



From the

Ministry of Education Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines

Policy Directions

Meeting the Educational Needs of All Children

British Columbians want an education system which reflects their belief that all students are unique, all students are to be valued, and all students can learn. Based on this belief, and the growing recognition that we cannot afford, either socially or economically, to leave untapped the potential of anyone, British Columbia has been moving toward an inclusive education system in which students with special needs are fully participating members of a community of learners.

It is this vision of what British Columbians want for our schools that is reflected in the policy for special education. This policy framework, and the guidelines which support it, provide some practical planning and delivery tools to assist in making this vision a reality.

Students with special needs have disabilities of an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional or behavioural nature, or have a learning disability or have exceptional gifts or talents.

This diversity poses both challenges and opportunities for students, parents and teachers. It demands that we examine what we do and how we do it, in a way that is in the best interests of all students in our schools. For this reason, this document establishes an overall framework for the provision of special education programs and services in the province. It combines aspects of changes to the government's public education policy introduced in September, 1994, with the work of a Special Education Advisory Committee established in 1993 to provide advice to the Ministry of Education during a review of special education programs.

Goals for Education

The primary goal of the British Columbia school system is to support the intellectual development of students, with the support of families and the community. Enabling students to achieve the goals of human and social development and career development is a responsibility shared by schools, families and the community. These goals apply to all students, including students with special needs.

To help realize these goals for students with special needs, the education system in British Columbia is working toward removing barriers and providing appropriate services and programs to ensure that the school system is:

- equitable;
- of high quality;
- relevant;
- accessible; and
- accountable.

Creating an Equitable Education System

The School Act requires that school boards make available educational programs to all school age persons resident in the district. This entitlement stands as an important inclusionary statement for all students. In addition, a Ministerial Order requires the integration of students with special needs with students who do not have special needs in most instances.

Inclusion and Integration

The principle of inclusion adopted in British Columbia schools supports equitable access to learning by all students and the opportunity for all students to pursue their goals 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.

Integration is one way to achieve inclusion. Integration encourages students with special needs to participate and interact fully with other students in neighbourhood schools and to develop friendships. Integration involves placing students with special needs in classrooms with their age and grade peers, then providing them with the necessary support, accommodations and adaptations-determined on an individual basis-to enable them to be successful.

However, this does not mean that students with special needs must spend 100 per cent of every day in neighbourhood school class placements with their age and grade peers. The goal is to meet their educational needs and the educational needs of all students. The emphasis on educating students with special needs in neighbourhood school classrooms with their age and grade peers does not preclude the appropriate use of resource rooms, self-contained classes, community-based training or other specialized settings.

Alternatives to the Integrated Classroom

Students with special needs should only be placed in settings other than a neighbourhood school classroom with age and grade peers when the school board has made all reasonable efforts to integrate the student, and it is clear that a combination of education in such classes and supplementary support cannot meet their educational or social needs, or when there is clear evidence that partial or full placement in another setting is the only option after considering their educational needs or the educational needs of others. Evidence could include frequent and significant disruption of the learning environment despite appropriate classroom interventions, or the probability of physical harm to the student or others.

If alternatives to neighbourhood school classes with their age and grade peers are necessary for the above reasons for some students with special needs, then placement in alternate settings should be done as part of a plan that is regularly reviewed and updated in consultation with parents and school-based

teams (if applicable) with a view to returning these students to neighbourhood school classrooms as soon as it is feasible.

Planning Appropriate Educational Programs

Integrated Planning

Some students with special needs may require programs and services not usually provided to other students. Schools and school districts should organize themselves to provide educational programs and services to students with special needs. This includes planning with other ministries and community agencies where necessary. Many of the services required to support students with special needs are available through community-based agencies or other ministries through inter-ministerial protocol agreements, which are described in the Inter-Ministerial Protocols for the Provision of Support services to Schools.

When school district size or location make it impossible to provide the range of services needed, schools boards should plan collaboratively with other districts.

At the school level, teachers whose classrooms include students with special needs should have timely access to support. All schools should have formal problem-solving units, such as school-based teams, to plan and co-ordinate available support services for these students and to assist teachers in developing effective strategies.

School-based teams are composed of a small group of regular members. They may appoint members to oversee planning activities for individual students.

Identification and Assessment

Early identification is an essential first step in successful program planning for students with special needs. Ideally, identification begins before children enter school, when parents and health or other community personnel identify the students' special needs and begin planning to meet those needs. In such instances, schools should make use of available information by incorporating it into educational planning activities.

Students whose special needs are less readily evident are often not identified until they enter the school system. Thorough assessment of students' strengths and needs is essential for developing Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Assessment practices should be designed to ensure timely identification by personnel trained in the assessment of specific special needs, recognizing that this may require more careful planning in remote, rural areas.

