



# ONTARIO ASSOCIATION FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH COMMUNICATION DISORDERS

## O.A.F.C.C.D. NEWSLETTER

November 2006

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### ***Ontario Trillium Foundation Supports OAFCCD Parents As Partners Program***

The Board of the Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders is very excited to announce that the Ontario Trillium Foundation has announced that they will provide \$121,300 to expand the OAFCCD *Parents As Partners* program to more communities across the province.

The OAFCCD *Parents As Partner* program was developed in Oxford County and York Region to provide support to families of children with special needs that were transitioning into elementary school. Over the next 18 months the program will be expanded into the following communities:

- Brant County & Haldimand - Norfolk
- Cochrane & Nipissing – Timiskaming
- Durham Region
- Eastern Ontario & Rideau Valley
- Haliburton, Kawartha, Peterborough & Pine Ridge
- Halton Region & Peel Region
- Kent County & Lambton County
- Ottawa-Carleton & Renfrew County
- Thunder Bay
- Toronto
- Waterloo & Wellington-Dufferin

The OAFCCD *Parents As Partners* program assists families with the transition from early years intervention programs, such as but not limited to the Preschool Speech and Language and Infant Hearing program, to the school system. The program, uses a collaborative approach, working with school boards and community agencies to deliver workshops and information resources to parents.

Project facilitators will work with SEAC reps and community partners to customize resources and workshops. The Facilitators will also deliver the

workshop series and train local staff and volunteers to deliver future workshops and provide the resources to families. The OAFCCD *Parent as Partners* workshops cover the following topics:

1. Getting Ready for School: Planning for Kindergarten
2. Strategies for Effective Partnerships: Communicating for Success
3. The Kindergarten Program: Supporting Students with Special Needs
4. Introduction to Special Education
5. Introduction to the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Developing Effective Individual Education Plans

The Ontario Trillium Foundation funding will support the development of an OAFCCD *Parents as Partners* website that will list workshop locations and dates, and provide information resources for parents. This will be linked to the OAFCCD website and should be on-line early in the new year.

Effective transitions into school require preparation and planning and may take several years. Ideally, parents should be thinking about transition in the fall before their child will start school.

Most children will attend Junior and Senior Kindergarten before starting Grade 1 and transition planning will continue through-out this time as the child leaves preschool programs and starts to access school programs and services. The OAFCCD *Parents as Partners* program supports families through this process and helps them to prepare for positive relationships with school and community partners that will last to the end of High School.

OAFCCD is pleased to be presenting this valuable service and thank the Ontario Trillium Foundation for their support.



# Transforming Special Education

In June 2006, the Minister of Education released the report: **Special Education Transformation, the Report of the Co-Chairs with the Recommendations of the Working Table on Special Education**. This document proposes changes to the way special education is funded as well as changes to improve the administration of special education and improve student outcomes. OAFCCD welcomes many of these improvements.

One of the most significant recommendations concerns the relative roles of the Identification and Placement Review Committee (IPRC) and the Individual Education Plan (IEP). The report suggests that students with special needs who are placed in a regular classroom will no longer need an IPRC.

Regulation 474/98 clearly outlines the process for the IPRC, parent participation and appeals. There are no changes in this Regulation and parents will continue to have the right to request an IPRC, and an IPRC is recommended for students who will be in special class placements.

The proposed change recognizes that the IEP is the most important document in describing the student's strengths and needs; the accommodations and program modifications to be provided; and the teaching and assessment strategies that will be used. The IEP is reviewed in each school term and is linked to the Report Card. A well written IEP, that is implemented and regularly reviewed, can be a great support for student success. Unfortunately, there are still many misconceptions about the IEP and inconsistencies in who has an IEP and how well it is implemented in the classroom.

OAFCCD supports the direction of the transformation of special education but cautions against rapid change, and supports the need for clear communication and professional development for school administration, teachers, students and families.

OAFCCD has identified three key elements that are critical for the effective design and implementation of an IEP that will support student success. They are:

- Parent Participation
- Timely and relevant student assessments
- Dispute resolution mechanisms

## Parent Participation:

The **Individual Education Plan (IEP), A Resource Guide, 2004** clearly identifies the importance of parent involvement and participation in the development and monitoring of the IEP. Unfortunately, parents and school staff are often confused about the parent role. Some parents are not sure what is expected of them and school staff are sometimes unaware of what they can do to support parent involvement.

Parents should be invited to all planning meetings, and if they can't attend, should be asked for their input. Parents should be informed about the purpose of the IEP, the process for developing and implementing the IEP and how the student's progress will be monitored and evaluated.

Parents need to be knowledgeable about their child's strengths and needs and the school program. Parents will get some of this information from their interaction with the child at home and in the community. Parents should also ask the classroom teacher and other school staff about the education system, the curriculum and the student's performance at school. Parents can get additional information about their child's disability, the school system and effective intervention strategies from community agencies, professionals involved with their child and parent associations, such as OAFCCD.

Effective parent involvement is supported by:

- on-going home and school communication
- a welcoming school atmosphere
- meetings that are focussed and documented
- clear action plans and accountability.

## Student Assessments:

An effective IEP requires accurate, relevant and up to date information about the student strengths and needs. This information can be obtained from direct observation by the parent and school staff, review of student performance and professional assessments.

Student testing or assessments requires parent agreement and support. Parents should be informed of the purpose and type of assessments that are required

may be asked to provide verbal or written consent. Communication about the value and use of the test results is critical.

