

# **Part C.**

# **Program Planning**

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# INTRODUCTION

All students, including exceptional pupils, in schools across Ontario “require consistent, challenging programs that will capture their interest and prepare them for a lifetime of learning. They require knowledge and skills that will help them compete in a global economy and allow them to lead lives of integrity and satisfaction, both as citizens and as individuals.”<sup>1</sup>

This section of the guide outlines the steps normally taken to ensure effective program planning for students who require special education programs and services.

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1. Ontario, Ministry of Education and Training, *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8: Language* (Toronto: Ministry of Education and Training, Ontario, 1997), p. 3.

# PRESCHOOL IDENTIFICATION

Often, early identification of children with special needs is done by agencies of other ministries – perhaps through a daycare program or a public health or medical clinic – before the child enters school. A number of current initiatives are designed to facilitate such early identification and the provision of appropriate services. These include:

- the program "Healthy Babies, Healthy Children", a prevention/early intervention initiative designed to encourage healthy baby and child development. A joint project of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ministry of Community and Social Services under the direction of the Integrated Services for Children Division, "Healthy Babies, Healthy Children" is intended to augment and strengthen existing community services for families and children;
- the Preschool Speech and Language Initiative, which began in 1996 and is administered by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Thirty-two regional service delivery programs exist for providers of speech and language services for children, from birth to entry into Senior Kindergarten. Services include public awareness/prevention, early identification, assessment, and a full range of treatment options, from parent training to one-on-one or group therapy with a speech-language pathologist. A transition-to-school plan is provided for every child who has been receiving speech and language services and will require ongoing support once in school;
- the Intensive Early Intervention Program for Children with Autism, which is administered by the Ministry of Community and Social Services and provides intensive behavioural intervention services to children aged 5 and under and their families, and assistance in accessing the range of other services that may also be needed. Children who are not identified until they are 5 or 6 years old are eligible for twelve months in the program if, based on an assessment, these services would help their transition to school. Each child will have his or her own transition-to-school plan.

Where early identification of a child with special needs has been made and preschool services are being provided, services may need to continue when the child is enrolled in a school to ensure a smooth transition to school. For example, providers of speech and language services to a preschool child may need to continue their involvement with the child when he or she enters school. To ensure that this step is successful, schools should have in place a good transition protocol. The question of the continuation of existing support may be considered when the parents first discuss their child's enrolment with the principal.<sup>2</sup> Parents and community resource persons should be encouraged to contact the principal at an early stage prior to enrolment, in order to give him or her time to consult with appropriate board personnel about resources and programming.

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2. See Ministry of Education and Training, Ontario, "Interministerial Guidelines for the Provision of Speech and Language Services" (Toronto: Ministry of Education and Training, Ontario, 1988), p. 1.

# ENROLLING A CHILD WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

**Education is the shared responsibility of the principal, classroom and special education teachers, support staff, parents, and student. Ongoing communication and close cooperation among these partners is particularly important for success in helping the student to achieve.**

All children, including those with special needs, have the right to attend school at the beginning of the school year following registration. (For further information, refer to Part A, page A11 of this guide, "Enrol All Pupils Who Have the Right to Attend".)

Parents and school board personnel should work together to ensure that the necessary supports are in place to provide a successful school-entry experience for the child. Through the early identification process there should be a planned transition. This planned transition to school will help to prepare for the child's future success. Such a process might include:

- identifying persons who have worked with the child in the past and those who will play a role in supporting the child in the new school environment;
- identifying the support staff who will continue to work with school board staff to ensure a successful transition to school (e.g., Community Care Access Centre staff);
- establishing the appropriate program, supports, and services to meet the student's needs once in school.

Once a child with special needs has been registered, the school and parents should continue the process of collecting and reviewing information related to the child's needs and should maintain regular communication about the student's progress. Early documentation will be useful in establishing records against which to measure future achievement.

Some children may need individualized or modified programs or assessment methods to achieve the Kindergarten expectations to the best of their ability. It is the responsibility of the teachers and other school board staff to meet the needs of children in the Kindergarten years, making modifications where necessary for children who are having difficulty as well as for those who need more challenging learning experiences. In addition to their own observations and the information provided by parents, teachers can use the information available through the early identification process to determine individual children's level of development, learning abilities, and needs. This identification procedure is part of an ongoing assessment process that boards are required to initiate when a child first enters school.

