometimes the team will include district-based support people like an integration support coordinator or other itinerant teachers. Several Provincial Resource Programs may also provide support to your child's school team.

The role of other involved professionals is to support the educational program specified in the child's Individual Education Plan. These specialists may also work as members of the IEP team. Every effort should be made to provide support in the classroom in a way that's least disruptive to the child.

Whenever a number of professionals are involved with the program, a coordinator should be designated to coordinate service delivery to the student.

Who coordinates your child's education?

Someone should be charged with coordinating your child's educational program and the services of other professionals. This person is sometimes called a case manager, but it may be the principal, the resource teacher, the learning assistance teacher, or the classroom teacher.

Ask the principal who's responsible for coordinating your child's educational program. You'll want to develop a relationship with that person. It's your right to be part of the team that discusses your child's educational program and any changes to your child's support services.

You may want to ask the coordinator the following questions:

- When and how often can we meet?
- How will I be notified of planning meetings?
- How will I be involved?
- Will my child be out of the regular class for any period of time, and if so, for what purpose?

The school board

"Integration appears to have the most chance for success when it is a policy initiated by the school board ... The feelings of excitement and general confidence that 'we're doing the right thing' are clearly much higher when integration is backed by policy and administrative support."

DONNA BRACEWELL, *LEARNING TOGETHER*

School boards comprise elected school trustees whose responsibility is to oversee the delivery of public education in their school district. They make major policy decisions for the district and are responsible for the district budget. The School Act defines the responsibility of school boards and links that responsibility directly to the Ministry of Education.

In BC, school boards have a great deal of autonomy and flexibility to plan and implement local programs. This means that they are free to respond to their district's needs. To respond effectively, the school board must be well informed and committed to quality education for all students.

School boards should ensure that special education programs and services are delivered to students in their school district as required, and that schools are aware of what supports and services are available. School boards should also have policies and procedures that are consistent with ministry policy, and special education programs that are consistent with regular educational programs.

School boards should have policies and procedures ensuring that they accomplish the following:

- identify, assess, and plan for students with special needs
- track and report on Individual Education Plans
- provide a straightforward appeal process for parents/guardians
- evaluate and report on the progress of students with special needs
- evaluate special education programs and services

As a parent, you have the right to ask the school board for their philosophy, policies, and procedures on special education. (You can find contact information for most school districts at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/apps/imcl/imclWeb/SN.do.) A school district's written policies may or may not be consistent with actual practice.

The superintendent of schools is the school district's chief administrator and is responsible to the school board (also called the board of school trustees). The assistant superintendent is usually assigned to a particular function within the district, such as instruction, personnel, business, or special education.

Someone will be assigned responsibility for special education and support services

for the district. Depending on your district's size and structure, it may be a school principal, the director of instruction, director of special education, a district principal, or the superintendent.

ROLE IN INCLUSION

School boards make major policy and budget decisions for the school district, including those that affect special education. These decisions can affect the educational options available to children with special needs and can have an impact on how children are placed in the district's schools.

Special Needs Students Order (Ministerial Order 397/95) directs school boards to consult with parents about placement decisions for their children with special needs. Ideally, there should be placement choices available that meet the needs of all students. However, sometimes it is difficult for a school district to provide exactly what is needed. Limited resources and funding often create challenges for educators working with students with special needs.

A cooperative, problem-solving approach between parents and school personnel is usually most effective in ensuring that appropriate opportunities are available to your child. However, sometimes parents get involved at the school board level if they're not satisfied with the decisions made by their trustees.

Getting active with your school board

School Boards are elected by the public. During civic elections your vote can determine who becomes a trustee on your local school board, and your questions and comments during an election can help educate potential school trustees as well as other voters.

Once a school board is elected, you may need to educate your trustees about students with special needs. As publicly elected officials, school board trustees should be well informed about issues that affect all children. School trustees learn from and respond to personal contact. One particular trustee may be assigned to your child's school. Take the opportunity to invite them to meet with a parent group at the school, or to meet with any support group for parents that addresses issues about children with special needs.

You can get a list of contact information for your trustees from your school board. Inclusion BC can provide you with information to help you inform your trustees.

Visit our website or call for further information.

To get involved, consider the following approaches:

- ask for the school district’s policy on services to students with special needs
- attend school board meetings
- talk to other parents who have experience with the school board
- read the local paper about school board decisions
- make personal or phone contact with trustees — remember to share successful inclusion experiences with trustees
- make a presentation to the school board outlining issues related to inclusion
- run in a civic election and become a trustee

The value of building school relationships

It’s important to build relationships with people throughout the school system, including those at the school board level. Take opportunities to inform and educate your school board members about the philosophy of inclusion and issues related to children with special needs. Remember, policies aren’t written in stone, so building more support for special education and the philosophy of inclusion can ultimately change policies.

Building relationships at all levels is important not only for the success of your child’s education but also for their future. By investing time in building relationships and by educating others, you’re creating opportunities for your child and for the children who follow.

CHAPTER THREE

Advocacy skills



“It’s a funny thing about life; if you refuse to accept anything but the best, you often get it.”

SOMERSET MAUGHAM



Being an Advocate: Deb's Story

Deb lives with her husband David and her sons Mitchell and Cameron in BC's Lower Mainland. Deb and I sat together at her kitchen table over coffee and homemade snacks as she told me about Mitchell's journey. Deb shared warm and touching details as she showed me photos. Pictures have been an important way of recording Mitchell's life. I came to know Mitchell as a happy, always giggling boy with a great disposition.

These photos document the enormous commitment and effort by the many professionals who work with Mitchell at his neighbourhood elementary school. Many of these pictures are in a scrapbook, and some are used as teaching tools to include Mitchell in his class. One book is a photo journal of sorts. It includes information that students in the class contributed. It notes Mitchell's strengths and his likes: "Mitchell is good at holding his head up," "Mitchell likes pudding."

Mitchell's educational program is individualized. He has different learning goals than the other students, but he's learning and developing to his greatest potential. His program includes his physical development. The daily use of his walker has helped him increase his strength. He's getting stronger and learning a lot. He benefits greatly from the social opportunities at school where he thoroughly enjoys his time with friends.

Pictures have been an important way of recording Mitchell's life.

As Deb told me about the recent success of her son's inclusive program, she also shared details of times when the journey was more difficult — in her words, "frustrating and frightening beyond belief." Deb had been preparing for Mitchell's transition to elementary school for three years before he entered kindergarten. His preschool supports had been family-centred and family-friendly, but at first the school system wasn't responsive to Mitchell's needs. He is non-verbal and requires full-time support. For Mitchell and his family, the school wasn't welcoming; it felt like a very dark place.

Despite the preparation Deb's family had done with the preschool, with the school, and with support people from the district, Mitchell's initial period at school was rough. In fact, Deb describes it as "pure hell." Mitchell's transition plan wasn't being followed, and he wasn't spending time in the kindergarten classroom as had been agreed.

It was clear from the breakdown that people feared the unknown. Deb attended a series of meetings, trying to resolve this issue with school and school district people. Miscommunication or lack of communication between teachers and other support people made the process difficult. The smooth transition they'd planned never took place. The year ended with Mitchell never having experienced kindergarten.

As the school year drew to a close, plans proceeded for the following year. A new

principal, new classroom teacher, and more special educational assistants formed a new team. With Mitchell's family and members of the district's Student Support Services, the new team made a sincere commitment to ensure that the failure of the first year wouldn't happen again — to Mitchell's family or any other family. Team members began to foster trusting relationships with each other and with Mitchell's family.

Mitchell entered school the next September. Once school staff had the opportunity to get to know him, attitudes began to change. Meeting Mitchell and sharing each day with him at school was very important for a successful outcome — he was the greatest teacher.

In grade one, the teacher saw Mitchell for what he was — a child. This teacher saw the positive impact that Mitchell had on his classmates and always considered his needs when planning for the class. Mitchell was considered when it came to classroom seating, field trips, and even the Christmas concert.

Deb attributes much of the success of Mitchell's inclusive educational program to the work of several individuals, including special education assistants, classroom teachers, and support teachers. However, Deb's continued efforts to make this happen, and her ability to build a team to respond to Mitchell's needs, were also key to this turnaround in the school's approach. Mitchell himself played a huge role by teaching the school community that everyone belongs. The shift in attitude among all the team members helped create a truly inclusive school.

Deb continues to advocate and work on building the team that supports Mitchell.

Deb is the first to admit that working with a team is hard work and that there's a delicate balance for everybody involved. Sometimes the decisions the school makes can push the boundaries of a family's comfort zone. At those times, Deb finds that patience and a willingness to adapt are important. Sometimes, moving beyond a comfort zone can be an important part of growing and learning. For example, when Mitchell entered grade one, Deb was concerned about not being able to observe or participate as much as she had in preschool. Yet Mitchell has succeeded at his elementary school and continues to learn and teach everyone — including his mom!

Today Deb continues to advocate and work on building the team that supports Mitchell. He's now in grade five. Deb's ongoing relationship with district personnel has reinforced their commitment to ensure that her family's earlier experience never happens to another family. Each year Deb is invited to a district orientation for parents who are new to the school, during which she shares her story and knowledge. Deb assures parents that despite some difficulties, the school system can be a great place offering "many wondrous experiences." She notes, "As with anything else in life that's worthwhile, you have to work at it."

BY TAMARA KULUSIC IN CONVERSATION WITH DEB APPLEBY

Your role as an advocate

Advocacy involves a set of skills that parents of special needs children need to develop. You may already have learned many of these skills without knowing it. When you insist that your child's rights be met, you're advocating on their behalf. Advocacy skills enable you to access the supports and services your children need.

Advocacy is the act of supporting a cause or idea. Advocacy is the act of sharing information and getting a need met. Advocacy is speaking out on issues that concern you and taking an active role in your child's life and your child's education. Advocacy is also a fine balancing act — an ongoing struggle to find win-win outcomes in difficult situations.

To be an effective advocate, you need to know about service systems. Chapter 2 of this handbook outlines the roles and responsibilities of the various people you're likely to meet as you advocate for your son or daughter. In later chapters, you'll find some of the policies that can help you know your rights and what services are available. In this chapter, you'll find information about how to advocate on your child's behalf, including recommendations on the following:

- being an effective advocate
- building an effective partnership with the school
- preparing for and participating in school meetings
- resolving issues
- preparing a School District Appeal
- pursuing other options

As you work to ensure that your child has the best educational opportunities, remember that you're not alone. Many other parents have had similar experiences. In addition, people in organizations like Inclusion BC, FSI, and community living associations can assist you. Several organizations also provide support and services for specific disabilities. You'll find a list of some of these organizations in Chapter 5 of this handbook.

While it may seem daunting, advocacy works! One of the greatest benefits of advocacy is that it produces lasting improvements for all children. Though much work remains, we have a strong legacy left by parents who began by advocating for access to education for their children more than 50 years ago.

Being an effective advocate

You're an expert on your child and you know what your child needs to be successful. This is why you're the most important advocate for your child. Below is an outline of some of the most important advocacy skills.

BE ORGANIZED

To be an effective advocate, you need to be organized. You'll need to gather all relevant information about your child's needs as the basis for any of your requests.

It's helpful to prepare a file. Keep copies of all correspondence, both letters you send and letters and reports you receive. Keep a journal or log of phone calls about your child. Keeping records of letters and calls will help you be prepared if a concern or problem arises.

KNOW THE FACTS

Being a good advocate means knowing the facts. This includes knowing about your rights and about students' rights as defined in the School Act and other policies. For example, you need to know about funding policies and policies and regulations related to the development of an **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)**. (See Chapter 4 for more information about IEPs and Chapter 6 for more information about funding policies.)

IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM

To be good advocates, parents must learn to identify the key issue or problem. Sometimes this may relate to policies and funding. Other times it's related to people and attitudes. Once you've identified the problem, identify a solution and look for ways to remove barriers to the solution. Enlist staff at the school to help you problem solve. When seeking a solution, set your priorities and know your bottom line.

A problem related to attitude may arise because people haven't had the opportunity to learn about the value of inclusion. Or they may not have had the opportunity to learn about your child (as was the case for Deb and Mitchell in "Being an Advocate"). Advocating under difficult circumstances can be challenging, but keep in mind that solutions can usually be found.

IDENTIFY KEY DECISION-MAKERS

Good advocacy means knowing who's making the decisions that affect services. Depending on the problem and solution you've identified, you may need to advocate to different people. Being informed about roles and responsibilities will help you understand who can best resolve a problem. Knowing the protocol and the system's structure will help you know who to approach first. Proceed one step at a time within authority structures.

For example, when your child isn't getting a service because there's a lack of funding, you may have to advocate at several levels. While advocating in the school for your child's right to supports, you may want to turn your efforts to the decision-makers who allocate funding. This may mean approaching the district school board or even the Ministry of Education to advocate for systemic reform.

Use a respectful and assertive communication style

Your communication style affects your chances of succeeding. Here are some suggestions:

- Be assertive and clear but avoid being too forceful.
- Use a cooperative approach.
- Give positive feedback when things work.
- Be patient and supportive.
- Recognize that timing is important, that funding cycles may impact decision-making, and that decision makers must balance many demands.
- Offer opportunities for people to get to know you and your child in more personal ways. Share your hopes and dreams and stories. Bring pictures to meetings to keep the focus on your child. Include pictures with written letters.

GET SUPPORT WHEN NEEDED

Being a good advocate also means recognizing when you need support. Several organizations offer advocacy support. Contact FSI or Inclusion BC or consult this handbook's resources section.

Deb Appleby's guide to advocacy

From her experience as a parent advocate, Deb has learned some good advocacy strategies for making the school system work for your child and family. Here are her suggestions:

- Be informed. Be prepared. Be realistic.
- Be aware of the system and how to work with it.
- Take one day at a time. Remember, this is a 13-year journey.
- Knowledge is power — the more informed you are the more comfortable you'll be.
- Know who the players are and what their roles are.
- Be aware of the system's realities, such as how funding operates.
- Get to know your child's principal and teachers, their philosophy and feelings.
- Inclusion can vary from school to school and class to class.
- Advocate, advocate, advocate! (This basically means "fight for everything" but sounds better.)
- Never assume anything. Find out what you need to know.
- Know your bottom line and pick your battles.
- Never be afraid to raise your concerns to the next level, but follow protocol.
- Never lose sight of why you're doing this.
- Build ongoing relationships.
- Always be factual and respectful. This is what you want from others in return.
- Be aware of services that are available and know how to access them.
- Get involved at your child's school: volunteer, join the parent advisory council or district parent advisory council.
- Remember that you're not alone. There are lots of us out there! Seek support locally or through the Family Support Institute or Inclusion BC.

Building an effective partnership with the school

“Parents need professionals. Professionals need parents. The children need us both.”

FEDERATION OF INVISIBLE DISABILITIES
PARENT REFERENCE AND RESOURCE KIT

As a parent you're an equal partner in your child's education. The knowledge and experience you bring to planning for your child's education is as important as professional expertise. Both you and professionals, working together, are essential to making your child's educational plan successful. This section outlines how to make your first contact with the school as positive as possible, and how to build relationships with school personnel.

When your child first enters school

As the parent of a child with special needs, you're likely to meet school professionals formally. Many school districts follow a formal process for children with special needs who are about to enter kindergarten.

It's a good idea to schedule a formal meeting with the school administrator or principal to discuss your child's needs six to eight months before he or she enters school. Or schedule a meeting as soon as possible after learning that your child will be attending a new school. At an initial meeting, you may want to ask about the school's preparedness for including your child.

You may want to consider asking some of the following questions:

- How can I help make sure that my child's school entry will go smoothly?
- Have adequate documents been forwarded to you?
- Do I need to sign a release form so that you may receive information from other professionals?
- Are there any documents I can provide or any forms I should fill out to help you get a picture of my child's needs?
- Is there staff with knowledge or experience related to my child's needs?
- How will staff be prepared for my child's school entry?

- When will a classroom teacher (and possibly educational assistant) be assigned?
- When will it be possible to meet with the teacher (educational assistant)?
- Can we arrange a classroom visit and/or school tour before the school year begins?
- Is the school accessible? Is the necessary equipment available?