Planning educational programs for students with special needs should begin in neighbourhood school classrooms, where classroom teachers, in consultation with parents, assess children by comparing their performance with expected learning outcomes for their age or grade. In many cases, students will have their special needs met by classroom teachers with no additional assistance.

However, when classroom teachers - in consultation, whenever possible, with parents and the school-based team or the school administration - believe that students require more intensive individual assessment of how they learn and the best ways to teach them, such assessment takes place at the school level using expertise within the school-based team.

More specialized assessment is required for a few learners whose special needs are more complex. At this level, specialized personnel appropriately trained to carry out more complex assessments (for

example, school psychologists) should be available to support schools in the assessment and planning process.

Where assessments indicate that students need additional assistance, such assistance will be planned based on both the careful assessment of those needs and the availability of resources. While it is sometimes difficult to obtain access to specialized assessment, the Ministry of Education can assist districts in identifying resources.

Individual Education Plans

School personnel, after collaboration with parents and outside agencies, are responsible for establishing goals for children that take into account the children's special needs and strengths. The results of planning are documented in Individual Education Plans. Students identified as having special needs must have IEPs unless:

- the student with special needs requires minor adaptations to educational materials, or instructional or assessment methods;
- the expected learning outcomes established by the applicable educational program guide have not been modified for the student with special needs; and
- the student with special needs is receiving, in a school year, 15 hours or less remedial instruction, by a person other than the classroom teacher in order for the student to meet the expected learning outcomes.

The IEPs should be implemented, reviewed and updated at least annually.

IEPs:

- Are written records of planning conducted by students, parents/guardians, school personnel and other service providers.
- Provide coherent, short-term and long-range plans for student learning and service needs.
- Provide administrators with evidence of individualized planning.
- Are useful tools in planning the transition of students with special needs from one setting to another.
- Help in determining how well students are meeting their goals, and form the basis of reporting students' progress.

Though planning occurs collaboratively, principals should ensure that all students with special needs are assigned case managers to co-ordinate the development, documentation and implementation of their IEPs.

Teachers and parents should be partners in their development for IEPs to be effective. Parents must be given the opportunity to participate in the planning process. To the extent that they are able, students should also participate. All of the participants who develop the plans should have access to them, within the provisions of the School Act and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

IEPs must outline:

- the present levels of educational performance of the student;
- the learning outcomes set for that student for that school year where the learning outcomes are different from the learning outcomes set out in the applicable educational program guide;
- all the required adaptations to educational materials, and instructional and assessment methods;
- all the support services to be provided;
- a description of the place where the educational program is to be provided;
- the names of all personnel who will be providing the educational program and the support services for the student during the school year; and
- the period of time and process for review of the IEP.

Education is a Shared Responsibility

Students

Students are entitled to consult with their teacher or administrative officer concerning their educational program. For students with special needs, this may involve participating in the development of their IEPs. In addition, students are expected to participate in an educational program provided by the school board. To the extent to which they are able, it is expected that students with special needs will participate fully in these programs.

Parents

Parents play a vital role in the education of their children with special needs by working in partnership with educators and other service personnel. They help to identify and inform school personnel of their children's special needs, and also participate in developing IEPs. Parents participate in planning activities to establish goals for their children, as well as help teachers to implement strategies to meet those goals. Engaging in these activities enables parents and teachers to communicate about children's progress and helps to fulfill children's educational goals.

Teachers must maintain the ability to manage their classrooms while respecting the advice and role of parents. If disagreements occur, they may be resolved through a review of the IEPs to determine how classroom activities can best relate to the goals established in the IEPs. As is currently practised, every attempt should be made to resolve differences at the school or district level. Additionally, under the School Act, all districts are required to have appeal processes.

Teachers and Other Service Providers

Neighbourhood school classroom teachers and teacher assistants should be the first line of support for students with special needs. Under the School Act, teachers are responsible for designing, supervising and assessing education programs and providing instruction to individual students and groups of students. As well as working with other service providers, teachers provide a vital service by being one of the first steps in identifying students with special needs and referring students for further assessment, planning to meet those needs in conjunction with parents and others, implementing students' IEPs, and reporting on the effectiveness of special education programs as well as student progress.

Principals

As the Principal responsible for the overall operation of the school, the principal plays a number of important functions in the education of students with special needs. These include being available to consult with students or their parents/guardians concerning the students' educational programs; ensuring that individualized programming occurs for students with special needs, and that the programs are implemented; overseeing the placement of students; and, ensuring that parents/guardians are regularly provided with reports concerning their children's school progress.

Principals may also help plan for the assessment of students' needs, and arrange for appropriate inservice training in special education to provide opportunities for school staff to acquire valuable knowledge and skills. In doing this, and also by participating in reviews of special education programs at their schools, principals help to meet the needs of students with special needs and ensure the provision of appropriate special education services.

