

## Section Five

### Speech and Language in Junior and Intermediate Grades 4 to 8

The ability to read and write is strongly influenced by the ability to understand and use language. Students who are good listeners and speakers tend to become strong readers and writers. Language has a major role in all subjects including reading, math, history, geography and even art and physical education. Once children with language impairments 'learn to read' they may also struggle with 'reading to learn.' The student is expected to comprehend abstract concepts, make inferences, interpret what is heard or read, problem solve and ask questions.

The early school years emphasize language development, social-emotional growth and readiness skills. The middle grades emphasize specific subjects and reading to learn. Mastery of language is assumed and emphasis is placed on written skills, including abstract, complex, and inferred meanings. The language content of the curriculum may become more difficult for the student. New vocabulary, including specialized vocabulary for science and math, will constantly be introduced. The sentence structure will become more complex and students will be exposed to words with double meanings (for example, 'rock' could mean a type of music, a boulder, or type of movement) and figurative language (for example, 'That went right over his head').

Students need to know how to determine meaning by considering context and inference. For example, if someone says, 'The golfer kicked the ball', the reader may infer that the golfer was angry but if we add, 'The golfer's ball landed in a sand trap. He noticed that the cameras were not on him so he kicked the ball' the reader will infer that the golfer was cheating.

As the learning expectations increase, students with language impairments may have difficulty with understanding and completing assignments, with tests and exams, and with following the course content. As a result, the student may stop paying attention, act out in the classroom and receive failing marks. The student is at high risk for failure and for eventually dropping out of school. Parent support continues to be very important in helping children to be successful in school.

#### 5.1 How are Students with Speech and Language Impairments Supported in Grades 4 to 8?

Speech and language services and supports vary across school boards in the province and may include:

- Differentiated instruction strategies used by the classroom teacher
- Assessment/consultation by the Speech-Language Pathologist
- Accommodations or modifications to the learning program through the development of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) process (see Section 7)
- Providing an alternative program
- Special class placement
- Referral by the Speech-Language Pathologist to outside agencies for further intervention (e.g., CCAC for those with speech impairments; a registered ADP clinic for augmentative/alternative devices).

### *OAFCCD Parent Tip*

*Find out about the process used by the school board to support students with speech and/or language impairments from the school board Special Education Plan, available from the Principal or on the school board website. Consult with your child's classroom teacher about the resources and strategies that are appropriate for your child.*

## **5.2 Self Advocacy**

For many students with language impairments, reading and writing are likely to present lifelong challenges. Students who learn to advocate for themselves are more likely to receive assistance for developing literacy skills, and be successful at school and later in life. Family and professionals can work collaboratively in teaching self advocacy strategies to the student. Although self-advocacy activities need to be geared to appropriate developmental levels, strategies to become self advocates should be part of all intervention programs and intensified for adolescents.

Strategies might include helping the student to:

- Understand their learning profile, their learning strengths and the strategies that help them manage their areas of need.
- Request assistance in the classroom and talk to the teacher about what supports they need.
- Participate in educational planning, including the IEP process, to advocate for personal goals, required services, and program and course selection.
- Focus on strengths during career exploration, while keeping options open.

For a student with speech and/or language difficulties, developing self advocacy skills can be very challenging. The student may need to learn how to get an adult's attention, how to hold a conversation and how to explain his/her needs. The student may need to be taught these specific skills and have opportunities to practice successfully. It is very important to work with the school to identify quick and simple ways for your child to ask for help. As your teen matures, different strategies may be needed to reflect the greater number of adults involved, and adult expectations of behaviour and communication.

### *OAFCCD Parent Tip*

*Ask about including self-advocacy skills in your child's Individual Education Plan (IEP). You can identify it as a need and the school can work with you to identify strategies to help the student develop the necessary skills.*

## **5.3 Transition from Elementary School to High School**

Speech and language impairments in adolescents can take a different form and may be less obvious. The services and supports needed in high school may be different from elementary school and it is important to work with staff at both the elementary and secondary school in developing a successful transition plan.