In addition to formal meetings, meeting with school personnel informally can help you build school relationships. Try to get to know the people you'll need to interact with before your child enters school. You may already have older children at the neighbourhood school, or you may have neighbours whose children attend the school. You can attend school events such as sports days or school fairs and introduce yourself to the principal as "Johnny's" mother or father. If possible, attend school information meetings.

For more information, you may want to consult the booklet, *Transition to School: An information guide for parents*, prepared by several community partners in Prince George. You can access it at www.makechildrenfirstpg.org/kindergarten.htm. Or find out if your district has a similar resource booklet.

If your child has multiple/severe disabilities, you may want to contact the **Provincial Integration Support Program (PISP)**. PISP can be a valuable transition support if your child meets the criteria for receiving services. The program provides an outreach service to assist schools throughout BC to meet students' educational needs. It can support the classroom teacher and others by providing information, in-service training, and teaching strategies. Contact information for PISP is in Chapter 5 of this handbook.

Some parents may want to create a transition plan that allows their children to remain in preschool an extra year. In this case, the school district arranges to fund the preschool program, and you can develop a transition plan that includes regular visits to the kindergarten classroom. Contact your school district for more information.

Once your child's life at school is underway and you continue to build a partnership with the school, it's important to be patient. Give the school time to learn and include your child. Meeting with key personnel before the beginning of the school year will allow the school to prepare to meet your child's needs. But it may take

some time in the beginning of the school year to work out details. Remember, the school needs a chance to respond to your requests while balancing the needs of other programs, routines, and all students.

While your child's education progresses

As Deb and Mitchell's story illustrates, your role as an advocate doesn't end when things go well. Every year brings new challenges, and maintaining a good relationship with school personnel can go a long way towards helping resolve any new issues effectively. Below are some ways you can nurture an ongoing relationship with your child's school.

ESTABLISH AN IDENTITY AT YOUR SCHOOL

Being present at the school will give you a chance to get to know the staff, and it will give them opportunities to get to know you. Parents' contributions of time and caring can sometimes give teachers the boost they need to take on new challenges.

Attend parent/teacher conferences, parent group meetings, and school functions. Volunteer at the school whenever possible. Many schools seek volunteers for activities like organizing school lunches or helping with special events like field trips. Participate when you can. Always attend IEP meetings so that you can share ideas, make suggestions, and help develop an appropriate program for your child.

If you can't volunteer at the school, make yourself known to key people and students. Phone, or ask to be phoned, with concerns, and write notes. Discuss with the teacher other ways to get feedback, such as a communication book. Let school personnel know that you're approachable and available for consultation about your child. Take opportunities or create opportunities to share information. Take the time to share your hopes and dreams for your family and child. This can help other people understand how they can contribute to that future.

ACT AS A RESOURCE FOR TEACHERS

Not all teachers have experience working with children with special needs. Some may be quite nervous about teaching your child. It can take time before all the appropriate training and supports are in place. Cultivate a good relationship with your child's classroom teacher. Offer to share some of the resources you have,

or take time to seek out appropriate resources for them, such as the BC Teachers' Federation Teaching to Diversity website. They may not know about resources or have time to access them.

Preparing for and participating in meetings

Meetings may be called by parents, school staff, district personnel, or other professionals involved in your child's education. Meetings may be called to plan your child's educational program, discuss a transition to a new class or school, or resolve an issue. Whatever the purpose, meetings can sometimes be confusing or intimidating. This section provides some tips that can help you get what you need out of meetings.

Tips for preparing before a meeting

- Be clear on the purpose of the meeting
- Know your rights and your child's rights
- Prepare and distribute an agenda if you called the meeting
- Ask for an agenda if someone else has called the meeting
- Clarify what, if any, decisions will be made at the meeting
- Decide what materials to bring
- Prepare your own presentation, questions, or concerns
- Be realistic about what can be covered in one meeting
- Ask who will be attending and what their roles will be
- Invite support people who are familiar with you and your child (such as therapists) or other support people you may need (such as translators). Seek help from the school to arrange this if necessary
- If you invite support people: notify the person who called the meeting that others will be attending, prepare supporters with copies of relevant materials, and let supporters know the meeting's purpose
- When possible attend a meeting with your child's other parent, or ask a friend or other supporter to attend the meeting with you

Tips for participating in a meeting

- Ask everybody there to introduce themselves and explain their role
- Ask questions and express your opinion
- Seek facts and clarification, if necessary
- Be open to ideas
- Use good communication skills. Begin statements with “I”
- Take careful notes, or have someone else take them for you
- Make sure that information presented by professionals is understood
- Bring a photo of the student if the student isn't attending
- Be assertive but not confrontational
- Summarize the discussion and review the decisions made
- Don't agree on a decision or sign anything if you aren't comfortable with it
- Remember that you have the right to think about requests before making a decision. School staff also have this right
- Ask for a copy of minutes taken by others
- Identify the next steps and identify who's responsible for carrying them out, and set reasonable timelines
- Set follow-up meetings if necessary

Following up after a meeting

- Review your minutes and add anything you missed
- Compare your notes with minutes taken by others
- Respond in writing to the person who chaired the meeting (or the principal), outlining your understanding of major points covered or decisions made. Indicate whether or not you're in agreement. Also note dates set for completing tasks, describe your future role or responsibilities, and include positive feedback

Resolving issues within the school system

Resolving an issue sometimes requires lots of organization, time, and effort. Many parents of children with special needs have experienced frustration. (“Rahim’s Legacy” in Chapter 2 details one mother’s efforts to resolve the difficulties created for her son when his education assistants repeatedly changed during the school year.) But it’s important to remember that those who work within the system may be as frustrated with it as you are. It helps to separate your frustration with the system from the individuals who work in it.

Establishing good communication with a school can often prevent problems from arising or keep them from escalating. Often the result of poor communication, most problems occur at the classroom or school level and should be resolved at that level. Document your concerns and work with the classroom teacher toward a resolution. If the school has resources for problem-solving, use them.

Keep in mind that people within the system often support your advocacy goals. Educators and administrators also want what’s best for students. Some school districts even offer advocacy support.

When authority for decisions isn’t in the teacher’s hands, ask the principal to help identify who to contact to resolve the issue.

Dealing with the school system hierarchy

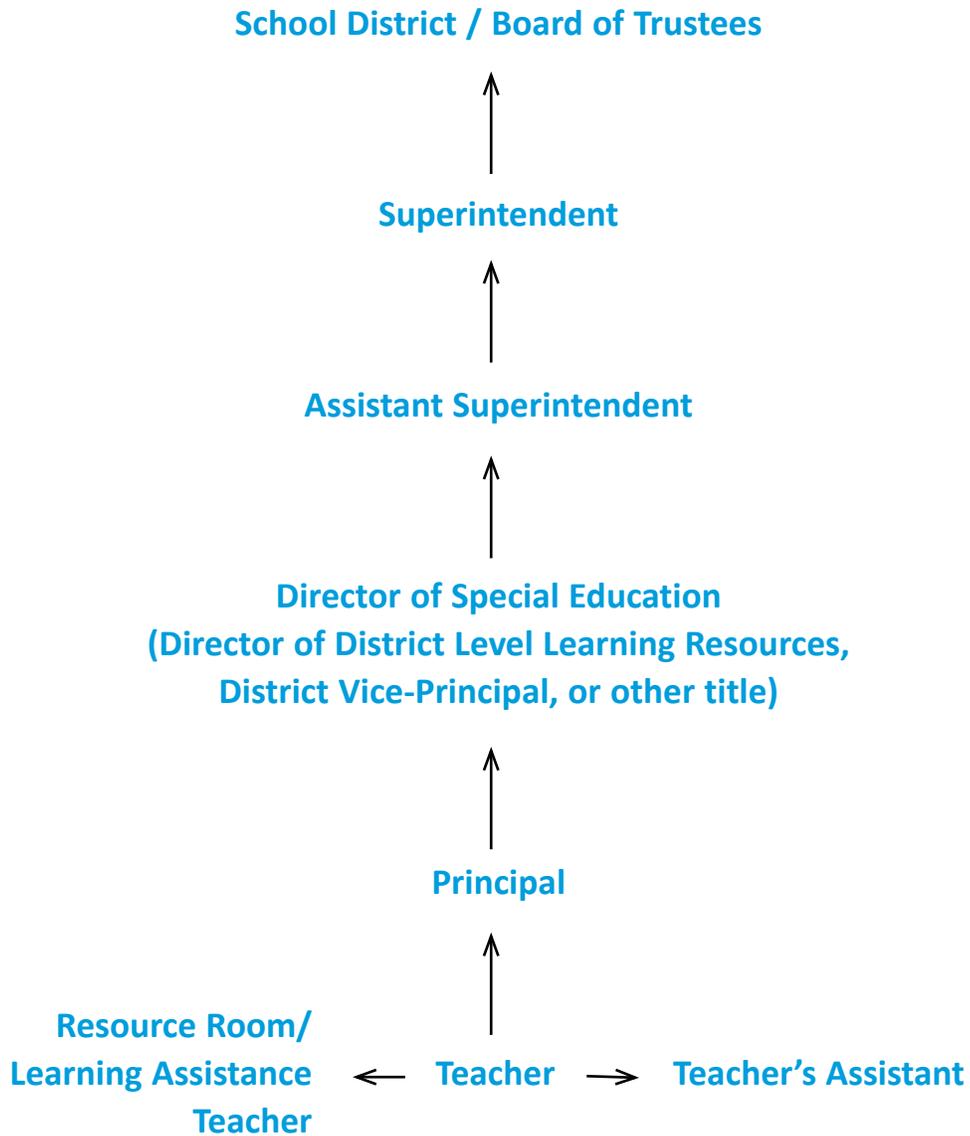
With its established levels of authority, the local school fits within a broader district-level system. To get the best results, it is important to know the hierarchy of authority and work with the established system.

Knowing the hierarchy of authority will help you identify who to speak to next. In most cases the organizational hierarchy looks like the diagram on next page.

When an issue arises, you should approach the teacher first and work your way up the hierarchy until the issue is resolved.

It’s also important to plan your strategies so that they’re appropriate to the circumstances. Never use a cannon where a pea shooter will do. Proceed cautiously.

The School System Hierarchy



Steps in resolving an issue

This section outlines the appropriate steps for resolving issues at various levels of authority. It's important to move through each level before going on to the next one. If an issue isn't being resolved in a timely manner, consult with school staff and your supporters about how to make faster progress. Approaching higher levels of authority prematurely can make it difficult to find a permanent solution. Proceed through each step and exhaust all possibilities before going to the next level.

At any time in this process, you can get advice and/or support from the FSI, Inclusion BC, or a local association for community living in your area.

STEP 1 — MEET WITH THE TEACHER

Set up a meeting at a mutually convenient time. Follow the guidelines for meetings described earlier in this chapter. Present your reasons for calling the meeting, listen carefully, take notes, and summarize.

If you feel you aren't getting anywhere, let the teacher know that. Set up a second meeting and offer to invite the principal, or ask the teacher to suggest someone who can help, such as a resource teacher, learning assistance teacher, or counsellor.

If the teacher has a concern or shares your concern, he or she can ask the school-based team for help.

STEP 2 — MEET WITH THE PRINCIPAL

When meeting with the principal, or the principal's designate, you may bring a support person. At the meeting, state your concerns. List the steps you've already taken, and say what you want to see happen. As always, take notes of the discussion and record the actions that are agreed upon. After the meeting, send a letter to confirm what you believe was agreed to and keep a copy.

If the issue isn't resolved to your satisfaction, the principal can refer you to the next person in the hierarchy. The principal may suggest involving the school-based team before seeking assistance from school district personnel. However, once the school's resources are exhausted, you'll be referred to someone at the school district office.

At this point it's especially important to maintain good records. Follow up after meetings with written correspondence and indicate that you expect a written

response. Indicate what your next intended steps are and provide a timeline for a response. Always follow up by phone or email to ensure that correspondence has been received and offer to resend if necessary. You may also want to send copies of your correspondence to the people you'll be meeting with next to ensure that they're aware of the situation.

Sending copies to your supporters and advocates is also a good idea. This strategy should be used consistently as you proceed with your efforts to resolve the issue.

STEP 3 — MEET WITH THE DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

The next person in the chain of command may be the director of special education or his or her designate. Meeting with district personnel often involves larger meetings with unfamiliar people. Follow the same procedure as you would for other meetings, but consider including other support people to strengthen your case. These support people may include therapists, child care workers, or advocates.

The director of special education may also be called the director of instruction, district principal, or district vice-principal. You can find a provincial contact at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/apps/imcl/imclWeb/SN.do.

STEP 4 — MEET WITH THE SUPERINTENDENT OR ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT

If the issue hasn't been resolved after meeting with the director of special education, the last individual to hear your case is usually the superintendent of schools. When meeting with the superintendent of schools, follow the above meeting procedure. If you can't reach an agreement, you have the right to appeal the superintendent's decision to the school board.

STEP 5 — REQUEST A SCHOOL DISTRICT APPEAL

Section 11 of the School Act requires each school district to have an appeal process that enables a parent or student to appeal a decision (or non-decision) of a school board employee.

Under section 11(2), parents can challenge a decision of an employee of a Board which "significantly affects the education, health or safety of a student". The Board is required to establish an appeal process through by-law (section 11(3)). The appeal must be brought within a reasonable time from the date that the parent or student was informed of the decision. The Board is obliged to render a decision within 45 days (Section 11(6)).

An appeal provides you with an opportunity to present your concerns about a decision. However, **there are time limits for starting an appeal**, so it's important to act quickly and check your school district's appeal policy. Get the policy from your school board office, or search their website. The policy should include information about how to request an appeal, any timelines that must be followed, and how the appeal will proceed.

School district appeals can be important for resolving an issue that may affect many others. Appeal decisions are formally recorded so that issues affecting students with special needs throughout the province can be identified. The next section describes how to prepare for an appeal.

Preparing a school district appeal

An appeal is the final opportunity to seek a favourable decision before going outside the school system. Parents should exhaust all options with local school and school district staff before proceeding with a school district appeal.

At an appeal hearing, school staff may present their point of view about a decision. The board can ask questions of you and any other presenters. The school board will make its decision in a closed meeting. You'll receive the school board's decision, which is final, in writing.

The appeal process in each school district must follow the principles of **administrative fairness**. A report called *Fair Schools* written by the Ombudsman in 1995 provides detailed information about administrative fairness and your rights. It's available at www.ombudsman.bc.ca.

Parents sometimes ask if they need a lawyer for an appeal. The school board may have legal representation at an appeal hearing. Check with your school board for information about local procedures and ask if they'll have legal representation at the appeal.

TIPS ON PREPARING AN APPEAL

1. Request a copy of the appeal policy from your school district. This policy will outline the procedure and timelines for each step of the appeal. It will also tell you when to expect a decision from the board. The board's decision should be in writing.

2. Ask who will be in attendance at the meeting and what their roles are.
3. You must support the issue you're appealing with written documentation, including relevant policies or legislation that apply to your case. You must submit this documentation to the school board as part of your appeal application.
4. You're entitled to any school board records relevant to the decision you're appealing, and to get copies of all written documentation that the school board will use at the appeal hearing.
5. Seek an advocate's support to help you prepare and accompany you at the formal appeal. You can get information on appeals and how to find advocates from Inclusion BC, FSI, your local community living association, or other support groups that know about your child's disability (see Chapter 5 — Organizations that can help).
6. Work with your advocate to prepare your argument carefully. Your advocate can help you find examples of similar situations to support your case.
7. In some cases, it may help to have your child present, although the board may deny this request. If so, you may want to bring a photograph.
8. The school board's decision is binding and is the final step for resolution within your district. If you believe that the appeal process wasn't fair or that the proper procedure wasn't followed, see the following section for other options available to you.

Resolving issues beyond the school district

If you are unable to resolve your issue by going up the hierarchy of the School District to a School Board appeal, there is another level of appeal within the education system – an appeal to the Superintendent of Achievement under section 11(6). A decision by the School Board must have been rendered, or, a reconsideration decision rendered (section 11(5)) before pursuing such an appeal.