# EARLY AND ONGOING IDENTIFICATION

The early identification of the learning abilities and needs of students has been a long-time priority in Ontario schools. See the Education Act, clause 8(3)(a) and Policy/Program Memorandum No. 11, 1982, "Early Identification of Children's Learning Needs".

Policy/Program Memorandum No. 11 requires school boards to identify all students' strengths and needs when they are first enrolled and to reassess them on a regular basis. Although these procedures are not strictly considered to be part of special education, children identified may receive a variety of support services. Documentation of these support services and monitoring of ongoing school progress should be an integral part of any later recommendations for special education assistance, since the identification of a student's needs is crucial to the provision of special education programs and special education services.

Early identification may serve to:

- establish a clear understanding of any visual, hearing, or other medical conditions that may affect learning;
- identify students who may face academic, cognitive, motor, or social challenges, so that interventions or more in-depth assessments can be initiated;
- identify students who are not developing speech and language skills within normal ranges, so that remediation or treatment can be initiated;
- enable school teams to plan proactively to provide experiences and programs that will maximize students' strengths and meet any special needs they may have from the time they enter school.

A learning problem may be suspected on the basis of observable behaviours, health or medical issues, and current development levels. It is the combined responsibility of school personnel, other professionals, and parents to gather this information and share it so that appropriate programming and monitoring can be put in place at the school.

# THE IN-SCHOOL TEAM AND OTHER SUPPORT MEASURES

## **The In-School Team**

Establishing a student support team is an important first step in creating conditions that will enable a student who is experiencing difficulty to succeed in the learning environment. Many school boards have school-based "teams" that suggest teaching strategies to classroom teachers who have students with special needs and that recommend formal and informal assessments. School teams play a significant role in helping classroom teachers address difficulties that a student may be experiencing in the classroom prior to, and after, formal assessment and identification.

The school team is made up of people with various types of expertise who work together to:

- support the student, the parent, and each other;
- collaborate, consult, and share information and knowledge to identify strategies that may increase the student's learning success.

School boards do not have a legislated responsibility to establish an in-school team, but many boards find that such teams can provide interventions and support that effectively meet the student's needs.

There are no formal rules about the composition of the student support team. Teams are designed to suit the specific needs within the school, using the individual resources and skills of the school staff responding to local conditions. Formal guidelines for the team's membership, meeting times, and procedures for recording and reporting on its activities may be established.

In most schools, the core members of the team would include:

- the principal or vice-principal;
- the school special education resource teacher (if available);
- a guidance teacher-counsellor (especially at the secondary level), and possibly the teacher-adviser;
- the student's current teacher and/or the "referring" teacher.

The team may also include board staff and professionals in the community who have expertise with the various exceptionalities and in such areas as speech and language development, psychology, physical and occupational therapy, social work, curriculum modification, and ESL/ELD.

As circumstances require, the team may also seek assistance from outside resource people such as:

- parents and other family members;
- community associations/agencies;

**The collection, use, and disclosure of personal information must comply with the requirements of freedom of information legislation.**

- service providers from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (e.g., Community Care Access Centres, which coordinate service providers such as occupational therapists and hospital personnel);
- service providers from the Ministry of Community and Social Services (e.g., representatives from treatment centres).

The active involvement of parents enhances the effectiveness of the school team. Parents and students have important information to share with members of the school team and should be invited to meet with the team when necessary and appropriate. The support of parents has positive and pervasive effects on the child's success in school, and parents should be encouraged to feel that their contribution is a valuable part of the school-team process.

### **Stages in the In-School Team Process**

#### **Stage 1. Classroom Screening and Intervention**

Apart from the parent, the classroom teacher is usually the first person to recognize that a student is experiencing difficulty in learning. Generally, the teacher initiates the problem-solving process at the classroom level. The teacher should discuss the concerns with a previous teacher, review information in the student's Ontario Student Record (OSR), and make some initial program adjustments. The teacher should also contact the student's parents to discuss the matter and the planned program adjustments. During this process, the teacher is able to form his or her own judgements about the student's strengths and needs. The teacher and principal then determine what resources, support personnel, and strategies are available to meet those needs.

