

TIPS for Parents When Dealing with School Personnel

As another school year begins you, as a parent, can feel overwhelmed. To assist in making this year a positive one, here are 12 tips for parents when dealing with school staff.

1. **BE PREPARED.** Review your child's school records and request a copy for your file at home.
2. **KEEP ORGANIZED.** Your home records should include school records, reports, assessments, copies of letters you have written to the school and copies of correspondence and /or reports from other professionals
3. **FOLLOW UP** any telephone calls with a short summary letter or email. **EXAMPLE:** "It is my understanding from our recent phone conversation on Sept 00, 2007 that points 1, 2 and 6 will be implemented on or before my child's first report card
4. **TAKE NOTES** at meetings or while talking with school personnel over the phone. Make sure you get the person's name/title, and write a brief summary of what was said and by whom.
5. **GET YOUR FACTS STRAIGHT** Deal **ONLY** with the facts.
6. **BE THOROUGH** in your suggestions to school staff. Know exactly what you want and why. It may help to make a list of your concerns suggestions and evidence so you can cover all points in an organized manner.
7. **REQUEST COPIES** of the minutes or reports for any school meeting that involves your child.
8. **NETWORK** to find another parent who may be experiencing a similar situation. Other parents can be a wealth of information and advice.
9. **BE REALISTIC** about your expectations and requests. Demanding is not negotiating.
10. **BE PREPARED** for the best and worst. Come in with alternatives and options.
11. **TAKE SOMEONE** with you if you have a tendency to lose your temper or feel you can no longer deal rationally with school personnel. This person may also speak for you
12. **STAY POSITIVE!** Remember, it is important to be positive and commend professionals when progress is made.

Parents as Partners Update



The OAFCCD Parents as Partners transition to school program continues to expand into new communities. A schedule of parent workshops is available on the new website at: www.parents-as-partners.ca

A key approach of the Parents as Partners program is working with the community agencies and school boards to identify the community needs. Based on the identified needs, OAFCCD Parents as Partners resources are made available through the Website, staff training or parent workshops. The goal is to help community partners and school boards improve transition planning and create a successful transition for children and families.

Thanks to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for funding the Website and OAFCCD Parents As Partners Program.



Support OAFCCD Pay Your Annual Membership Fees Or Make a donation to OAFCCD

Have you paid your Annual Membership Fees? A renewal Form has been enclosed with this Newsletter if you have not paid in 2007.

Are you thinking about making a charitable donation for the holiday season or year end? You can donate to OAFCCD using the Membership renewal form and sending a cheque, or you can make donations through Canada Helps. Donations by credit cards can be made online through the Canada Helps donation link on the OAFCCD Website at www.oafccd.com.

Tax receipts will be provided for all donations.



Directions in Special Education September 2007

**Information provided by Bruce Drewett,
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Goals for Special Education

- Improve outcomes for students receiving special education
- Increased capacity of school to effectively meet the needs of a variety of learners in settings ranging from regular to self contained classrooms.
- Programming in IEP that is connected to the Ontario Curriculum and the Provincial Report Card
- More cooperative connections between schools and families of students facing learning challenges; promoting a positive environment
- Improved balance between a focus on teaching and learning and the need for appropriate process documentation and accountability

More Money in Special Education through Targeted Investments

Special Education Funding

2007/08 Special Education grant is to increase by \$79 million to a provincial total of over \$2.07 billion of which \$25 million will provide stable funding levels for boards who are experiencing declining enrollment, and to support growth in the number of claims for the highest needs students. An additional \$20 million to improve support for teacher's assistants. Also a benchmark increase to the salary components of the Special Education Grant (SEG) to reflect increases in staff costs.

Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE)

The ministry has provided \$3 million to CODE for 2007/08 projects. Boards will be expected to continue addressing the sustainability of new approaches to teaching and learning demonstrated through the projects.

Ontario Psychological Associations (OPA)

The Ministry of Education provided \$20 million to OPA in 2006/07 to work with school boards to reduce current waiting times for students who require assessments and to enhance the capacity of teachers to provide effective programs for students. The focus is on students in JK to Grade 4 that require differentiated learning experiences. School boards are determining their students' assessment needs which may include psychological, speech and language and social needs.

What does this mean to parents?

Improved Outcomes:

The Ministry of Education is providing funding to school boards to improve the capacity of school staff, including classroom teachers, to meet the needs of students with special educational needs. This includes Professional Development on how to assess achievement for students who may be working on modified or alternative programs.

Improved Individual Education Plans:

The Ministry is encouraging school boards to make it clear on the Individual Education Plan what the student's needs are and how the education program and services will address those needs. The IEP should show what strategies will be used in the classroom and how the student's progress will be assessed. Parent must be consulted in the development of the IEP and it is your job to make sure you meet with school staff, or talk on the phone, to provide input on your child's educational strengths and needs and share information that may help your child at school.

In addition, it should be clear to the parent how the IEP links to the Report Card. Parents should look at the IEP and the Report Card at the same time to see what the student was to learn, and how the student's results were to be measured. This should make it easier to know where your child is being successful and where there are problems that may need to be addressed at the next IEP Review.

More Parent Involvement:

The Ministry of Education through the Parent Engagement Office has provided school councils and regional/provincial organizations funding to promote parent engagement in the school.

OAFCCD was fortunate to get a grant to organize Parent Workshops in York Region and Upper Canada. Two Newsletters with parent tips and resources were provided to over 3000 families, and, the parent workshops were attended by 127 parents or caregivers. Parents who attended reported that they felt more knowledgeable about the IEP and more comfortable in talking to school staff about their concerns.