This appeal is a new hearing. This means that the parties can bring in evidence that was not in front of the Board under the section 11(1) appeal. The Superintendent of Achievement has the discretion to suspend the decision of the School Board pending the appeal.

Student Appeals - Ministry of Education Appeal Process

In 2007, an amendment to the School Act was passed and has been in force since March 2008, allowing parents or students to appeal a decision of a Board of Education. This amendment provides parents and students with a further avenue for appeal of a Board of Education's decision to a Superintendent of Achievement at the Ministry of Education level.

The following grounds for appeal are set out under the Appeals Regulation (BC Reg 24/2008):

- Expulsion from an educational program;
- Suspension from an educational program;
- Suspension from an educational program where no other educational program is made available;
- Distributed learning required as part of a disciplinary matter;
- A decision not to provide a student with an IEP;
- Consultation about placement of a student with special needs and the preparation of an Individual Education Plan (IEP);
- Bullying behaviours, including intimidation, harassment or threats of violence; or
- Exclusion due to a medical condition that endangers others.

It is important, once again, to thoroughly read the information provided by the Ministry of Education (available on their website at http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/student_appeals/superintendent.htm) and to follow all instructions on completing the necessary forms in accordance with the timelines stipulated. Be sure to state your desired outcome clearly on the appeal form.

Upon receipt of the Notice of Appeal, an adjudicator will:

- Confirm, vary or revoke the decision under appeal;
- Refer the matter back to the board for reconsideration, with or without directions; or
- Dismiss all or part of the appeal.

The matter may be dismissed, referred for mediation or adjudicated at this level and the Superintendent of Achievement's decision is final and binding.

If you are unable to resolve your issue by going up the hierarchy of the school district to a school board appeal, there is another level of appeal within the education system – an appeal to the Superintendent of Achievement under section 11(6). A decision by the school board must have been rendered or a reconsideration decision rendered (section 11(5)) before pursuing such an appeal.

This appeal is a new hearing. This means that the parties can bring in evidence that was not in front of the board under the section 11(1) appeal. The Superintendent of Achievement has the discretion to suspend the decision of the school board pending the appeal.

Other Avenues

If the problem is not solved through these processes, other avenues may be explored outside of the school system. Below are some strategies you may wish to pursue.

Contact a politician

When issues aren't resolved at the local level or through regular channels, it may be helpful to write to your Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), to the Director of Special Programs at the Ministry of Education, or even to the Minister of Education. (These officials can be found on the British Columbia Government website at www.gov.bc.ca.) Keep copies of your letters for your file and make copies for anyone you think should have one. Politicians are likely to contact the local school district about your complaint.

When you take the political route, it can be helpful to seek support from other parents or support groups. Political advocacy can be a slow method for getting results and is most effective with issues that impact a number of people who speak with a collective voice.

Take your story to the media

Sometimes people turn to the media to bring attention to the issues they face, in the hope that the attention will help bring about a resolution. When all other options have been exhausted, media attention can put added pressure on politicians

and decision-makers to resolve an issue.

However, there are risks involved with seeking media attention. Be prepared for your child's disability to become a topic of public discussion. Once your story is in the media, you won't have control over how it is reported or how the public responds. While media attention may garner sympathy for your child's situation, it may not necessarily result in positive action to resolve the issue, and may antagonize those who could help. Consider media coverage only as a last resort when other avenues have failed, and seek the help of a trained and experienced advocate before going to the media.

When you are angry and frustrated with a system that seems unjust or uncaring, it may be tempting to go to the media early on in the process. Keep in mind that there are usually greater benefits to working hard to solve issues close to home.

Request a review by the ombudsperson

The Ombudsperson is a provincial advocate responsible for ensuring that public agencies act fairly. The Ombudsperson investigates complaints regarding unfair administrative decisions or actions by a public agency, and can try to settle complaints through consultation. In most cases, you are required to complete the School Board appeal process before the Ombudsperson's office can open a file on your case.

The Ombudsperson cannot make a binding decision but can recommend to the public agency how to resolve unfairness. The Ombudsperson has persuasive ability but no legislative ability to enforce any of their recommendations.

The Ombudsperson may review decisions and procedures within the school system, and though it reports to the legislature, its review process is impartial and independent.

For more information about steps you need to take and what the Ombudsperson can do, contact the Ombudsperson's Office or go to www.ombudsman.bc.ca.

Legal remedies

If the problem cannot be resolved, you may consider seeking a legal remedy through an administrative tribunal or the courts. At these levels, it is a good idea to seek help from a trained advocate or lawyer. Below are some strategies you may consider.

File a human rights complaint

If a School Board makes a decision that you believe discriminates against a child on the basis of physical or mental disability, you can file a complaint with the Human Rights Tribunal. (See the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal website at www.bchrt.bc.ca.)

Note: There is a six (6) month time limit from the date of a single act of discrimination to file the complaint. If the discrimination is repetitive or on-going, the complaint must be filed within 6 months of the last act of discrimination.

The Human Rights Tribunal screens, accepts, mediates, and judges human rights complaints. A case manager will inform you whether or not you have grounds for a complaint under the *British Columbia Human Rights Code (the "Code")*. This screening may take a couple of months. If your case is accepted, a mediator will attempt to resolve the case. In some cases, mediation is successful and there is no need to proceed to a hearing. If a complaint proceeds to a hearing, you may want a lawyer. When a complaint goes to a hearing, a tribunal member or panel makes a decision and gives reasons for their decision in writing. This process can take a long time to complete.

The BC Human Rights Coalition runs human rights clinics and assists people who are having difficulty with the human rights complaint process. For more information, see their website at www.bchrcoalition.org or, check the resource section at the end of this handbook for contact information. There is no charge for their services.

Proving your human rights case

The BC legislature created the *Code* to make society more equal, and to remove barriers that have excluded certain disadvantaged groups. People with disabilities are one of the groups protected under the legislation. The *Code* also focusses on certain areas of activity to prevent discrimination. One of the protected areas is “services customarily available to the public” under section 8 of the *Code*. The courts have ruled that education is a public service under this section.

A student who has been denied a benefit or suffered an adverse consequence for reasons related to his or her disability can therefore consider filing a disability discrimination claim under section 8 of the *Code*. To succeed, the complaint would need to pass the following two part test:

1. The First Step

Under the first step, the person who filed the complaint (the complainant) must prove what is called *prima facie* discrimination. The complainant must show that, (1) the student has (or was perceived to have) a disability; (2) something negative happened—the student received adverse treatment; and (3) the student’s disability was a factor in the adverse treatment.

2. The Second Step

Once the student has proved the above three requirements, the education provider can still claim that it is not discriminating because it can show it is justified in its actions. To do this, the provider must show that it accommodated the student up to the point of undue hardship. Undue hardship factors will be different in every case but can include things like undue cost or safety. The courts have cautioned that government should not put too low a cost on accommodating persons with disabilities. If the education provider can prove that it would suffer undue hardship in accommodating the student, the complaint will be dismissed.

3. Remedies

If the complaint succeeds, the Tribunal can, under section 37 of the *Code*, make a number of systemic and individual orders to fix the discrimination. The Tribunal can order compensation for losses related to the discrimination, as well as injury to dignity.

Human Rights Win for Inclusive Education: The *Moore* Case

There has been a recent notable success under the Code for inclusive education. In *Moore v. British Columbia (Education)*, [2012] 3 S.C.R. 360, nine justices of the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that severe learning disabled students are entitled to equal opportunity to access public education as students without learning disabilities.

The case centered on Jeffrey Moore, a student who attended elementary school. Jeffrey had a severe learning disability. He required educational accommodations to help him learn to read. He was referred to the Diagnostic Center 1 (DC1), a successful program that provided specialized literacy instruction geared toward severe learning disabled students. However, just as Jeffrey was about to enter the DC1, the district administration abruptly closed it and dismantled a number of other supports for severely learning disabled students. The District argued that it had no other choice due to finances. But while the District dismantled these programs, it maintained a number of popular non-core programs, including, Band and Strings, as well as a nature school.

The unanimous court ruled that the District had discriminated against Jeffrey by failing to accommodate him to the point of undue hardship. They said that “special education is not a dispensable ‘luxury’, but a necessary ‘ramp’ to ensure equal access to educational services.” Education providers must show that they have explored all reasonable options short of undue hardship, before cutting necessary accommodations. The court rejected the School District’s cost argument because they could not show that they had done so here. The court awarded damages to reimburse the Moores for tuition costs incurred to educate Jeffrey at private school, as well as, damages to compensate for Jeffrey’s injury to dignity.

File a Charter Challenge

Like human rights legislation, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (the “*Charter*”) protects against discrimination on the basis of disability. Section 15 (1) of the *Charter* says:

Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

While you can use the *Charter* to pursue equality rights, practically speaking, a *Charter* challenge is a more complex and less accessible option than the human rights system. The case can only proceed through the court system and you will need to pay filing fees to commence the claim. You also run the risk of paying court costs if you do not succeed. The arguments and process are difficult, the defences differ from human rights legislation, and it would be difficult to proceed without a lawyer. Further, not many cases involving disability rights have succeeded before the court.

That said, there have been some successes, and the principles that come out of these cases are useful for reminding school providers about their obligations. Three of these cases are discussed below.

In ***Eaton v. Brant County Board of Education***, [1997] 1 SCR 241, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that Emily Eaton was not a victim of discrimination when she was placed in a segregated classroom. The Court declined to go as far as requiring schools to integrate students in all circumstances. Instead, the Court recognized the harm caused by exclusionary policies and repeatedly emphasized the advantage of integration. But the Court also said that school boards have a duty to recognize the individual and actual needs of students with disabilities and make reasonable accommodation of those needs, based on what is in the best interest of the student.

In ***Eldridge v. British Columbia (Attorney General)***, [1997] 3 SCR 624, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the equality rights of deaf patients seeking medical services were violated when they were not provided interpreters. The Supreme Court of Canada found that effective communication is necessary in the delivery of medical services, and that the failure to provide interpretive services to deaf persons in hospitals was discriminatory. The Court also ruled that governments have a duty to ensure that members of disadvantaged groups benefit equally from services offered to the general public.

Finally, ***Moore v. British Columbia*** (Education), [2012] 3 S.C.R. 360, which was discussed earlier, was not a Charter case. However, it relied on the reasoning in *Eldridge* to rule that severe learning disabled students are entitled to equal opportunity to access public education as students without learning disabilities. The Court ruled unanimously that students with disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodation (to the point of undue hardship) to ensure equal access to educational services. The *Moore* case provides an important framework to ensure accommodation and support for students with special needs in the classroom, who have an equal right to access the benefits of general education as all other students.

These cases have clear implications for school boards with regard to recognizing the needs of students with disabilities and providing reasonable accommodation of those needs. The challenge now is to ensure that school boards actually incorporate the requirements of section 15(1), and the mandate of the *Moore* case in their day-to-day operations.

School boards and senior administrators should be reviewing, on a regular basis, whether they are fulfilling these duties. Since financial limitations are a factor in determining what is “reasonable accommodation,” a good time for parents and parent organizations to ask school boards to review their success in accommodating students is during the budgeting process.

Request a Judicial Review

If you believe that a School District appeal decision is unfair, or that the School Board did not meet the requirements of administrative fairness, you may be able to seek a judicial review by the Supreme Court of British Columbia. You should consult with a lawyer if you want to file a judicial review. The judicial review court does not act as an appeal court, nor does it conduct a new hearing with new evidence. In general, the court can only decide whether the School District or Ministry of Education made serious legal errors. The court can examine the School District's decision and the process by which it was made. A judicial review may succeed only under certain conditions. The court may overturn a decision when the following errors can be shown:

- i) there is a patently unreasonable finding of fact;
- ii) there is a denial of procedural fairness; or
- iii) the Appeal Board made a decision in bad faith, exercised its discretion for improper purposes, based its decision on irrelevant factors, or failed to take statutory requirements into account.

If you succeed, the remedy generally ordered by the court will be that the school authority reconsider its decision under proper legal principles. The ruling from a judicial review is legally binding. If you lose, there is a risk of facing additional court costs. If you win, you may be entitled to an award of costs.

File a civil lawsuit

In some cases, you may be able to file a civil lawsuit to realize a right under the School Act. This involves suing the School Board or School District in British Columbia Supreme Court.

For example, in *Hewko v. British Columbia*, 2006 BCSC 1638, parents of a student with autism had partial success in a civil claim based on breach of statutory duty. Under the School Act, the District is required to consult with parents regarding the student's educational program. In this case, the District failed to do so. The Court ordered the District to consult with the parents in drafting the education plan. The Court ruled that reasonable accommodation was part of the duty to consult, and that the parent's representation on the student's program must be seriously considered, and wherever possible, integrated into the proposed plan of action.

Civil suits can be complex proceedings and it is best to seek the advice of a lawyer about whether a civil claim is a viable option in your particular situation.

CHAPTER FOUR

Planning for your child's education



*“Without leaps of imagination, or dreaming,
we lose the excitement of possibilities.
Dreaming, after all, is a form of planning.”*

GLORIA STEINEM



Planning and Advocacy Go Hand in Hand

In 1989, when Christian was three years old, our efforts to find a school district that supported integrated education led our family to Richmond. Just before his third birthday, Christian, our oldest son, had been diagnosed with a developmental disability and autism.

In 1991, Christian entered the neighbourhood elementary school a block from our home and later progressed to high school one block in the other direction. In high school, Christian's classmates knew him well from shared years in elementary school. These students supported his learning by gently instructing his education assistants about how Christian learns best. They demonstrated, "No, ask like this: 'Christian, Christian what is the class doing now?'"

Christian's classmates knew him well from shared years in elementary school.

Christian's elementary school years were inclusive throughout. In his early high school years Christian spent most of his time in inclusive classrooms. This allowed his peers to see him at his best. By the end of elementary school, his classmates understood that he had some exceptional differences; but they also understood that he was one of them. From the time he was little, Christian engaged in self-stimulatory behaviour that included hand flapping, pacing, hopping, and unusual noise making. His classmates were aware of this, but they also spent time with Christian when he was able to stay on task. These times balanced out his more unusual behaviour.

As Christian grew older and as resources and funding for education became limited, he spent more time isolated from his typical peer group. Ironically, the more time he spent isolated from them, the more he attracted their attention through behaviour that marked him as different. Much of his time outside the classroom was spent in a resource room in a distant school wing, where his learning wasn't well supported. Well-meaning but over-burdened staff lacked the ability and experience to provide a program that engaged Christian. This led him to increase his self-stimulatory behaviour and grow more withdrawn. It saddened us to see this happening to our son.

As Christian neared the end of his school years, we realized that he would need an extra transition year in school before becoming eligible for adult services. Beginning in March 2003, we tried to work with the school to create a plan for such a transition year. The school would only agree to let Christian attend part-time in that final year. They told us this was because they had limited

funding that had to be distributed equitably and the resources were needed by other students who hadn't spent as many years in school as Christian.

When we spoke to the school district, they agreed to commit the \$15,000 provided by the Ministry of Education for Christian's education, an amount that would pay for 12 hours of one-to-one support from an education assistant each week. The district also suggested that it might be possible to pool resources so that Christian could attend full-time in a shared placement.

Yet the school still insisted that Christian could attend only part-time. They told us that they wouldn't provide one-to-one support, that he'd once again be relegated to the resource room, and that they didn't know what a program for him might look like. When we approached Christian's social worker about getting any other daytime support services, he told us that Christian wouldn't be eligible for services during school hours because he was still school aged. We couldn't provide Christian with the level of daily support that he needed at home. Reaching one dead end after another, we were worried about Christian's future.

It took a year of advocacy, and many letters and meetings, before district staff finally clarified with the Ministry of Education that Christian was eligible to attend high school full-time while he remained school age. (The age for leaving school is 19. But if a student turns 19 after July 1, he or she can enroll in school the following September. For the School Act definition of school age, see Chapter 6.)