If the student continues to have difficulty, a referral is usually made to the in-school team. Ongoing communication with the parents can elicit valuable information about the student and is encouraged.

#### **Stage 2. Referral to the In-School Team**

At the request of the student's teacher or the principal, the in-school team will allocate time at a regularly scheduled team meeting for discussion of the student's problems with learning. Some school boards have a practice of notifying the parents prior to the meeting about the issues to be discussed. Problems may be academic (either underachievement or the need for enrichment), behavioural, social, or a combination of these, or may involve such things as poor attendance, medical issues, or a variety of other circumstances that are adversely affecting the student's learning.

In addition to regular members of the team and at the invitation of the team leader/chair, the team may include additional persons who have information or expertise to share. The selection of additional members depends on the needs of the student and the personnel resources available to the school team. Team members may include the teacher-adviser, teachers who work with the student, paraprofessionals who work with the student, and service providers from community agencies who may have relevant information to

share. Where a number of teachers are involved (as in secondary school), some information may be presented through reports collected from teachers. However, it is important for those most closely involved with the student to be present.

The meeting should be structured to establish a welcoming atmosphere and to ensure that all participants feel that their opinions are valued and respected. Attention to details such as choice of room, seating arrangements, and introductions can contribute to a productive meeting. (Refer to Appendix 4 for a sample agenda checklist.)

The referral to the in-school team may result in one or a combination of the following actions:

- a determination of the interventions or accommodations needed;
- program interventions in the regular class;
- the addition of specific supports in the classroom or the withdrawal of the student from the classroom for limited periods of time (e.g., for remediation or enrichment);
- referral to other specialized services, including itinerant hearing, vision, and/or speech and language services, psychological services, and social services or medical support;
- referral for assessment, which may or may not lead to an IPRC referral;
- ongoing monitoring leading to review after several weeks.