Decisions about assessments and discussion of results provide a further opportunity for parent education and relationship building. Well informed parents are a valuable support to students and school staff.

Student program accommodations and modifications, and the teaching and assessment strategies should be based on the result of student assessments and evidence of the intervention effectiveness.

### **Dispute Resolution Process:**

There is currently no formal dispute resolution process for IEPs. Regulation 474/98 clearly describes the requirement that each student with an IPRC should have an IEP, and outlines the appeal process for decisions about student identification and placement. However, parents do not have a similar right to appeal if they are dissatisfied with the content or the implementation of the IEP. Currently, when parents are asked to sign the IEP, the signature merely confirms that the parent was consulted in the development of the IEP.

If a parent is concerned about the IEP they should start by discussing their concerns with the classroom teacher and the Principal. If they are still unsatisfied concerns can be taken to the next level of administration. Most teachers, Principals and administrators want to resolve any problems as quickly as possible and will usually be able to do so.

The Special Education Transformation report identifies the need for better dispute resolution processes and it is vital that a process for resolving disputes about IEPs is developed. OAFCCD believes that an easy to use dispute resolution mechanism for IPRCs and IEPs is critical, and should be developed as soon as possible.

OAFCCD continues to recommend students with communication disorders should be formally identified as exceptional through the IPRC process. An IPRC protects the rights of the parent to appeal decisions of identification and placement, ensures that the student has an IEP and documents the legal obligation of the school board to meet the needs of the student.

## **Special Education Resources**

### **Ministry of Education:**

The ministry publishes policy documents and resource documents to assist parents and school staff in providing appropriate special education programs and services to students with special needs and to inform them of ministry policies in this area. Useful references and Documents discussed in this newsletter are noted.

For a better understanding of the parent role in the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) get a copy of *Regulation 181/98 Identification and Placement of Exceptional Pupils*. This is available on the ministry Website and may be available through the school board website.

To help parents understand the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and the roles of parents, the Ministry of Education developed *The Individual Education Plan (IEP), A Resource Guide, 2004*. This guide provides information on the IEP development process, content and monitoring.

The complete *Special Education Transformation, Report of the Co-Chairs with the Recommendations of the Working Table on Special Education* is also available on the Ministry Website.

The Ministry of Education website is at: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca>

### **School Board:**

School boards are required to develop and distribute a *Parent Guide* with information on the IPRC process and special education. Ask your school Principal for a copy of the Parent Guide or check the school board website.

School boards also produce an **Annual Special Education Plan** that should be available through your school or on the school board website.

Each school board has a Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) with parent volunteers who may be able to assist you in learning more about special education. Information on SEAC members should be available on the school board website.

## ***SEAC Reps Wanted!***

Parent Associations, such as the Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communication Disorders (OAFCCD), are able to nominate volunteers to the Special Education Advisory Committees (SEAC) of each school board in the province. OAFCCD is seeking parent volunteers who are interested in representing children with communication disorders on SEAC in many parts of the province.

SEAC volunteers must be over 18 years old, Canadian Citizens, who are resident tax payers to the school board and not employed by the school board.

Each SEAC must meet 10 times a year, usually monthly from September to June. SEAC reps need to have some knowledge of the special education system and the needs of children with communication disorders. SEAC reps are supported by OAFCCD with regular e-mailed updates and other resources.

OAFCCD is able to nominate a SEAC rep and an Alternate representative to each school board. If you are interested in finding out more about SEAC positions, please call Alison Mores at (519)842-9506 or e-mail [abmorse@kwic.com](mailto:abmorse@kwic.com).

OAFCCD can nominate parent volunteers to any board in the province, however, the following boards have written and requested that OAFCCD nominate a representative:

Conseil Scolaire de District Catholique  
des Aurores boreales  
Toronto Catholic DSB  
Thames Valley DSB  
Upper Canada DSB  
York Catholic DSB

OAFCCD would like to thank several of our dynamic volunteers who are stepping down from their role as SEAC reps. A big thank you to Carleana Dekelver and Susan Seymour (Thames Valley DSB), Judy Brignell (Ottawa-Carleton) and Karen Curtis (Halton).

## ***OAFCCD Honours Susan Menary***

The Ontario Association for Families of Children with Communications Disorders (OAFCCD) is pleased to recognize the outstanding volunteer contribution made by Susan Menary. Susan is the Chief of Speech-Language Pathology and Autism Services at the Toronto Catholic District School Board.

At the OAFCCD Annual General meeting in June, Susan was presented with the **George Shield Volunteer Award**. This award was given to Susan in recognition of her work as an advocate for speech and language services for children. Susan has served on the Board of Directors of OAFCCD, and as a professional representative on the Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE) and on many government advisory committees.

Susan is a member of the Minister's Autism Spectrum Disorders Reference Group that was recently appointed by the Minister of Education and the ministry of Children and Youth Services to provide strategic advice on autism services.

Thank you Susan for your work with OAFCCD and for your on-going work to help children with communication disorders.

### **Retirement Celebration Benefits OAFCCD**

Heather Shoniker retired at the end of the school year from the Toronto District School Board after 32 years of teaching. To celebrate her retirement friends, family and colleagues were invited to a social evening and requested to make donations to OAFCCD. The party resulted in over one thousand dollars in donations for OAFCCD!

Thank you Heather and best wishes for a happy and healthy retirement.