We expressed hopes and shared our enthusiasm. Together we formed a vision of Christian's future.

At the end of that year, we participated in a person-centred planning process for Christian that empowered us to Plan an Alternative Tomorrow with Hope (PATH). The planning meeting included Christian, family members, and some members of the school team. During this PATH, we were encouraged to dream again of the possibilities for Christian's future. We shared these dreams with school staff who had never had the opportunity to imagine the future for Christian. We spoke of community life, daily activities, and travel. We expressed hopes and shared our enthusiasm. Together we formed a vision of Christian's future.

Christian attended his final year of high school with a goal of developing community access opportunities. Due to limited resources, he had limited success. However, this time allowed us to develop an action plan that has secured opportunities in his adulthood. Today, he's supported in a home-based, individualized program run by a microboard.

BY TAMARA KULUSIC

Why is planning important?

Planning allows parents who support children with special needs to connect their hopes and dreams to daily actions. It makes possible an inclusive community life for your children, one step at a time. Planning can also involve forming a team to work together toward big-picture goals. This team will include you and your child at the centre and may include friends, neighbours, extended family and other caring community members.

Planning should be person-centred. It begins with your child and your family. It should also respond to all aspects of life — including social relationships, recreation, and educational opportunities — and include both long-term and short-term goals for your child. Person-centred planning tools such as **MAPS** and **PATH** may be helpful for developing plans. Community partners — including school personnel, social workers, and other professional supporters — can also help with developing plans and organizing the required supports and services.

Planning is an ongoing, circular process. As you identify new needs, you will need to revise the plan to address them. As goals in the plan are achieved, you will need to define new goals. There are also many crossroads over the years, and transition planning is key to ensuring good outcomes. Transition plans allow for visits to a new environment before an actual move. They allow staff in a new environment to develop the best possible strategies to make the move as smooth as possible for your son or daughter. Some school districts have transition teams to support students through major changes. Planning should begin well in advance of anticipated transitions.

Planning is also an important part of the educational process. For a student with special needs, education planning includes developing an **Individual Education Plan (IEP)**. An IEP arises from holistic person-centered-planning but is more specific to the school setting. The IEP identifies appropriate learning goals for your child and describes adaptations to the environment or to teaching methods that will enable your child to learn. It also includes a description of the services that will be provided to achieve the goals it outlines. It may involve community service providers.

Over time, the way you plan may change. For example, as students get older, it's important to include them as much as possible in the planning process. Ideally, students should participate in IEP meetings. Planning works best when both parents and students are active and valued participants in the process.

This chapter provides an overview of the components of planning essential to education. You will find information about assessing and identifying education and support needs; tools for creating, implementing and evaluating plans; and reporting on progress. This chapter concludes with a discussion of planning for transitions, including high school completion.

Assessing and identifying learning needs

It's important to identify a student's learning needs early. Many students will have an identified need before they enter school. In these cases, it's helpful for parents to share any information they have with the school when they register their child. In other cases, a student with special needs will be identified only after that student's difficulties become apparent in school. In this circumstance, the teacher should consult with the parents and refer the student to the school-based team (see Chapter 2 for description) to begin an assessment and identification process.

Informal assessments include observations, file reviews, and interviews. Formal assessments include achievement measures, adaptive functioning, and other standardized assessments, including IQ tests. Both informal and formal assessments are important in identifying needs and planning an education program. Sometimes a teacher may refer a student to the school nurse for vision or hearing screening. The teacher might also discuss with parents the possibility of referring a student to a physician for a medical examination.

A student with challenges may benefit from a specialized assessment. These assessments may be performed by school district professionals, including psychologists, occupational therapists, speech and language pathologists, or other specialists. (Parents must give written consent for some assessments.) Both formal and informal assessments have the same goal: to better understand a student's strengths and needs and to plan effectively. Some assessments provide a diagnosis that will allow the school district to access special education funding from the Ministry of Education (see Chapter 6 for Ministry of Education policy on funding). Assessment and identification should lead to better learning opportunities for your child.

School personnel should always consult and inform parents about assessments that they feel are needed for their child. However, some informal assessments do

not require parental permission. Establish a good relationship with school staff and ask in the beginning to be notified of all assessments. Sometimes only you will know that your son or daughter has had a bad night or a medication change that may impact assessment results. It is in your child's best interests that you are informed of any assessments to be performed.

Questions to ask about assessments

You'll probably have questions like the following for the case manager or school team members:

- What do you hope to find out from this assessment?
- Why is this assessment being done? Is it for funding/placement?
- Is previous information about my child's learning style/needs available?
- Will I get a copy of the assessment? Will I be asked to give approval for its distribution? The answer to each of these should be yes.
- Can I speak to the assessor so that I can understand the results?

As a parent, you may have concerns about how well your child knows the person who will be doing the assessment. Unfamiliar situations and people can be overwhelming. You may wonder how well your child will do if the assessor is a stranger. You may also have concerns about when and where an assessment will take place. These factors may influence the results. Some parents don't want their children assessed under less than ideal circumstances. Some parents choose to have assessments done privately so that they can share results as they see fit.

After an assessment, you should get a summarized report of the results. This report will be shared with others, including the school-based team and, as appropriate, the student. According to the School Act, parents have to be informed as to how the report will be made accessible to others working with the student. Ask to speak with the assessor if you need further information or help to interpret the results.

Information gathered through assessments helps people to understand a student's level of functioning and identifies areas of need. This information is the foundation for planning.

Person-centred planning tools

Person-centred planning brings a group of people together to plan for an individual. It recognizes a person's unique gifts and strengthens relationships among those members of a caring community who have come together for that person.

Several formal processes are helpful for creating person-centred plans. These include MAPS (Making Action Plans) and PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope). Other approaches include Essential Lifestyle Planning and Personal Futures Planning. These tools are all designed to help individuals achieve their hopes and dreams.

It's likely that as a parent you began dreaming and hoping for your child's future long ago. But challenging circumstances can make it difficult to keep dreaming or hoping for the best life for your child. Seeking support to develop big-picture plans can help you achieve the results you want for your child. Both MAPS and PATH include the individual to whatever extent he or she can participate. Trusted friends and family can then provide additional information. Each of these planning processes can help identify goals that may be included in an IEP.

You can find information for both processes on-line at www.inclusion.com. Trained facilitators may be available to help you in these processes. Contact Inclusion BC or FSI to find a facilitator who can provide service (sometimes via video or teleconferencing) in your community.

MAPS (Making Action Plans)

MAPS is a planning process that begins with forming a caring team around an individual. The first step involves telling the individual's history. Team members share their dreams for the individual's future and express their fears about that future. They also identify the person's strengths, gifts, and abilities.

The MAPS process acknowledges the person's needs and related issues. Seven key questions drive the process. Answering these questions helps the planning team to dream, plan, and produce results. The overall goal is the inclusion of the person with special needs in activities and environments with their same-age peers.

Sometimes carried out in schools, MAPS may take place at home or elsewhere in the community. The outcomes from the MAPS process can then inform other

planning processes such as IEP development. When MAPS is used in the school, it's important that it not be limited by bureaucratic structure or other restrictions. This means, for example, that team members should include the caring community that surrounds the individual outside of school, including family members, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, and grandparents. Same-age friends, classmates, and peers should also be involved.

PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope)

PATH is a planning process — for individuals, schools, families, groups, and businesses — that brings people together to address a common issue or difficult problem. PATH begins with defining a vision and sharing a dream for the future. As in MAPS, the process begins with forming a caring team whose purpose is to build a common understanding and create the needed support. The team then identifies the steps that must be taken to make that dream come true.

Individual Education Plans (IEP)

An IEP is a document that describes an educational program that has been developed for one specific student with special needs. It includes only the details of the educational program that have been modified or adapted. IEPs must also identify the support services required to implement the program.

IEPs for special needs students are a requirement under the School Act, mandated by Ministerial Order M19/00 (see Chapter 6). This order directs school boards to ensure that an IEP is in place for a special needs student as soon as practical after a student's special needs are identified. The order requires that the IEP be reviewed annually and, when necessary, revised or cancelled. It also requires that parents, and students where appropriate, must be consulted about the preparation of the IEP.

The duty to consult with parents in the preparation of the IEP is an important statutory right. In *Hewko v B.C.*, 2006 BCSC 1638 the court held that the School Board had failed to meaningfully consult with Darren Hewko's parents over his plan. The court held that the Abbotsford School District had breached its statutory duty to consult in failing to seriously consider, and where possible integrate, the parent's home based program as developed by the home based consultant.

There was evidence that this program could produce beneficial instruction for

Darren Hewko. The District was ordered to meet with its obligation by meaningfully consulting with the parents.

Each student's IEP will be different, reflecting their personal learning needs. Some students require only small **adaptations** and minimum levels of support. They can achieve the expected learning outcomes for their grade level and/or courses. Some students with more complex needs will require **modifications** to their education programs. Some or all of their learning outcomes may differ from the curriculum. Some students may have both adaptations and modifications in their IEPs. IEPs may be brief or detailed as appropriate, and are designed to enable learners to reach their individual potential.

“The Ministry of Education is committed to providing a high quality education for Kindergarten to Grade 12 children so they can develop their individual potential and acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes to contribute to society.”

BC MINISTRY OF EDUCATION WEBSITE

From school entry to school leaving, developing and implementing an appropriate IEP is critical for supporting student learning and long-term success. It's also the foundation for reporting. Participating in the development of your child's IEP is critical. Your role in planning, making the plan work, and ensuring that quality educational opportunities are available to your child will lead to the future you want for your family and for your child.

Adaptations

Adaptations are developed and implemented when a student's learning outcomes are expected to exceed or be the same as those described in the provincial curriculum.

There is a range of adaptations that can help create meaningful learning opportunities and evaluate student progress. *Every Principal's Guide to Special Education in British Columbia* by the British Columbia School Superintendents Association (available at www.bcssa.org/topics/topicsfront.html#specialied) provides the

following information about adaptations (p. 48).

Adaptations may include:

- changes to the physical environment, different teaching strategies, different materials, or different evaluation methods.
- small classrooms; altering the classroom lighting or ambient sound; providing wheelchair accessible space; or specific seating arrangements to accommodate a student's needs.
- the use of concrete manipulative materials; providing both written and spoken directions; allowing extra time or supervised breaks; use of a visual schedule; or breaking information into smaller chunks or steps.
- providing calculators; providing recorded material; providing Braille or large text; highlighting directions or key points; offering raised line paper; or providing technology to use, such as computers.
- use of video; extended time for tests; use of oral tests; providing a scribe; open book tests; small group or individual testing; allow audiotaped responses; or use of readers on first draft writing and numeracy.

Reporting for students with adapted programs follows ministry grading and reporting policies for the regular K–12 program. Students with adapted programs receive letter grades in the intermediate and high school years.

The IEP notes any adaptations that apply to evaluation procedures. However, official transcripts need not identify those adaptations.

It may be important to your child to know that Grade 10, 11 and 12 provincial exams may be adjudicated in order to determine whether or not adaptations will be allowed during these exams. A determination which allows adaptations to these exams must be supported by documentation to verify student needs. This documentation must indicate that the student meets ministry criteria for special needs, that the specific adaptations are appropriate for the student's documented special needs; and that the adaptations are consistent with classroom assessment practices. The school and school district must follow the requirements as specified by the Ministry of Education and report all adaptations to the Ministry. These requirements may be found in chapter 8 of the Ministry of Education Handbook of Procedures for the Graduation Program. This handbook is available at http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/exams/handbook/1112/handbook_of_procedures.pdf.

Modifications

Modifications involve setting goals that differ from those in the provincial curriculum. Students with more complex needs may require detailed planning for educational modifications, including the use of adaptive technologies. Their needs may also require the development of health care plans. Modifications should focus on the skills that a student needs to enhance his or her quality of life, now and in the future.

Reporting for students with modified IEPs does not include letter grades. Instead, report cards for these students provide anecdotal comments. The report refers to the goals and objectives established in the IEP and reflects the student's progress toward those goals. (There is a discussion of graduation credentials in the section called "Acknowledging student success" later in this chapter.)

Academic or life skills?

Myth: Your child doesn't need to learn academics. For children like yours, it's better to concentrate on life skills.

When IEPs are modified, teachers need to set goals that are high but attainable. Modified IEPs should include academic skills to the greatest possible extent while keeping goals attainable so that learners can succeed. The goals should address all aspects of learning and may include the following:

- functional academic skills
- independent living skills
- participation in community activities
- personal safety, health, and relationship skills (should address sexuality and sexual development for a healthy life, which can reduce vulnerability to mistreatment)
- self management and decision making
- career planning and work experience

Though "life skills" are important, they shouldn't form the basis of the entire educational program.

“Remember that it is easier to teach cooking skills than math skills. Just like every other child, a child with a disability should learn life skills like cooking, self care, making a bed and social skills, at home or out in the community. If your child is learning too many “life skills” at school, he or she may not be learning some of the academic lessons that will be harder to learn later on in life. The goals of education should not be changed for a child with a disability. The teaching method or pace might need to change, but the subjects should be the same. School for most kids means academics and social interaction. This is what school should mean for your child as well.”

NAVIGATING THE SYSTEM: AN ADVOCACY
HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN
WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

Navigating the System reminds parents to think about the importance of their own education and question how they'd get by without the essential skills they learned in school — like reading, writing, math, and computer skills. It may take longer for special needs students to learn these skills, but they're essential skills for a good quality of life.

Research shows that people with developmental disabilities who have more education also have better life outcomes. Life skills can be learned throughout life in a variety of places, but for many students, school will provide their best opportunity to develop academic skills.

The IEP process

Creating an Individual Education Plan involves three main steps:

- developing and writing the plan
- implementing and evaluating the plan
- reporting on student progress toward the goals in the plan

This is an evolving process: sometimes, as the student's needs change, the planning team changes or refines an IEP's goals.

DEVELOPING AN IEP

A meeting to develop an IEP usually takes place in the fall after a new teacher has had a chance to get to know the student. Parents should be invited to attend this meeting, and when appropriate the student should be included. The Ministry of Education has prepared a available at www.bcssa.org/PDFs/resources/IEP.pdf or from your school principal or other school-based team member. This booklet is a very helpful for understanding the IEP process.

The team involved in the IEP needs to gather relevant information before developing a plan. This may include assessments from previous years and reports from various professionals. Sometimes parents will be asked to prepare for the first IEP meeting by filling in forms about their child's interests, likes, strengths, dislikes, needs, and challenges. Even if you haven't been asked, it can be helpful to compile this information for the IEP meeting.

Tips for preparing a parent report for an IEP meeting:

- Describe your child and outline his or her strengths and needs. Consider all social, educational, physical, and emotional aspects
- Describe what you want your child to learn. Include both short-term and long-term goals
- Include support documents, if necessary or relevant
- If the team is new to your family and child, or you're planning a critical transition, consider including photos or videos of your child's home life to demonstrate your child's skills, interests, or method of communication

It's also helpful to identify your expectations for the IEP meeting. Sometimes parents will work with the teacher or case manager before the meeting to ensure that their ideas and concerns will be addressed.

Team members usually come to IEP meetings prepared to develop a working document. This meeting isn't for making critical decisions such as those about classroom placement. Instead, the team uses the IEP meeting to identify goals and objectives for student learning and to explore strategies to support students to achieve those goals.

An IEP also usually includes a process for reviewing the plan. The Ministry requires that IEPs be reviewed only once a year, but it's sometimes possible for the IEP team to meet more often. The frequency of reviews, like the complexity of the IEP itself, will depend on the individual student's needs. Work with the team at your son's or daughter's school to develop a suitable plan for review meetings. Once an IEP is established, the annual review may be less extensive than the first development meeting.

Preparing an IEP to deal with a critical transition may require more time than regular annual IEP reviews. Planning for transitions in an IEP can greatly benefit some students (see section on transition planning later in this chapter). Also, if extra support is needed in the new environment, it's important to document this need early to ensure that the support is in place when the transition occurs.

After the IEP meeting, the case manager will create a written copy of the IEP, incorporating the key information discussed. During the meeting, ask when you can expect to get a copy of the IEP. Follow up to make sure you get a written copy.