Many of the school council projects promoted parent involvement in school activities and created opportunities for parents to meet staff during fun social activities. It is important to make the time to be involved at school as research has shown that parent involvement in school increases student achievement. So the next time a flyer comes home inviting you to attend a school concert, or help with a fund raiser, try to find the time. Your child will be the one to benefit!

Did You Know?

In 2005/06 school year a total of 290,725 students are receiving special education programs and services. There were 191,902 students (91,501 secondary) identified as "exceptional" by the school board Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC's).

Streamlined Administrative Processes:

There has been some confusion about whether the Ministry of Education is advocating for a move away from the IPRC process. The Ministry of Education has made clear that a school Principal must respond to parent requests for an IPRC as laid out in Regulation 181/98. In addition, the IPRC process should be used when the Placement decision may involve a placement other than regular classroom.

The main purpose of the Ministry asking school boards to review their IPRC processes, is to ensure

that the main focus is on the student's educational program. Where resources including staff time, are limited, it is critical that families and school staff work together to develop and implement an IEP that supports the child in the classroom. This may mean that when there is no change in the student's Identification or Placement being considered, the parent may be asked to waive their right to an IPRC Review. The waiver only applies for one year, and there will be another opportunity to Review the IPRC decisions in the following year.

Remember that while the IPRC process is important, the IEP is more important in terms of determining the educational programs and services that will be used to support the student in the classroom. Parents who spend time helping to develop and review the IEP will be making a valuable contribution to their child's education.

Shared Solutions

A Guide to Preventing and Resolving Conflicts Regarding Programs and Services for Students with Special Education Needs

This new resource guide is intended to help parents, educators, and students with special education needs work together to prevent conflicts, resolve them quickly, and allow students to develop their full potential and succeed in school. The approaches outlined build on techniques and strategies for conflict prevention and resolution that are already in place in many school boards. The Resource Guide is available on the Ministry of Education Website at:

www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/

Tips for Reaching a Shared Solution

1. Listen actively and intently.
2. Acknowledge the other party's feelings.
3. Acknowledge the validity of the other party's feelings.
4. Apologize if it seems appropriate to do so.
5. Use humour.
6. Change the timing of a meeting or take a break.
7. Use "yes...and" instead of "Yes...but"
8. Ask questions that elicit a "yes" response.
9. Change language from "you" to "us"
10. Agree on a shared, mutually acceptable solution.

Source: Shared Solutions, A Guide to Preventing and Resolving Conflicts Regarding Programs and Services for Students with Special Education Needs (2007) Appendix B: Shared Solutions on the Go



NOISY CLASSROOMS HURTING STUDENTS

The ability to hear and understand the words of the teacher is an essential first step toward understanding the message!

A newly released (2007) study has revealed that many classrooms have poor quality acoustics and that children are not always working in optimal classroom listening conditions. Because children primarily learn through listening, noisy classrooms can have serious effects on a child's ability to learn. Classroom acoustics are controllable by taking steps to reduce noise and reverberation. Parents must be aware of the potential effects of noisy classrooms on learning and help ensure that steps are taken to maximize their child's education. Teachers must be aware of the impact of poor classroom acoustics on their vocal health.

CASLPA held a press conference on Parliament Hill on October 1, 2007 to address these important issues.

Audiologists and speech language pathologists are concerned with proper acoustics and background noise in the classroom which can interfere with a child's academic development.

One in six words is not understood by the average Grade 1 student due to excessive background noise and poor acoustics in Canadian classrooms. (Bradley 2005)

- In order for speech to be understood, there must be an adequate speech-to-noise ratio meaning that the speech must be that much louder than the noise to be understood.
- Less than 10% of Canadian Grade 1 classrooms tested had an ideal Speech-to-Noise ratio. This means that 90% of our Grade 1 students are not hearing all of their teacher's words. (Bradley, 2005)
- Outside noise sources include vehicles, airplanes and voices in the playground. Inside sources of noise include equipment, such as computers, projectors, fish tanks, reverberation (the echo) of sound within the room due to hard surfaces such as uncarpeted floors, neighbouring classrooms, hallways, gyms, music rooms, ventilation and heating systems and classroom lighting systems, that emit a 'buzzing' noise.

- Young children, whose auditory centers are not fully developed in the brain, require better signal quality than adults to understand speech well. They do not have the language knowledge or life experience to "fill in the blanks" when they don't hear a word or only part of a word.
- Grade 1 children require a speech-to-noise ratio of 15.5 dB in order to achieve 95% speech intelligibility.
- Noise is measured by determining the sound levels in decibels. As a point of reference, average conversational speech is about 60 dB. The average unoccupied classroom background noise level measures around 50 dB. Add to that, the noise level of students in the class, around 10 dB, and you now have a noise level of 60 dB.
- It is critical to understand that when difficult listening conditions persist for some time, some children will "turn off" and stop trying to understand the words. Many of the children who are not hearing adequately become academically deficient in at least one subject by the 6th grade.



Tips to Improve Classroom Acoustics

- Make x-slits in hypo-allergenic tennis balls or other commercial products and place on the legs of chairs and tables in classrooms with no carpeting
- Add hypo-allergenic carpeting and curtains to classrooms
- Consider Soundfield amplification systems
- Replace ballasts from noisy fluorescent lights
- Fix loose or vibrating parts on heating and ventilation systems
- Move free-standing furnishings to break up sound reflections and isolate areas in large rooms
- Use suspended acoustic ceiling tiles, sound absorbent panels on upper walls
- Add cork boards to walls.

Source: CASLPA website, www.caslpa.ca

Reference: Bradley, John, Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network Study: Does the Classroom Assist or Impede the Learning Process, 2005.