School Districts

School boards are responsible for ensuring that, within available resources, special education programs and services are delivered to students who in the opinion of the board require them. Such programs and services are an integral part of the total school system. In some cases, collaborative planning between or among school districts may be necessary to ensure that necessary services are available.

The Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education provides funding for special education programs and services, and works with school boards to achieve the goal of an education system that provides students with opportunities for a quality education in a cost-effective manner. To ensure opportunities for students with special needs, the curriculum, learning resources, and assessment practices developed by the ministry should be appropriately adapted. All ministry policies must ensure equitable access, appropriately high standards, and accountability for the programs and services provided to students with special needs.

Within the ministry, the Special Education Branch:

- sets standards;
- assists in developing and implementing policies;
- develops guidelines and procedures;
- monitors trends in research and practice;
- reviews and evaluates programs and services;
- manages an array of provincial services for students with special needs;
- supports professional development; and
- participates in long-term planning and priority-setting for special education in British Columbia.

Other Ministries and Agencies

Many services for students with special needs are provided by community-based agencies or other ministries. A spectrum of support services - including child care workers, school nurses and other

specialists - is available through arrangements with the Ministries of Health, Social services and other ministries.

Access to an Appropriate Education

Accessibility

All students should have equitable access to learning, opportunities for achievement, and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their education.

The B.C. education system encourages students to get the most from their school experiences by providing the opportunities and support they need to learn. New education facilities and transportation systems should be free of physical barriers which may hinder some students. This includes new schools designed for better access and, wherever possible, the elimination of barriers in existing facilities. Existing buildings are made more accessible through an on-going program of capital improvements funded by the ministry.

A Continuum of Services

Services should be organized along a continuum which reflects the diversity of special needs and the prevalence levels of various special needs in the school population. To the maximum extent possible, students with special needs are integrated into classrooms with other students and will have their needs met by classroom teachers who adapt instruction and evaluation methods as necessary. This may involve support from school-based resource teachers, itinerant teachers, or other specialists such as orientation and mobility instructors. The emphasis on educating students with special needs in neighbourhood school classrooms with their age and grade peers, however, does not preclude the appropriate use of resource rooms, self-contained classes, community-based programs, or specialized settings.

A small number of students requires specialized services that are only available from community or regional agencies or at the provincial level. When required services are so specialized that they cannot be replicated in every school, they should be available at the district level, or else school districts should arrange to obtain them from community or other sources.

It is the policy of the ministry to provide provincial programs to support school districts where needs are highly specialized. These include Provincial Resource Programs, as designated under the School Act, (such as education programs for children in hospitals, treatment centres, and containment and attendance centres), the Special Education Technology-British Columbia (SET-BC) Program, the Provincial Centre for the Visually Impaired, and other provincial programs designated by the minister.

In addition, the ministry provides:

- a link to the Special Education Branch and other schools and districts;
- resource documents and videos that provide specific descriptions of best practice in Special Education service delivery.

Training and Professional Standards

To provide an appropriate educational program for and work effectively with students with special needs, teachers, teacher assistants and administrators need an understanding of special education. The Ministry

of Education is working with universities and colleges to ensure that appropriate training and experiences are available.

In order to provide adequate educational support for students with special needs, school districts should provide inservice training to ensure that all staff can develop the skills and understanding needed to work in an inclusive environment. School districts should have a systematic training plan for all staff to ensure that staff remain current in their knowledge and understanding of special education. The Ministry of Education will continue to support school districts with inservice training through the provision of funds specifically for staff development. Teachers and other professionals should also upgrade their own knowledge.

The ministry will continue working with professional organizations to set standards for specialists working in the educational system such as speech language pathologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, sign language interpreters, and orientation and mobility instructors. School districts having difficulty in accessing the services of specialists should contact the Ministry of Education, Special Education Branch, for information and assistance.

Quality Programs and Resources

K-12 Education and Special Education

The Kindergarten to Grade 12 education policy describes, among other things, both the educational programs and expectations for student performance. To succeed in the K-12 program, some students may require adaptations in methodology, materials or assessment techniques, or modifications or enhancements of programs, or compensatory skill development. With appropriate support, most students with special needs will be successful in the K-12 program.

Although the government's new Kindergarten to Grade 12 educational program affects all students, some aspects are of particular importance to students with special needs. These include:

- new standards for reporting student achievement;
- new reporting requirements for students who accomplish the goals established in their IEPs in those instances when curriculum outcomes are modified; and
- an equivalency policy that enables students to receive credit for learning acquired outside of the classroom.