It is helpful to include the student in the planning and preparation for high school. Some students find change very hard, and will need opportunities to visit the school and become familiar with its location and layout. Students at secondary schools are expected to be more independent and it is important that the student can express their needs and ask for help.

Peer relationships become more important at the high school level and many students want to avoid being different or getting special treatment. It is, therefore, important that the student is comfortable being a self-advocate and that he/she understands the importance of getting the help required.

### *OAFCCD Parent Tip*

*Many school boards have developed 'Transition Planning Guides' to help staff and families prepare for the transition to high school. Ask your school for a copy of any transition resources and for details about how they will support your child's transition to high school.*

#### **The resources needed to develop a successful transition may include the following:**

- Documentation of student strengths and needs (usually in an IEP)
- Recent report cards and assessment results
- Information on support services and programs provided to students in elementary school
- List of key staff to be involved in transition planning from elementary to secondary school
- Information on available high school placements and programs

For some students the transition plan may be started more than a year before the planned move to high school. The amount of time needed will vary, but generally the higher the student's needs, the more time that will be required to organize the transition.

#### **Issues to consider as you plan for high school may include:**

- School Environment - Physical attributes such as size, layout and accessibility
- School Transportation - Criteria for bussing, pick up location, supervision
- Program and Service Supports - Computer availability, audio enhancement system, resource room for students who need extra help and quiet rooms for independent study

The transition plan should include a time line and indicate who is responsible for action. For example, if you wish to tour a new school, who will arrange the tour and when will it happen?

### *OAFCCD Parent Tip*

*Most schools encourage all students to become independent through the use of agendas (school schedule or calendar books). A parent can help by encouraging their child to bring the agenda home each day, make notes in it and review them at home. Children should be encouraged to write down special events, notes and reminders of what they may want to ask a teacher or a friend. The independent use of an agenda is a key strategy for independence and success in high school, so now is the time to start! It is also something that all students use, and at this age, students want to be like their peers.*

It has been recognized that success in Grade 9 is critical to graduation and many high schools have developed student support programs that identify at risk students even before they start high school. Successful practices may include working with elementary schools to develop transition plans for all students, matching students with peer or adult mentors at the high school, and other strategies that monitor student progress and provide intervention as early as possible.

### *OAFCCD Parent Tip*

*As part of the planning for the transition to high school, parents can find out what programs are offered and about the different options available. Before high school begins, parents may attend any open house or information sessions about high school. If your child has been struggling in elementary school, it is helpful that you understand the opportunities available in high school and supports that will be available for your child. Ask for a meeting with staff at the high school who are responsible for special education or learning or resource support. Encourage your child to visit the school during planned events. For some students, extra visits to the school can be part of the transition plan to make them more comfortable with the change of settings. This can be arranged through the special education department.*

### **Additional Sources of Information:**

**Oral Language Foundation for Learning**, (2009) Ministry of Education and Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (OSLA)

**Helping Your Child Do Mathematics - A Guide for Parents Kindergarten to Grade 6**, Ministry of Education (2007)

**Helping Your Child With Reading and Writing - A Guide for Parents Kindergarten to Grade 6** Ministry of Education (2007)

**Bullying: We Can All Help Stop It**, Parent Brochure, (2009) Ministry of Education

**Literacy for Learning: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy in Grades 4 to 6 in Ontario** (2004) Ministry of Education

**Me Read? No Way? A Practical Guide to Improving Boys' Literacy Skills** (2004) Ministry of Education

**Guide for Accommodations, A Special Provision and Exemptions, Support for Students with Special Education Needs and English-Language Learners** (2008) Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)

**Think Literacy Success Grades 7 to 12, The Report of the Expert Panel on Students at Risk in Ontario** (2003) Ministry of Education

**Supporting Student Success In Literacy Grades 7 to 12, Effective Practices of Ontario School Boards** (2004) Ministry of Education

**Think Literacy: Pathways for Success**, Final Report of the Program Pathways for Students at Risk Work Group (2003)

**Making Ontario's Schools Safer What Parents Need to Know** Brochure (2009) Ministry of Education