The following questions may help you to assess the IEP:

- Are the goals clearly stated?
- Are the goals practical and realistic?
- Do the goals promote inclusion?
- Are the goals functional and age-appropriate?
- Will these goals enable my child to develop to his or her individual potential?
- Do the goals prepare my child for the future?
- Will the strategies motivate my son or daughter?
- Do they incorporate his or her interests and strengths?
- Do they include all program options and extracurricular opportunities?
- Are there both long-term and short-term goals?
- Are the people responsible for helping meet the goals noted?
- Does the IEP include a list of additional services required, such as speech and language/occupational therapy?
- Are upcoming transitions incorporated into the IEP?
- How will my child's progress be measured or evaluated, and by whom?
- How will we know when the goals have been reached?

- Is there a review date set?

SMART IEPs

SMART IEPs are a way for parents to check that their children’s IEPs are the best they can be to support their learning and behavioural and social/emotional goals.

- Specific
- Measurable
- Active
- Realistic and Relevant
- Time-limited

Specific

The information in the IEPs should address your child’s needs and strengths. For example, it isn’t specific enough for the IEP to state that your child “has a reading problem.” It should specify the nature of the reading problem — decoding, fluency, comprehension, etc.

Measurable

Three areas of the IEP should be consistently, objectively measured:

- The present level of your child’s performance
- The progress your child is making toward the goals
- The achievement of the goals

Active

The IEP uses active language to describe what will be done to support your child. For example, “Ms. Smith will provide phonics instruction twice a week for one hour each session.”

Realistic and Relevant

The goals in your child’s IEP should be relevant to his or her needs and set at high, but attainable, levels.

Time-limited

There are reasonable review times identified in your child’s IEP, when you’ll meet with the staff who work with your child.

For more information on SMART IEPs see
www.wrightslaw.com/info/iep.goals.plan.htm

IMPLEMENTING AND EVALUATING THE IEP

The school must ensure that all supports are in place before the IEP is implemented. It's also critical that everybody involved in the planning understands and supports the plan.

Implementation works best when it incorporates an ongoing assessment of the plan to refine or validate the goals and strategies. The plan will require collaboration among members of the school community, and may also require support from other government ministries or community agencies. Implementing an IEP is most successful when the team sees the student as any other student, and doesn't define the student solely by their "special needs."

REPORTING ON STUDENT PROGRESS

All students receive report cards at the same time. In primary grades, all students receive anecdotal comments on their report cards. In intermediate grades and high school, this changes. As discussed earlier in this chapter, students with adaptations are evaluated in the same way as their typical peers. Students with modified programs receive anecdotal comments rather than letter grades on their report cards. Students with modified programs are evaluated on their progress, and reporting should note the degree to which they've achieved the outcomes of their IEP.

Regardless of whether a student has an adapted or modified program, reporting must reflect the student's progress in developing their individual potential.

Acknowledging student success

Leaving school and entering adult life is a much celebrated event for youth. An important part of marking the achievements of students with special needs who complete high school is participating in all aspects of graduation. All students should be included in formal ceremonies, proms, and related festivities. This is the essence of inclusion.

All students should also receive recognition and rewards for their learning achievements. Students with special needs should be acknowledged and rewarded for their achievements alongside their peers. This recognition should arise from the wider community's acknowledgement of the importance of inclusion.

Currently, the BC Ministry of Education issues official documents that acknowledge all graduating students' accomplishments. All BC students who meet or exceed expected learning outcomes for their courses, or students who have adapted IEPs and receive letter grades, receive Dogwood Diplomas from the Ministry of Education to recognize the fulfillment of their graduation requirements.

Students with modified IEPs who complete their educational programs receive a BC School Completion Certificate called the Evergreen Certificate, from the Ministry of Education. The ministry has described the certificate as "an important statement of personal achievement, reflecting the accomplishment of goals a student has chosen to pursue during the intermediate and graduation years." A board must recommend to the Minister that a student be awarded a School Completion Certificate. School districts report to the Ministry on the achievements of students with modified IEP's in the same way that they do with all students and transcripts are issued.

Reference: Student Credentials Order, School Act, section 168 (2) (t) See Schedule C.

Transition planning

Your child will experience many transitions: from home to preschool or kindergarten; from preschool to kindergarten; from school to school; from elementary school to middle or high school; and from high school to a college or university or adult life. For some children, the transition from school year to summer may be significant. For others the transition from school year to school year may present challenges.

Parents often experience these transitions as difficult. This may be due partly to the uncertainty of new settings, or to changes in services and supports that occur with transitions. Planning for critical transition periods may help to ease the bumps in the road. Transition planning can reduce some of the tension for parents and provide a better experience for children.

Transition planning should begin early. If your child is entering kindergarten, you may find the guide helpful (available at www.makechildrenfirstpg.org/kindergarten.htm).

Once your child is in school, the goals of a transition plan should be incorporated into the IEP as appropriate. As students get older and can participate, they should

be involved in transition planning. At the end of high school, the use of person-centred planning is important. A valuable guide to transition planning for youth is (available at www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec_needs/adulthood.htm).

Leaving high school and embarking on adult life is a major transition, and it's crucial to plan well in advance. Planning should begin in grade 9 or 10, and the IEP should incorporate new goals to prepare students for upcoming life changes. In BC, students remain eligible for educational programs through the school year in which they turn 19. During this year, they must be provided with a full-time educational program (see Chapter 6 for ministry policy on school age). Students who have an IEP with an adapted curriculum and who are pursuing a Dogwood Diploma may be eligible to remain in school until they're 21.

IEPs in high school should begin to prepare for options after high school, including the following:

- planning further learning opportunities in post-secondary or other programs
- developing employment objectives
- if appropriate, accessing adult community living supports and opportunities through Community Living BC (see www.communitylivingbc.ca)

At this stage of planning you may need to include other community professionals. A Child and Youth with Special Needs (CYSN) social worker from the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) or a facilitator from Community Living BC (CLBC) may be an important member of the transition team. MCFD delivers community-based supports and services to children, youth with special needs and their families. CLBC delivers supports and services to adults with developmental disabilities and their families in their home communities. These supports may include assisted daily living and residential support.

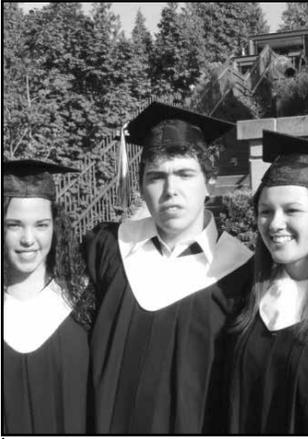
CLBC's vision is one of full citizenship in which people with disabilities lead good lives, have rich relationships with friends and family, financial security, choices in how they live their lives, employment opportunities and are accepted and valued as citizens.

To create the best possible future options, begin transition planning early. Build a transition planning team that focuses on the child or youth and that includes family

and friends, school personnel, community professionals, and service coordinators as appropriate.

To assist students, their families and a transition team with effective transition planning, a Cross Ministry Transition Planning Protocol for Youth with Special Needs was developed and signed by 9 ministries and government organizations in 2009. A copy of the protocol may be found on the CLBC website at <http://www.communitylivingbc.ca/individuals-families/youth-in-transition>.

In addition this website provides a very comprehensive guide to transition planning for youth and their families including step by step tips starting with the eligibility process. The Province of BC has also created a “Roles and tasks timeline for transition planning team members” that is available on-line: www.inclusionbc.org/resources/roles-and-tasks-timeline-transition-planning-team-members.



Unexpected Celebration

During Christian's final year at school year, we were busy planning and preparing for his life beyond school. At the same time, we were also preparing for our daughter Marina to graduate and go to college.

While Marina's graduation plans moved ahead, we wondered if Christian would participate in this important rite of passage for young people. Would his years on a modified program lead to graduation? Would he cross the stage to receive a certificate as the other students did? Would he be invited to?

If I had been asked years ago if this were possible, I would have said, "Absolutely not!" It was beyond my wildest dreams. Christian's often unpredictable behaviour had meant excluding him from such events. We knew that it could be an overwhelming experience for him. But when we considered celebrating Marina's graduation without Christian, it seemed like too bitter an irony.

We went ahead with planning to include Christian in the graduation ceremony. Marina was willing, even insistent, that she cross the stage with her brother. But we were worried - it was possible that he'd be overwhelmed by the event and use some of his unusual coping behaviours on stage. We didn't want Marina's moment overshadowed by Christian's difficulties, nor did we want the evening disrupted for any of the graduates or their families.

Christian said he wanted to go on stage and throw his hat in the air.

As my husband and I drove with Christian to the Chan Centre at UBC for the ceremony, we could see he was getting increasingly anxious. Despite all our careful planning, we questioned our decision as we left him with his support worker, an educational assistant who had worked with him for the past six years.

Christian entered the centre with all of the other grads, holding his sister's hand as they made their way to the front of the theatre. He sat with his sister at the end of an aisle, his support worker standing at an exit nearby. Our family and friends — from Christian's younger brother Josh, to his cousins, aunts, uncles and grandmother — watched with nervousness as his moment approached.

Seeing that Christian's anxiety was increasing, his support worker slipped out the exit with him to the backstage area, where Christian ran and leapt through the area, making loud noises. Marina still insisted he participate; his worker reluctantly agreed. Christian said he wanted to go on stage and throw his hat in the air.

When Christian's name was called, he emerged from backstage holding his sister's hand, then greeted the vice-principal and the principal. Then Marina's name was called, and they stood together being acknowledged with applause and cheers. The entire audience, and especially the students who knew him, recognized what a feat this was. He did it! He smiled and shared a sense of accomplishment with the other students.

In that moment, we celebrated as a family. We celebrated Christian the brother, Christian the son, Christian the grandson, Christian the nephew, the cousin, the student, the friend. We celebrated Christian the graduate!

This School Completion Certificate recognizes him and celebrates his graduation.

Too often, young people like Christian who face challenges don't have the opportunity to celebrate with the community. We're very proud of both of our children. And we're grateful to the high school staff who made the graduation night possible. Christian didn't participate in the dinner dance, which didn't appeal to him and wouldn't have been worthwhile for him. But these options should be available to the students who want them.

As we expected, Marina received a Dogwood Diploma, which acknowledged her high school accomplishments. I was devastated, however, to learn from Christian's high school transcript that he'd received credit for only one course — Foods 11. His transcript listed the reasons for non-graduation: no English 11 or 12; no Social Studies 11, no Science 11, no Career and Personal Planning 12. It read like a series of the "can't, won't, and don't" attitudes that we wanted to leave behind. We'd worked toward celebrating what he could do, what his accomplishments were. His education had been based upon an Individualized Educational Program. He worked at his learning; he worked at developing to his greatest potential.

A few months after receiving the transcript, Christian received his School Completion Certificate from the Ministry of Education. Though it didn't erase the devastation of the non-graduation notification, it did acknowledge his accomplishments. It acknowledged that he achieved his high school learning goals. His School Completion Certificate recognizes him and celebrates his graduation. We're grateful for the opportunity we had to acknowledge and celebrate Christian's accomplishments as his high school days came to an end and his adult life began.

BY TAMARA KULUSIC

CHAPTER FIVE

Where to get more information and help



“How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.”

ANNE FRANK

On-line information and services

INCLUSION BC

www.inclusionbc.org/inclusive-education

Inclusion BC's website has a section on inclusive education. It provides helpful information, updates and links to other resources. A directory of Inclusion BC member organizations provides information about support services available throughout BC. Inclusion BC also distributes the booklet, *12 Inclusive Activities: A guide for youth group leaders (2004)*.

BC COALITION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

<http://www.bccpd.bc.ca>

This site is a place of support, information and advocacy for people with all disabilities. Their Advocacy Access Programs include help sheets on a multitude of topics.

BC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDANTS ASSOCIATION (BCSSA)

www.bcssa.org/topics/topicsfront.html#specialed

This website features many publications helpful in understanding the school system, including *Every Principal's Guide to Special Education in British Columbia*.

BC TEACHERS FEDERATION - TEACHING TO DIVERSITY

www.bctf.bc.ca/TeachingToDiversity/parents.html

This BCTF site provides information to support teachers and all those who support learners. It includes a directory to several helpful on-line resources for parents.

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNITY LIVING (CACL)

www.cacl.ca

This national association works with other disability rights organizations for the benefit of people of all ages who have an intellectual disability. A federation of ten provincial and three territorial community living associations, comprising 420 associations, it has over 40,000 members.

COMMUNICATION ASSISTANCE FOR YOUNG ADULTS (CAYA)

www.cayabc.org

This organization operates as a project created through Special Education Technology BC (SET-BC), and provides services for adults aged 19 years and older who

require an augmentative/alternative communication (AAC) system due to a severe communication disability.

INCLUSION PRESS

www.inclusion.com

Inclusion press provides information on person-centred planning, and training for facilitators of MAPS and PATHS. This site also lists resources available for sale.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION - NATIONAL WEBSITE

www.inclusiveeducation.ca

This site acts as a meeting place for school representatives, families, and community members and promotes an inclusive vision of education in Canada. It is supported by the Canadian Association for Community Living.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION - PROVINCIAL RESOURCE PROGRAMS

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/sid/resources.htm

This site provides information about provincially funded resource programs available to districts and schools for students with intellectual disabilities. This includes educational alternatives (school programs) and consultative services (specialists who visit schools to offer training and/or to set student learning goals).

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION — SPECIAL EDUCATION RESOURCES

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/welcome.htm

This site features many resources, including guides for schools, that provide detailed information about teaching students with a range of special needs.

Some titles in the series are:

- Awareness of Students with Diverse Learning Needs (two volumes)
- Teaching Students with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
- Teaching Students with Autism
- Students with Intellectual Disabilities
- Teaching Students with Learning and Behavioral Differences
- Teaching Students with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Effects
- Students with Hearing Loss
- Teaching Students with Acquired Brain Injury
- Teaching Students with Mental Health Disorders (two volumes)

POVNET

www.povnet.org

This site focuses on anti-poverty work. It has a section on advocacy resources and lists advocates who are available throughout BC. PovNet provides up-to-date information about income assistance, disability benefits, housing and other poverty-related issues.

PROVINCIAL INTEGRATION SUPPORT PROGRAM (PISP)

www.pisp.ca

This outreach service assists BC schools to meet the educational needs of students with multiple/severe disabilities. It provides information, in-service training and teaching strategies to support the classroom teacher and support team.

Note: There's a waiting list for this program. Schools should send in referral forms as soon as possible.

PROVINCIAL OUTREACH PROGRAM FOR AUTISM AND OTHER RELATED DISORDERS (POPARD BC)

www.autismoutreach.ca

The team at this province-wide program includes teachers, special educators, registered psychologists, and/or autism specialists. The POPARD team can visit schools, provide workshops and other training, and consult with schoolbased teams about educational and behavioural programming. The POPARD office is located in Delta, BC.

SPECIAL EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY BC – (SET-BC)

This provincial program — with seven regional centres across the province — helps school districts throughout BC meet the technology needs of students with physical disabilities, visual impairments, and autism. Services include the following:

- assessment of students' abilities and need for technology
- program planning and transition planning, where technology is used to support learning outcomes
- equipment loans and technical support of loan equipment
- training and workshops in the use of equipment for teachers and other staff

Districts determine which students will receive SET-BC services in a given year, and school-based teams work with SET-BC consultants to consider student needs and educational goals. Eligibility for these programs is based on specific disabilities rather than needs, so some children are excluded from accessing these resources.

THE BC UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING OBJECT REPOSITORY

<http://www.setbc.org/bcudl/>

The BC UDL Learning Object Repository (BCUDL LOR) provides free, searchable, access to UDL learning objects and course materials. It was developed to assist educators across the province to create, manage, and share their teaching resources.

STEPS FORWARD INCLUSIVE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION SOCIETY

www.steps-forward.org

This society of parents promotes post-secondary opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities and provides support to students with intellectual disabilities in colleges and universities.