K-12 program policies include dual credit, course challenge and equivalency. These options may be particularly appropriate for students with exceptional gifts or talents. Students can utilize these policies to demonstrate previously acquired learning, receive credit for learning acquired outside of the classroom, and receive school credit for post-secondary classes in specialized fields of study. In addition, exceptionally gifted students may be provided with options such as independent guided study, mentorships, or expanding and/or accelerating some or all of their educational programs.

Curricula

Provincial curricula are written keeping all students in mind, with the understanding that there will be varied levels of pace and achievement. IEPs define what goals and standards students are expected to achieve, and what supports, adaptations, or modifications are required to enable them to meet those

goals. Students with special educational needs are expected to achieve some, most, or all provincial curriculum outcomes with special support.

Standards

Standards for all students, including students with special needs, are developed with high but appropriate expectations for student achievement. Whether students with special needs are expected to meet grade or course standards described in provincial curricula and reference sets - perhaps with appropriate adaptations to classroom materials or evaluation methods - or require individually-set outcomes and standards as part of the IEP planning process, the goals and standards for the students should be at high but attainable levels. For gifted students, goals established in IEPs will often exceed the grade or age level.

Learning Resources

The ministry selects a range of learning resources with all students in mind. Teachers then select appropriate resources to meet the needs of their particular students. As well, Braille and taped-book format versions of selected resources are available. IEPs identify those resources which best support the learning needs of children. In addition, technological supports that are required to fulfil IEP goals - such as Brailers, adapted keyboards, and special hearing devices - are available from the Auditory Training Equipment program, the Provincial Centre for the Visually Impaired, and the Special Education Technology-British Columbia (SET-BC) Program.

Funding

The levels of funding currently provided to support special education represent a significant investment in children with special needs. The government has increased accountability by targeting the expenditure of special education funds and will continue to audit school districts to ensure that funding dedicated to special education is spent on special education, and it will continue to expect school districts to be accountable for expenditures in special education. The best way to ensure accountability and quality of service to students, however, is to put into place a comprehensive policy and monitor compliance to it.

The ministry recognizes concerns with the existing method of determining funding for special education and is committed to developing a system which addresses the issue of labelling and encourages access and efficiency.

The Government of British Columbia shows on-going support for an inclusive education system through resources to support students with special needs. This includes funding to provide services to students with special needs, including:

- funding for students with severe behavioural difficulties;
- specialists such as speech-language pathologists, school psychologists, and itinerant specialists;
- school-based learning assistance that supports regular classroom instruction;
- resource rooms;
- special outside-of-school options including hospital and home-based services;
- teacher assistant support; and
- a wide range of provincial programs and services.

Greater Accountability

The education system is truly accountable when parents know how well their children are doing in school, and when the public knows how well the education system is doing. Accountability includes monitoring, auditing and program review. Although collecting information about services provided to students with special needs is essential for continuous improvement to practice, this may raise concerns about labelling of students. It is important to ensure that data collection systems are designed and implemented to influence best practice and to minimize any detrimental effects of labelling individuals.

The ministry is expanding its ability to review and improve services to students. In addition to auditing special education program enrolments to ensure that students with special needs receive appropriate special education services, each school is periodically reviewed through the accreditation process. The ministry is committed to strengthening this process to ensure effective delivery of special education services, to undertake district-level special education program reviews, and to expand the information it collects to monitor and improve special education programs.

Student Progress Reports

Like all parents, the parents of students with special needs have a right to regular information about their children's progress. For students with special needs who are expected to achieve or surpass the learning standards set out in the provincial curriculum, regular letter-grading and reporting procedures will be followed, although adapted assessment methods may be necessary.

Ministerial Order 191/94, Student Progress Report Order, sets out the requirements for student progress reports. Where it is determined that students with special needs are not capable of achieving the learning outcomes set out in the provincial curriculum and course or program modification is necessary, specific individual goals and objectives will be established for the students in their IEPs. The use of letter grades and percentages for reporting the progress of these students is not appropriate. Structured written comments will be used to report the level of the students' success in achieving their modified goals and objectives. In these circumstances, when students meet the learning outcomes as reflected in their IEPs, the efforts of these students should be recognized.

Where specialist support personnel other than classroom teachers are responsible for providing some portion of students' educational programs (for example, speech-language pathologists, orientation and mobility instructors), those persons should provide written reports on the students' progress for inclusion with the reports of the classroom teachers.

Appeals

Currently, students or their parents/guardians may appeal, under section 11 of the School Act, to the school board decisions made by school board employees that significantly affect the education, health or safety of the students.

All school boards are required to establish appeal procedures. The ministry expects that the appeal procedures will be based on principles of administrative fairness, which include the right of students and parents/guardians:

- to be heard by the school board;
- to be consulted in decisions affecting them; and
- to an impartial school board decision based on relevant information.

Since 1992, the Ombudsman has been able to investigate complaints concerning public schools and school boards.

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<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/pandp/policy>