Phone: (604) 782-1382 E-mail: tamara@steps-forward.org

SUNNY HILL EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTRE (SHERC)

www.bcchildrens.ca/Services/SunnyHillHealthCtr/Learningeducation/EducationResourceCentre/default.htm

SHERC runs a library with books, videos, journals, board games, and other educational materials designed for children with disabilities. These resources are loaned to people with disabilities, their families, care providers, and other professionals working in BC. Loans can be arranged in person, by phone, email, or fax, and materials are mailed within BC free of charge.

3644 Slocan Street, Room S225

Vancouver BC V5M 3E8

Toll Free: 1-800-331-1533 Phone: 604-453-8335 ext. 1

Fax: 604-875-3455 Email: sherc@cw.bc.ca

THE ASSOCIATION FOR PERSONS WITH SEVERE HANDICAPS (TASH)

www.tash.org

This international advocacy organization includes people with disabilities, their family members, other advocates, and people who work in the disability field. It promotes the full inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities.

TRANSITION PLANNING FOR AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec_needs/adulthood.htm

This site provides information about planning for the transition to adulthood for youth with special needs. It has a link to *Your Future Now: A transition planning & resource guide for youth with special needs and their families*. This guide, based on best practice, includes a step-by-step planning process and a workbook. Also a great resource, *The Cross-Ministry Transition Planning Protocol for Children and Youth with Special Needs*: http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/spec_needs/pdf/transition_planning_protocol.pdf

On-line publications and documents

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION (INCLUSION BC)

<http://www.inclusionbc.org/our-priority-areas/inclusive-education>

This Inclusion BC publication is a companion to the parent's handbook on inclusive education. It makes the case for inclusive education by shattering myths, presenting research on the positive impact of inclusive education, and telling the stories of five students who, with the support of teachers and families, demonstrate the value of inclusion. Includes references and ideas for how to support and advocate for inclusive schools.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

www.knowyourrights.ca/knowyourrights

This booklet from the Learning Disabilities Association of BC, South Vancouver Island Chapter, is for parents/guardians of children with learning disabilities or ADHD. It provides information to support their advocacy efforts to make sure that their children get the best education possible. There are two versions of *Know Your Rights*, one for parents/guardians and one for students.

THE MANUAL OF SCHOOL LAW K-12

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/

This manual contains the following documents:

- The School Act
- The School Act Regulations and Orders in Council
- School Act Ministerial Orders

To find the Special Needs Students Order, Ministerial Order 150/89 and the Individual Education Plan Order, Ministerial Order 638/95, link to School Act Ministerial Orders.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION POLICY DOCUMENT:

K–12 FUNDING — SPECIAL NEEDS

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/funding_special_needs.htm

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/special_ed.htm

These websites provide details of the K–12 funding policy, including a chart of the categories eligible for funding and the amount that districts receive for each student recorded in each category.

PARENT’S GUIDE TO INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANNING

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/iep

This 20-page booklet by the Ministry of Education contains an overview of Individual Education Plans (IEPs). It outlines the roles and responsibilities of IEP team members and includes sections on a parent’s role in planning and supporting his or her child’s IEP. A section on learning assessment, evaluation, and reporting explains the basic difference between adaptations and modifications as they relate to the provincial curriculum and graduation requirements.

THE PRIMARY PROGRAM: A FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/primary_program/primary_prog.pdf

This Ministry of Education handbook focuses on teacher roles and primary education.

**ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF TEACHERS AND TEACHER ASSISTANTS/
EDUCATION ASSISTANTS**

http://www.cupe.bc.ca/sites/default/files/2009_Roles__Resp.pdf

Prepared and recently updated by BCTF and CUPE

**SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES: A MANUAL OF POLICIES, PROCEDURE
AND GUIDELINES**

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/ppandg/toc.htm

This Ministry of Education manual was revised in 2011 and is intended mainly for administrators, school-based teams, and special education professionals, but may be of interest to parents. Divided into eight sections, it contains information on

relevant legislation, ministry policy, and program standards. The manual gets updated as needed so it should contain the most current information.

SUPPORTING MEANINGFUL CONSULTATION WITH PARENTS

http://www.bc-case.org/downloads/WVSD_brochure.pdf

This helpful booklet has been prepared by the BC Council of Administrators of Special Education.

TRANSITION TO SCHOOL: AN INFORMATION GUIDE FOR PARENTS

www.makechildrenfirstpg.org/kindergarten.htm

This is a guide to assist parents with the transition to school for kindergarten age children.

Organizations that can help

Advocacy

INCLUSION BC

Inclusion BC is a provincial organization that advocates for children, youth, and adults with developmental disabilities and their families to ensure justice, rights and opportunities in all areas of their lives. Inclusion BC provides information, referral to local services, workshops, and parent support.

227 Sixth Street, New Westminster, BC V4L 3A5

Phone: (604) 777-9100 Toll free: 1-800-618-1119

Fax: (604) 777-9394 Website: www.inclusionbc.org

E-mail: info@inclusionbc.org

BC COALITION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES / ADVOCACY ACCESS

BCCPD is a cross-disability advocacy organization. It provides information and referrals for people with disabilities. Advocacy Access provides individual advocacy assistance.

204 – 456 West Broadway, Vancouver, BC V5Y 1R3

Phone: (604) 875-0188 TTY: (604) 875-8835

Fax: (604) 875-9227 Advocacy Access Phone: (604) 872-1278

Website: www.bccpd.bc.ca E-mail: feedback@bccpd.bc.ca

BC HUMAN RIGHTS TRIBUNAL

This is an independent, quasi-judicial body created by the Human Rights Code. The Tribunal is responsible for accepting, screening, mediating, and adjudicating human rights complaints. The Tribunal offers the parties to a complaint the opportunity to resolve the complaint through mediation. If the parties don't resolve the complaint, the Tribunal holds a hearing.

1170 – 605 Robson Street, Vancouver, BC V6B 5J3

Phone: (604) 775-2000 Toll free: 1-888-440-8844 (in BC only)

Website: www.bchrt.bc.ca E-mail: BCHumanRightsTribunal@gov.bc.ca

OMBUDSPERSON'S OFFICE

The Ombudsperson investigates complaints about the unfair administrative decisions or actions of a public agency. There is a mobile office for complaint intake.

2nd Floor – 947 Fort Street, Victoria, BC

Phone: 1-800-567-3247 (toll free) (250) 387-5855 (Victoria)

Fax: (250) 387-0198

Website: www.ombudsman.bc.ca

Disability information and support

ASSOCIATIONS FOR COMMUNITY LIVING (ACLs)

Many ACLs have staff members who provide support to families and individuals in communities throughout BC. Check the Inclusion BC member directory for local resources at www.inclusionbc.org/membership_directory/index.cfm, or phone the Inclusion BC office at (604) 777-9100 to locate support in your community. To locate a family support worker in your community you may check our list: http://www.inclusionbc.org/our-priority-areas/supports-children-and-families/where-get-support#family_support. Other local community organizations may be helpful.

AUTISM COMMUNITY TRAINING SOCIETY OF BC (ACT BC)

ACT BC provides information, training, and vital support services to parents, para-professionals, and professionals who have or work with children with an autism spectrum disorder.

150– 2250 Boundary Road, Burnaby, BC V5M 3Z3

www.actcommunity.net Email: info@actcommunity.net

AUTISM SOCIETY OF BC

This society promotes inclusion and the acceptance of people with autism spectrum disorder, and provides information and referrals to people with autism spectrum disorder and their families.

301 – 3071 East Hastings Street, Burnaby, BC V5C 2H6

Phone: (604) 434-0880 (Vancouver area)

Toll free: 1-888-437-0880 (Outside Vancouver)

Fax: (604) 434-0801

Website: www.autismbc.ca Email: info@autismbc.ca

BC CENTRE FOR ABILITY

This organization provides individualized therapy and support services to disabled children and youth in their homes and communities. It also provides specialized community living services and comprehensive vocational and support services for adults with disabilities.

2805 Kingsway, Vancouver, BC VSR 5H9

Phone: (604) 451-5511 Fax: (604) 451-5651

Website: www.centreforability.bc.ca

E-mail: home@centreforability.bc.ca

CANADIAN DOWN SYNDROME SOCIETY

The Canadian Down Syndrome Society is a national non-profit organization providing information, advocacy and education about Down Syndrome to parents, families and self-advocates through all stages of life.

Suite 103-2003 14 Street NW

Calgary, Alberta T2M 3N4

Phone: 1-800-883-5608 Fax: 403-270-8291

Website: www.cdss.ca

CANADIAN HARD OF HEARING ASSOCIATION – BRITISH COLUMBIA CHAPTER (CHHA–BC)

This organization helps people manage hearing loss and provides information. It advocates for hearing accessibility in BC and supports individual and collective action.

102-9300 Nowell Street, Chilliwack, BC V2P 4V7
Phone: (604) 795-9238 Toll free: 1-866-888-2442
Fax: (604) 795-9628 Website: <http://chha-bc.org>

CEREBRAL PALSY ASSOCIATION OF BC (CPABC)

This association provides advocacy and implements programs for people living with cerebral palsy. It encourages networking and provides information, publications, and public education.

801 -409 Granville Street, Vancouver, BC V6C 1T2
Phone: (604) 408-9484 Toll free: 1-800-663-0004
Fax: (604) 408-9489
Website: www.bccerebralpalsy.com
E-mail: info@bccerebralpalsy.com

DOWN SYNDROME RESEARCH FOUNDATION (DSRF)

The DSRF develops educational and training programs, supplies information and research results, provides clinical support services, collaborates with other resource centres and community service providers, and raises funds to support research projects.

1409 Sperling Avenue, Burnaby, BC V5B 4J8
Phone: (604) 444-3773 Toll free: 1-888-464-DSRF
Fax: (604) 431-9248
Website: www.dsrp.org
E-mail: info@dsrf.org

FAMILY NETWORK FOR DEAF CHILDREN (FNDC)

FNDC offers workshops, videos, a newsletter, and bulletins supporting and providing information to parents of deaf and hard-of-hearing children and the communities that support them.

Phone: (604) 684-1860
Website: www.fndc.ca

FAMILY SUPPORT INSTITUTE (FSI)

This province-wide organization supports families faced with the circumstances that come with having a family member who has a disability. Directed by families, FSI provides information, training, and province-wide networking to help families and their communities to build upon and share their strengths. The organization provides educational workshops and has resource materials, including videos available to parents and communities.

227 – 6th Street, New Westminster, BC V3L 3A5

Phone: (604) 540-8374 Fax: 604 540-9374 Email: fsi@fsibc.org

Toll free: 1-800-441-5403

Website: www.familysupportbc.com

LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION OF BC (LDABC)

LDABC promotes the education and well-being of children and adults with learning disabilities.

3292 East Broadway, Vancouver, BC V5M 1Z8

Phone: (604) 873-8139 Fax: (604) 873-8140

Website: www.ldav.ca Email: info@ldav.ca

LOWER MAINLAND DOWN SYNDROME SOCIETY (LMDSS)

This society provides opportunities, support, and information to families of children with Down Syndrome.

201 – 13281 72nd Avenue, Surrey, BC V3W 2N5

Phone: (604) 591-2722 Fax: (604) 591-2730

Website: www.lmdss.com E-mail: lmdss@telus.net

SUNNY HILL EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTRE (SHERC)

SHERC runs a library with books, videos, journals, board games, and other educational materials designed for children with disabilities. These resources are loaned free of charge to people with disabilities, their families, care providers, and other professionals working in BC. For contact information, see listing under “On-line information and services.”

VELA MICROBOARD ASSOCIATION

Microboards are small non-profit societies that create customized supports and services to address the needs of the one person they support. Vela provides support and information to family and friends who create microboards.

100 – 17564 56A Avenue, Surrey, BC V3S 1G3

Phone: (604) 575-2588 Fax: (604) 575-2589

Website: www.microboard.org E-mail: info@microboard.org

Legal

COMMUNITY LEGAL ASSISTANCE SOCIETY (CLAS)

CLAS runs a Disability Law Program, which offers advice to those who meet certain financial and “test case” criteria. It provides free legal advice and representation on issues affecting people with disabilities.

Suite 300-1140 W. Pender Street, Vancouver, BC V6E 4G1

Phone: (604) 685-3424 (Vancouver) Toll free: 1-888-685-6222

Fax: (604) 685-7611

Website: www.clasbc.net

LAWYER REFERRAL SERVICE

This service refers individuals to lawyers who will provide a consultation for up to 30 minutes for a fee of \$25 plus taxes. This consultation helps people determine if they have a legal problem, what it means, how long it will take to solve, and about how much it will cost.

Phone: (604) 687-3221 (Lower Mainland Vancouver)

Toll free: 1-800-663-1919 (outside Lower Mainland)

Website: www.cba.org/bc/initiatives/main/lawyer_referral.aspx

LEGAL AID — LEGAL SERVICES SOCIETY (LSS)

LSS is an independent, non-profit organization that provides legal aid for people in BC with low incomes. Legal aid services range from legal information and legal advice to legal representation (a lawyer to handle your case). To obtain a legal aid lawyer, you must be financially eligible.

To find the address and phone number of a local legal aid office near you, see the LSS website: www.lss.bc.ca/legal_aid/legalAidOffices.php#legalAidOffices

If you can't go to an office, call the LSS Call Centre and LawLINE:

Phone: (604) 408-2172 (Lower Mainland)

Toll free: 1-866-577-2525 (outside the Lower Mainland)

LAW STUDENT'S LEGAL ADVICE PROGRAM (LSLAP)

The LSLAP approach to the relationship between clinicians and clients enables students to take more time to explain the legal alternatives and the legal processes which are available to the client, thereby not only offering legal services to people who could not otherwise afford them, but also helping to de-mystify the law.

In this way, it is hoped, the LSLAP client comes away from the program more aware and more comfortable in exercising their legal rights.

UBC Faculty of Law, Rm 158, 1822 East Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1

<http://www.lslap.bc.ca/main/?contact>

Phone: 604-822-5791 Fax: 604-822-1661

CHAPTER SIX

Useful policy and legal documents



*“We make a living by what we get,
but we make a life by what we give.”*

WINSTON CHURCHILL

Inclusion BC — Education Policy

Inclusion BC has developed social policies to provide a foundation for advocacy, public awareness and government relations work. The policies are designed to assist Inclusion BC and families and individuals as they advocate on behalf of people with developmental disabilities and their families.

Inclusion BC's Education Policy outlines the guiding principles for our work on inclusive education, and includes policy statements on several key areas related to education. Each policy statement includes an overview of the issue, the purpose of the policy, background information and Inclusion BC's position. These policies can be accessed on-line at <http://inclusionbc.org/about-us/social-policy-positions>

The education policy includes statements on the following topics:

- Guiding Principles
- Inclusive Early Childhood Education (0–5 years)
- Inclusive Education for Kindergarten through grade 12
- Individual Education Plans (IEPs)
- Parental Involvement in Public Education
- Special Supports and Therapy Services for School-Aged Children
- Post Secondary Education.

Education — Guiding Principles

The following are general guiding principles for all the education policies:

- The public school system is the foundation for inclusive education.
- All students have the right to receive a public education in the regular classroom.
- Inclusive education at all levels benefits students with special needs and their peers.
- Each student is unique and needs an individualized approach to education to meet his or her intellectual, physical, social, and emotional and career development goals.
- Parents are valuable contributing partners in the education system and their involvement enhances the effectiveness and accountability of the school system.
- Parents have a responsibility to be involved in their child's education and schools have the responsibility to encourage parental involvement.

- Students' participation in all aspects of school life is vital to a rich education experience.
- Transitions are more successful for students when formalized student-centered planning occurs

Inclusive Early Childhood Education (0 to 5 years)

POLICY ISSUE

Children with special needs may receive support to attend a program of their parents' choice through the Supported Child Care Program. The program assists the family and childcare providers to develop and implement an individual plan to meet the child's needs. The government pays for the cost of supports while the parents pay for the cost of the pre-school or child care space.

There are income-tested subsidies for the pre-school or child care spaces for parents who qualify. However, there are many parents who do not qualify for subsidies who cannot afford to send their children to pre school/child care program. In addition, the amount of government funding available for subsidies falls short of the need. Therefore, many children miss the opportunity for increased social and cognitive development that is available to their peers.

PURPOSE

To ensure that all children with special needs have access to quality inclusive early childhood education programs of their parent's choice.

BACKGROUND

Young children require meaningful learning opportunities in inclusive settings to maximize their growth and development. Children with special needs may require additional supports to fully participate in those settings. Children who receive quality inclusive early childhood education have increased opportunities to develop their social and cognitive skills and are better prepared to attend elementary school.

The Supported Child Care Program is a service which enables children who need extra support to be included in child care or pre-school. It allows the parent to choose the childcare setting and then provides extra supports to that setting so the child can be successfully included. The shift to Supported Child Care was inspired,

in part, from successful inclusion of children with special needs at the elementary school level.

The early childhood education system is still under-funded and children with special needs are either not receiving adequate supports in their early childhood education settings or are excluded because of waitlists, income testing for subsidies and other eligibility criteria. As well, there are still some childcare facilities that do not embrace the intent of Supported Child Care philosophy.

POLICY STATEMENTS

1. All children with special needs are entitled to attend inclusive early childhood education programs.
2. Early childhood education programs should receive adequate human, financial and equipment resources to support children with special needs.
3. Children with special needs should be provided sufficient support to enable them to participate fully and successfully in an inclusive early childhood education program.
4. The extra cost of supports required by a child to participate in an early childhood education program should not be borne by the family.
5. To ensure all children with special needs benefit from early childhood programs regardless of their families' financial situation, government should provide subsidies to all parents of children with special needs for the cost of enrolling in a program at a minimum of three-half days per week.
6. Children with special needs should be financially supported to attend early childhood education programs that meet their unique needs and their family's needs. This means that if a child's needs are better met in a more enriched program, or a program of longer duration, families will not be forced to absorb the extra costs or accept a program that does not fully meet their child's needs.

Inclusive Education: Participation in K to 12 Schools

POLICY ISSUE

All students in BC, including those with special needs, are entitled to receive a quality publicly funded inclusive education. A Ministerial Order directs students with special needs to be placed in regular classrooms as the first option. Research shows that when students are included in regular classrooms they make greater overall academic gains than do their peers with similar disabilities in segregated classrooms. To ensure the success of inclusion, students must have the necessary supports to learn in the regular classroom and participate in school social activities.

The benefits of inclusion extend to all students. Typical students experience gains on many fronts: opportunities for new learning, improved values and attitudes related to human diversity, more developed interpersonal skills, as well as greater maturity, self confidence and self esteem .

While some school boards throughout BC have adopted an inclusive education philosophy, others have not. Despite the Ministry of Education mandate that students be educated amongst their peers, children are being placed in alternate settings or removed because of inadequate supports. As well, many teachers report that they feel unprepared to educate students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. Students must have access to a range of supports including: technological supports, specialist itinerant teachers, educational support teachers, teaching assistants, speech therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, behavioural therapists, and psychologists.

Due to inadequately supported inclusive education practices some parents feel compelled to accept placement of their children in segregated classrooms.

The secondary school system has not been as proactive as the elementary system in adopting inclusive education practices and protecting the rights of all children to meet their intellectual, social and career goals in classrooms alongside their peers. Many secondary schools still practice a segregated model of education for students with special needs.

Students with special needs are better prepared for the adult world when they continue to receive a supported, inclusive education in secondary school. The current emphasis on social goals assumes that students with special needs cease

to benefit from an academic or career education. This results in students leaving school unprepared for adult life and facing unemployment.

Graduation practices for students with special needs often come under review. While some students with special needs may not meet the current graduation requirements, they are entitled to have their accomplishments publicly acknowledged in a similar manner as their typically developing peers.

PURPOSE

To ensure that all students with special needs have access to an inclusive education.

BACKGROUND

The fundamental right of children with developmental disabilities to receive an education was the issue that first mobilized parents in the 1950s to create their own local associations. At the time, a widely held belief was that children with developmental disabilities could not learn. The government, therefore, accepted no responsibility to educate these children. Parents of children with developmental disabilities, understanding the potential of their children to learn and grow, responded by creating their own schools in places like church basements and private homes. In 1955 parents formed a provincial body, Inclusion BC, and over the decades have steadily advocated for changes in government laws and policies so that their children achieved their right to be educated.

Government slowly accepted its responsibility to contribute funding to parent-run schools and eventually agreed that public schooling should be made available to children with developmental disabilities. Although the first educational programs developed by school boards throughout the province were segregated, with more emphasis on care-taking than education, they laid the groundwork for parents and others to call for the inclusion of children in general education classes. The Ministry of Education has been committed to a policy of inclusion since 1989 when legislation was passed recognizing that the former practice of educating students in segregated classes was ineffective.

Fiscal pressures and the requirement for balanced budgets are causing school boards to look for ways to save money. Many school districts have cut programs and supports to students with special needs over the last few years. The previous practice of targeting funding for special education ensured a minimum level of student support. School districts were accountable to show that targeted funds were

actually spent on special education. The elimination of these targets has put the provision of supports for students with special needs at risk.

POLICY STATEMENTS

1. The Ministry of Education must maintain legislation, policy and adequate funding to support inclusive education.
2. The Ministry of Education must ensure that all school boards practice inclusive education.
3. All teachers in BC should receive adequate levels of training, professional development and ongoing support to ensure the success of students with special needs.
4. Teachers must retain primary responsibility for the implementation of the student's educational plan and be provided with access to adequate professional supports to ensure the student's success.
5. Students with special needs should be educated in classrooms with their typical peers and be provided with the necessary supports to meet their intellectual, social, physical, emotional and career development goals.
6. If a student is removed from the classroom setting, the school and the child's team must ensure a plan is put in place in a timely fashion that addresses the issues with the intent to return the student to the classroom.
7. Students with special needs should be acknowledged for their school achievement with a provincial certificate of school completion and their accomplishments should be recognized with awards along with their peers.

Individual Education Plans

POLICY ISSUE

The Ministry of Education requires school boards to develop individual education plans (IEPs) for students with special needs to ensure that students are working towards their educational goals.

In their policy document on special education, the Ministry of Education states that the process of developing an IEP is a collaborative and consultative process involving the student, parents, teachers, administrative and support personnel and

representatives of districts/community agencies. For many students with special needs, IEPs are developed without their input, their parents' input or even the classroom teacher's input. Consequently the IEPs do not reflect a full understanding of the student or their goals for intellectual, physical, emotional, social and career development.

Planning for transitions to new learning environments is also critical. While this takes additional time to coordinate and implement, smooth transition planning for students can enhance their opportunity to maximize their learning potential.

Even when plans are collaboratively developed, the required adaptations and modifications are not always provided to the student on a consistent basis. The IEP is only effective when the student's education team uses, reviews and updates it throughout the school year.

PURPOSE

To ensure that all students with special needs have a meaningful IEP that is collaboratively developed, implemented and monitored by the student's education team.

BACKGROUND

The mandate to develop IEPs has been enshrined in legislation since 1995 and requires schools to develop IEPs for students with special needs "as soon as practical after the student is so identified.

POLICY STATEMENTS

1. Students have the right to actively participate in the development, implementation and monitoring of their IEP.
2. Parents have the right to actively participate as equal partners on their child's education team and to be involved in the development, implementation and monitoring of the IEP.
3. Implementation of the IEP is a joint responsibility shared by the student's education team.
4. IEPs must be reviewed and updated at least at every reporting period by the student's education team, reflecting changes to the student's circumstances, his or her progress and any plans for transitions.

Parental Involvement in Public Education

POLICY ISSUE

Parents have a right to be involved in their child's education and to participate with the school in decisions concerning their child and the school community. Extensive research has shown the benefits of parental involvement in education. These benefits include higher achievement, better attendance, more positive attitudes and behaviours and higher graduation rates. Moreover, schools that work well with families show improved teacher morale, and are seen by the community to be performing better than those that do not.

Parents of students with special needs do not always agree with decisions made concerning their child or the school community. The School Act provides an appeal mechanism for parents to appeal decisions that significantly affect the education, health or safety of their child. The appeal mechanism ensures that complaints are heard, however many parents have reported that the appeal process is unsatisfactory and lacks impartiality.

The Ministry of Education has formalized parental involvement by requiring schools to establish Parent Advisory Councils and School Planning Councils. Parents of students with special needs are not always represented on these councils and their concerns are not always included or considered.

PURPOSE

To ensure that parents of students with special needs are considered equal partners on their child's education team and participate in decisions regarding the school community.

BACKGROUND

Parents have struggled for years to become valued partners in the education system. This is especially true for parents of children with special needs. On July 1, 2002 legislation was put in place to create Parent Advisory Councils and School Planning Councils.

While Parent Advisory Councils and School Planning Councils have been in place in many schools, they have not been operational in all schools across British Columbia.

POLICY STATEMENTS

1. Parental involvement in public education needs to be invited and facilitated throughout the student's school years.
2. Parents should be considered full partners on their child's education team and involved in decision-making for their child.
3. Parent Advisory Councils and School Planning Councils must represent the diversity of the community, ensuring the perspectives of parents of students with special needs are understood.
4. School boards' appeal processes must be unbiased and follow the principles of administrative fairness.

Special Supports and Therapy Services for School-Aged Children

POLICY ISSUE

Many students with special needs require therapy services and additional special supports at school, in the community and at home to support their physical, academic, social and emotional growth and development. The amount and range of therapy services and supports provided for school aged children is inadequate to meet their needs and the needs of their families. Over the past decade the erosion of funding and the increased demand have compromised therapy and support services.

THERAPY SERVICES

Therapy services are increasingly consultative in nature. Instead of working directly with the student, the therapist provides input and direction to the teaching assistant and/or classroom teacher on specific tasks that will assist the student. Current budgets limit the therapists' ability to make regular assessments. Few resources are available to meet the increasingly complex needs of children. Students entering the school system face significantly reduced therapy services or, in most cases, none at all. Even fewer therapy services are available once a student reaches secondary school. Few of these children are receiving home-based services. Parents of children requiring more therapy must find and pay for private services if they are able.

Students are often taken out of the classroom for therapy, which may interfere with their inclusive education. The goal, for the majority of students, should be to meet therapy needs within the regular classroom whenever possible. For students needing more intensive therapies, an appropriate time and alternative location should be identified in an effort to minimize the interruption to their education.

Behaviour therapy is in increasingly high demand and the need cannot be met with existing resource staff. It is imperative that for the optimal benefit of the child and family that behavior support services be addressed collaboratively by the child's team to ensure consistency across all environments. The lack of availability of behaviour therapy is a significant concern, given the tendency of some schools to use segregated classrooms as a permanent alternative when behaviour problems occur.

Other therapies, such as augmentative communication are highly specialized and seldom available to school-aged child and their family, despite the need for them.

There are no provincial standards regarding the volume and range of therapy services and there are vast discrepancies in the delivery of therapy services throughout school districts in the province.

It is essential that the provision of therapy services be protected and enhanced and that the Ministry of Education take a leadership role along with the Ministry of Children and Family Development and the Ministry of Health in standardizing the delivery of therapy services across the province.

SUPPORT PROGRAMS

The province augments therapy services through the provision of support programs such as the Provincial Resource Programs and Special Education Technology – British Columbia.

Provincial Resource Programs (PRP) provide a variety of supplemental resources and are intended to assist districts to meet the extraordinary special educational needs of students. These programs provide specific services for students with special needs throughout the province, either on an outreach basis or at a provincial centre.

Special Education Technology – British Columbia (SET-BC) is a Provincial Resource Program established to assist schools by supporting educational programs through

the use of technology. These services are primarily available to students with a physical disability; and/or visual impairment. Services provided by the SET-BC program include: assistance with the assessment of the students' abilities and needs for technology; assistance in program planning and transition planning, where technology is used to support learning outcomes; equipment loans and technical support of loan equipment; and in-service and workshops to train teachers and other staff in the use of the equipment.

While these are valuable and appreciated services, the eligibility criteria for these programs are disability-based rather than needs-based, excluding some children from accessing these important resources. In addition, as with many resources these days, there is lack of capacity within these programs, leaving long waitlists and children without much-needed supports.

PURPOSE

To ensure that all children with special needs are provided the opportunity for optimum growth and development through the provision of quality school aged therapy and support services.

To ensure that students receive the therapy services they require in the appropriate environments, by trained and supervised personnel, in a timely and consistent manner.

BACKGROUND

The Ministry of Children and Family Development and Ministry of Health fund therapy services for pre-school aged children. Once a child enters the school system, therapy services are jointly funded by the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Children and Family Development and are predominantly provided in the school environment.

POLICY STATEMENTS

Therapy Services

1. To ensure children with special needs reach their full potential, a full range of therapy services should be available to school-aged children with special needs and their families.

2. Therapy services should be provided when the child needs them, for as long as the child needs them, and in settings where the child will get maximum benefit from the service, whether at home, at school or in another setting.
3. Therapy services should be available at no cost to the child and family.
4. When therapy services are delivered on a consultative basis, the person providing the therapy must be trained and monitored on a regular basis by the primary therapist.
5. The delivery of therapy services must support the child's education within an inclusive setting and whenever possible should be provided at a time that does not conflict with classroom participation.
6. Provincial standards should be developed across ministries to define the range, availability and level of therapy services to be provided to school-aged children, based on best practices.

Support Services

7. Services delivered through Provincial Resource Programs must be readily accessible to support educators in addressing the extraordinary special needs of students in inclusive settings.
8. Technological support, such as communication devices and computers, must be available to meet students' needs and educational program goals.

Post Secondary Education

POLICY ISSUE

Post-secondary education for all students, including those with special needs, provides opportunities for increased personal growth, employment and social activities. Post secondary education opens the door to people with disabilities to more fully participate in the labour market. Considerable research has shown that people with disabilities accessing post secondary education are employed at a much higher rate than those with just a high school diploma.

Attendance at college and university has not been an option for many students with special needs due in part to restrictive admission policies. As a result, students with

special needs who do not have access to post-secondary education lose the associated benefits of increased employment and personal growth opportunities.

Even when people with developmental disabilities attend post secondary programs, they still face attitudinal barriers that limit their inclusion into college and university life. Many of the informal personal growth and social opportunities available to typical students are still inaccessible to people with developmental disabilities.

PURPOSE

To ensure students with special needs have access to inclusive post-secondary education.

BACKGROUND

People with developmental disabilities have the capacity for lifelong learning which has not been recognized by post-secondary educators and administrators. Historically post secondary programs available to students with developmental disabilities have been segregated and limited to vocational or pre-employment training in the community college system. Access to university programs has been extremely restricted due to attitudinal, financial and academic barriers. Federal and provincial post-secondary funding has been significantly reduced and therefore post-secondary education is less accessible to students with developmental disabilities.

While BC's public post secondary system has been providing education and training for students with special needs for over 25 years, much of this training has not been geared to meet current market demands.

There have been some positive changes in recent years. Parents have been successful in advocating for inclusive post-secondary opportunities, and some students with developmental disabilities are attending academic classes offered by colleges and universities. In addition, a few colleges and universities have taken pro-active steps towards inclusion by creating more flexible admission criteria. While these are positive steps, the majority of people with developmental disabilities do not have equitable access to post-secondary education.

POLICY STATEMENTS

1. People with developmental disabilities should have the opportunity to attend regular college and university programs, courses and activities.
2. Adequate levels of support for disability-related needs must be available to people with developmental disabilities attending post-secondary education institutions.
3. Post secondary institutions must be responsive in their programming and admission criteria to the education needs of people with developmental disabilities.
4. Colleges and universities should foster an inclusive education community by promoting the rights of students with developmental disabilities.
5. Colleges and universities should ensure that student services and supports are equally accessible by people with developmental disabilities.
6. Students have the right to receive appropriate credits, diplomas or certificates in their area of study where they have fulfilled course requirements.

Ministry of Education new legislation

BILL 22 — EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT ACT – March 17, 2012

Among other things, Bill 22 affects class size and composition. It makes it easier for school administration to increase class sizes for grades 4 to 12, in that the limit of 30 can be increased if certain criteria are met. (i.e., in the opinion of the superintendent and principal the class is appropriate for student learning, the class is in a prescribed category, etc.).

In addition, prior to Bill 22 there was a cap of three students with Individual Education Plans in the classroom. There is no longer any reference to students with IEPs and this legislation now allows for an unlimited number of students with designated special needs to be included in the classroom. This means that a student with special needs cannot be excluded from class simply because there are already three other students with special needs.

Ministry of Education Policy

The following are Ministry of Education policies that may be useful for reference as you advocate for your child's education. There are different kinds of policy as noted on the Ministry of Education website <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/primer/whatis.htm>

- The “musts” which require compliance
- The “shoulds” which encourage or provide incentives
- The “mays” which are enabling

Basic student funding

The Ministry of Education provides a Basic Allocation of funding per student in the school district. The 2012/2013 school year Basic Allocation per student is \$6,784.

This amount is provided for all students including students with special needs. This is in addition to Special Needs funding. The Basic Allocation is intended to include fund supports to students with other special needs, including students with Mild Intellectual Disability, Learning Disability, Moderate Behaviour Support/Mental Illness, and students who are gifted. The Basic Allocation also includes funds to support school boards in providing learning assistance, speech-language pathology services, hospital homebound services, and assessment services.

The Ministry of Education provides basic funding for all students to each school district. Additional funding is also provided which recognizes the additional cost of providing programs for students with special needs. The Special Needs funding outlined below is a targeted grant that the ministry provides to each district. Each district is required to spend all of this funding on special education programs. Most districts in BC spend more on special education than they receive from government in the targeted grant.

Additional Special Needs funding is provided for students in the following categories:

Level 1 includes students defined as

- (A) Dependent Handicapped
- (B) Deafblind

Level 1 students are funded at \$36,600 per student attending full-time.

Level 2 includes students diagnosed with

- (C) Moderate to Profound Intellectual Disability
- (D) Physically Disabled or Chronic Health Impaired
- (E) Visually Impaired
- (F) Deaf/Hearing Impaired
- (G) Autism Spectrum Disorder

Level 2 students are funded at \$18,300 per student attending full-time.

Level 3 includes students with

- (H) Intensive Behaviour Interventions/Serious Mental Illness

Level 3 students are funded at \$9,200 per student attending full-time.

Note: Districts are not required to spend the Special Needs Funding amount on the educational program of a specific student who was identified in a particular category. The district utilizes these monies as a district-wide pool and allocates these funds to schools.

Find the Policy Document: K-12 Funding – Special Needs at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/funding_special_needs.htm.

See also Policy Document: Special Education at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/special_ed.htm.

Kindergarten full day

Starting in 2010, the Ministry of Education began phasing in universal access to full day Kindergarten over 2 years. Full day kindergarten is now available for all five-year-olds in the province. This remains an option to families, but all children must enrol in school or be home schooled in the year of their sixth birthday.

Full day Kindergarten is funded the same as all other grades with supplemental funding available for students with special needs as outlined in this chapter.

School age

The School Act defines “**school age**” as follows:

the age between the date on which a person is permitted under section 3 (1) (of the School Act) to enroll in an educational program provided by a board and the end of the school year in which the person reaches the age of 19 years.

The School Act defines “**school year**” as follows:

the period beginning on July 1 and ending on the following June 30.

A student who is “school age” may enroll in an educational program. According to the School Act, a student is “school age” if they have reached five (5) years of age on the first day of a school year or if they will reach five (5) years of age on or before December 31 of that school year.

A student remains “school age” until the school year in which they reach the age of 19 years. If a student turns 19 on July 1 or later, they are eligible to enroll in school the following September.

A student must be offered a full-time educational program during the year in which they turn 19. This is not an “extra year” of education but is a year in which a student remains eligible to attend. The Ministry of Education continues to provide funding to the school board for a special needs student’s program at the same level as they have in all previous educational years. It may be helpful if the focus of a final year of education is more community and transition focused than previous years.

The Ministry of Education Manual of School Law which includes the School Act can be accessed at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/.



SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS ORDER

Authority: *School Act*, sections 75 and 168 (2) (t)

Ministerial Order 150/89 (M150/89).....	Effective September 1, 1989
Amended by M397/95.....	Effective September 1, 1995
Amended by M32/04.....	Effective February 18, 2004
Orders of the Minister of Education	

Interpretation

1. In this order "student with special needs" means a student who has a disability of an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional or behavioral nature, has a learning disability or has exceptional gifts or talents.

[en. M397/95]

Students with special needs

2. (1) A board must ensure that an principal, vice principal or director of instruction offers to consult with a parent of a student with special needs regarding the placement of that student in an educational program.

(2) A board must provide a student with special needs with an educational program in a classroom where that student is integrated with other students who do not have special needs, unless the educational needs of the student with special needs or other students indicate that the educational program for the student with special needs should be provided otherwise.

[en. M397/95; am. M32/04]

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR SCHOOLS ORDER

Authority: *School Act*, sections 88 (1) and 168 (2) (t)

Ministerial Order 149/89 (M149/89)..... Effective September 1, 1989
Order of the Minister of Education

Community health nurses in schools

1. Every board shall
 - (a) equip and maintain a room that can be used as a medical room in each school within the district, and
 - (b) make that medical room available to the community health nurse assigned to the school during scheduled and special visits.

Auditory systems

2. (1) Each board is responsible for referring any of its students who are hearing impaired to the Ministry of Health for a needs assessment to determine if the student requires auditory training equipment for classroom use.
 - (2) On request of a board, the minister shall loan to the board auditory training equipment for each student who has been assessed under subsection (1) as needing the equipment.
 - (3) The minister is responsible for routine maintenance of auditory training equipment loaned to a board.

Speech and language services

3. A board of a school district shall provide speech and language therapy services for students of school age who attend a school in the district and whose education is adversely affected by oral communication difficulties.

Medical assessment

4. A board shall refer for medical assessment and subsequent referral for occupational or physiotherapy consultation any students who have ongoing physical conditions or disabilities serious enough to cause interference with the attainment of the goals of education.

Specialized health services

5. (1) If complex health procedures are carried out in schools, the board shall ensure that staff designated to carry out these procedures have been trained, and are supervised, by appropriate health professionals.
 - (2) For purposes of subsection (1) complex health procedures include but are not limited to, gastrostomy care and tube feeding, administration of oxygen, catheterization and suctioning.
 - (3) School staff trained to carry out health procedures for a specific student shall not perform those procedures on other students.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR SCHOOLS ORDER

Duty to report

6. On or before June 30, every superintendent of schools for a school district shall notify the school medical officer for the school district of the name and location of each school in the district and the projected enrollment for each school in the following school year.

INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN ORDER

Authority: *School Act*, section 168 (2) (a)

Ministerial Order 638/95 (M638/95)..... Effective December 19, 1995
Amended by M319/96..... Effective August 21, 1996
Amended by M011/98..... Effective January 21, 1998
Amended by M19/00..... Effective January 26, 2000
Orders of the Minister of Education

Interpretation

1. In this order,

"educational program guide" means a document specified as an educational program guide in Ministerial Order 333/99, the Educational Program Guide Order;

"IEP" means an individual education plan designed for a student and includes one or more of the following:

- (a) learning outcomes for a course, subject and grade that are different from or in addition to the expected learning outcomes for a course, or subject and grade set out in the applicable educational program guide for that course, subject and grade, as the case may be;
- (b) a list of support services required for the student to achieve the learning outcomes established for the student;
- (c) a list of the adapted materials, or instructional or assessment methods required by the student to meet the learning outcomes established for the student in the IEP, pursuant to a ministerial order or in a local program,

"student with special needs" means a student with special needs, as defined in Ministerial Order 150/89, the Special Needs Students Order.

[am. M319/96; am. M19/00]

IEP for students with special needs

2. (1) A board must ensure that an IEP is designed for a student with special needs, as soon as practical after the student is so identified by the board.

(2) Subsection (1) does not apply where

- (a) the student with special needs requires no adaptation or only minor adaptations to educational materials, or instructional or assessment methods,
- (b) the expected learning outcomes established by the applicable educational program guide have not been modified for the student with special needs, and
- (c) the student with special needs requires in a school year, 25 hours or less remedial instruction, by a person other than the classroom teacher, in order for the student to meet the expected learning outcomes referred to in paragraph (b).

[am. M011/98]

3. **REPEALED.** [M319/96]

INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN ORDER

Review and consultation

4. Where a board is required to provide an IEP for a student under this order, the board
 - (a) must ensure that the IEP is reviewed at least once each school year following the year the IEP is developed and, where necessary, it is revised, or cancelled, and
 - (b) must offer a parent of the student, and where appropriate, the student the opportunity to be consulted about the preparation of an IEP.

[am. M319/96]

Implementation of an IEP

5. Where a board is required to provide an IEP for a student under this order, the board must offer each student learning activities in accordance with the IEP designed for that student.

[am. M319/96]

Glossary

For a more extensive glossary of special education terms, see the Teaching to Diversity website of the BC Teacher's Federation at www.bctf.ca/teachingtodiversity/glossary.html.

Quick Acronym Reference List

ACL — Association for Community Living

ASD — Autism Spectrum Disorder

INCLUSION BC — Inclusion BC

BCBA — Board Certified Behaviour Analyst

BP — Behaviour Plan

IEP — Individual Education Plan

FSI — Family Support Institute

MAPS — Making Action Plans

OT — Occupational Therapy

PATH — Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope

PISP — Provincial Integration Support Program

POPARD — Provincial Outreach Program for Autism and Related Disorders

PRPS — Provincial Resource Programs

PT — Physical Therapy

SET BC — Special Education Technology – BC

SLD — Severe Learning Disability

SLP — Speech and Language Pathologist

ADAPTATIONS (OR ADAPTED) — changes to a student’s program of instruction that enable them to succeed in the provincial curriculum. These changes don’t affect the learning outcomes or the standards of assessment in the subject area. Adaptations may include changes to the physical environment, different teaching strategies, different materials, or different evaluation methods.

ADMINISTRATIVE FAIRNESS — a set of principles that applies to government-appointed bodies that interpret or apply the law, such as tribunals and administrative appeal boards. Administrative fairness means that when you appear before such decision-making body, you have the right to the following:

- to be treated with respect and dignity
- to speak on your own behalf or to have an advocate speak for or with you
- to be heard
- to participate in decisions that affect you
- to get clear, complete, and appropriate reasons for a decision
- to obtain all information that led to an initial decision or is being considered in an appeal
- to an impartial review of a decision that affects you — a review that is accessible, flexible, and timely
- to an appeal procedure that has a built-in mechanism to protect against retribution

ASSESSMENT — a systematic process of gathering information, designed to identify a student’s strengths and needs. This process should result in the identification and implementation of appropriate educational strategies. Assessments may be formal, informal, standardized, or measured in reference to typical students (“norm-referenced”).

CASE MANAGER — coordinates a student’s educational program. Generally, this is the person who creates the written copy of the IEP and monitors its progress.

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS — Under the Special Needs Student Order, a student with special needs may have a disability of an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional or behavioural nature, a learning disability or exceptional gifts or talents. In Inclusion BC's education policy, children with special needs means children who require extra support for their physical, intellectual, emotional, communicative, behavioural, or social development.

CHILD CARE — in relation to Inclusion BC education policy, child care includes registered and licensed child care.

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES — a lifelong condition that means a person grows and develops differently and more slowly than others. People with a developmental disability may have difficulty learning and processing information, understanding abstract concepts, or adapting to some of the demands of daily life. Disabilities vary greatly between individuals and may or may not be accompanied by other physical conditions.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS — in Inclusion BC's education policy, early childhood education programs include registered or licensed child care and pre-school programs.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION — means ensuring that all students are educated with their peers, have equitable access to learning and achievement, and are welcomed, valued, and supported in the public school system. Inclusive education promotes participation, friendship, and interaction.

INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN (IEP) — is an individualized plan for a student that includes learning goals, support services required by the student and a description of any of the adapted materials, instructional or assessment methods required by the student to attain the learning goals.

IEP TEAM — a team appointed by the school-based team to plan an IEP for a student. In some schools this may be the same members as the school-based team. It may include the classroom teacher, teaching assistants, learning assistants, and resource teachers and may include other community or district specialists. Ideally, the team should include parents and, where appropriate, students. Usually, a case manager coordinates and records the IEP and monitors its progress.

INTEGRATION — the strategy or process to achieve inclusion: placing students with special needs into regular classrooms and providing the required supports to enable these students to learn in classrooms with a same-age peer group. This doesn't mean they must have the same learning outcomes or goals, but they must have the same learning environment.

MAPS — stands for Making Action Plans, previously McGill Action Planning System, a person-centered planning tool. See Chapter 4.

MAINSTREAMING — term used during the early period of moving away from segregated education. It refers to placing special needs students in regular classes with their typical peers. Replaced by the term integration.

MICROBOARDS — operate as small non-profit societies that offer customized supports and services to the one person they support. See Vela Microboard Association in Chapter 5 – Organizations.

MODIFICATIONS (OR MODIFIED) — changes to a student's learning outcomes that are significantly different from those typical for a subject. Modifications reflect the needs of an individual student and get incorporated into an IEP.

PARENT — includes:

- the guardian of the student or child,
- the person legally entitled to custody of the student or child, or
- the person who usually has the care of the student or child.

PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL (PAC) — a parent group at the school level, designated by legislation to advise on matters relevant to the school. PACs are intended to represent the collective view of parents of children in the school. As a result of recent changes to the School Act, PACs are now responsible for electing parent representatives to school planning councils. They also work with school principals to promote effective communication between the school, the parent community, and school planning councils. Each district also has a District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC).

PATH — stands for Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope, a person-centred planning tool. See Chapter 4.

PROVINCIAL INTEGRATION SUPPORT PROGRAM (PISP) — an outreach service that assists BC schools in meeting the educational needs of students with multiple/severe disabilities. (See Chapter 3 for details, and Chapter 5 for contact information.)

PROVINCIAL OUTREACH PROGRAM FOR AUTISM AND RELATED DISORDERS (POPARD) — an outreach service accessible in all school districts. A team of specialists who provide training, workshops, and consultation. (See Chapter 5.)

PROVINCIAL RESOURCE PROGRAMS (PRPS) — PRPs provide supplemental resources and assist districts to meet the extraordinary special educational needs of students. These programs provide specific services for students with special needs throughout the province, either on an outreach basis or at a provincial centre. Examples include SET BC, POPARD, and PISP.

SCHOOL AGE — A student between the ages of 5 (by December 31 of the current calendar year) and 19 (on or after July 1 of the current school year). Defined in the BC School Act (see Chapter 6).

SCHOOL-BASED TEAM — a collaborative, consultative body that assists classroom teachers and helps plan for special needs students (see Chapter 2).

SCHOOL PLANNING COUNCIL (SPC) — a legislated advisory body. Its major responsibility is to consult the school community in developing and reviewing school plans for student achievement. Each SPC has members including:

- the school principal
- one teacher
- three parents (elected from the parent advisory council)
- one student from Grade 10, 11, 12 where applicable

SELF ADVOCATE — People with developmental disabilities who are speaking up for their own rights call themselves self advocates.

SEVERE LEARNING DISABILITY (SLD) — a learning disability that occurs frequently among students (“high incidence”), for which the Ministry of Education no longer provides funding. Accessing support services for this kind of disability has become difficult. See Chapter 4 for a recent human rights ruling addressing this group of learners.

SPECIAL EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY – BC (SET BC) — a provincial resource program that assists schools by supporting educational programs through the use of technology. These services are primarily available to students with a physical disability and/or visual impairment (see Chapter 5).

SUPPORTED CHILD DEVELOPMENT — a Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) program that provides consulting and support services to children with special needs in regular child care settings.

THERAPY SERVICES — includes speech therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, nursing support, behavioural intervention, and any other specialized therapy required by the student.

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