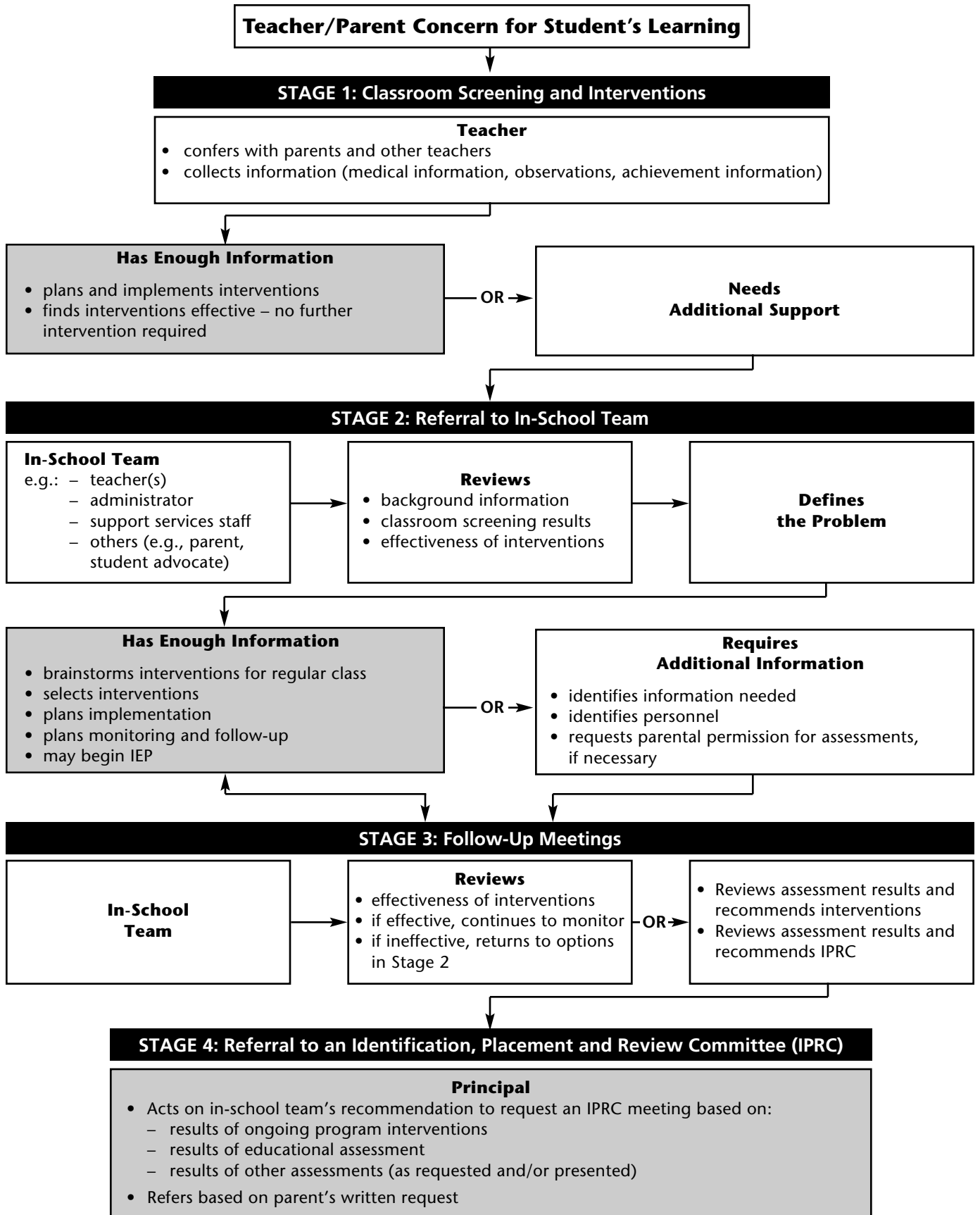
The overall goal of the program-planning process is to enable the student to learn successfully. Decisions about interventions and accommodations to the learning environment are best made at the in-school team meeting. The needs of the individual student, the resources available, and parent and student preferences must all be considered in determining the nature and extent of the interventions and accommodations recommended and provided. The in-school team uses the expertise of its members to make decisions about how to assist the student to achieve to the best of his or her ability. Follow-up monitoring permits the team to build on the student's success and to change the interventions that are not effective.

### **Stage 3. Follow-Up Meetings of the In-School Team**

A student's case may be discussed once or over several meetings of the in-school team, depending upon the student's ongoing or changing needs, the success of school-based problem-solving efforts, and the need for additional information from specialized services.

Usually, a referral is made to an IPRC only after the actions agreed to at the in-school team meeting(s) have been tried and found insufficient. (For further information regarding the school-team support process refer to Figure C.1.) In some cases, however, it may be obvious at the outset that the needs of a child will be best met through an IPRC.

Figure C.1: Stages of the In-School Team Process



#### **Stage 4. Referral to an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC)**

Referral to an IPRC is made by the school principal, usually following a recommendation from the in-school team. A principal must also make a referral on receipt of a written request by a parent.

The in-school team's recommendation is based on:

- the results of ongoing and continuous program interventions;
- an educational assessment;
- additional assessments as requested by the team. (For further information on assessment, refer to pages C16–20 of this guide.)

If a parent submits a written request for referral to an IPRC, the principal must arrange for an IPRC meeting to be set up. (For further information about the IPRC process, refer to Part D of this guide.)

# SCHOOL BOARD SUPPORTS

The following types of services may be provided by school board staff:

- educational services;
- other professional services (e.g., speech-language pathologist, psychologist, social worker);
- paraprofessional services (e.g., child/youth worker, developmental assistant).

## **Educational Services**

Educational services may be provided by resource teachers (including special education resource teachers, special education department heads, and itinerant teachers); guidance counsellors; teacher-advisers; school board resource teachers and consultants; and administrators.

## **School Special Education Resource Teachers**

A teacher who has concerns about the results of classroom observations and formal and informal assessments of a student may raise those concerns with the school resource teacher or through the in-school team. Many boards include a special education resource teacher in their staffing model for individual schools. When school boards do provide this support service, special education resource teachers have varied responsibilities, which may include:

- providing support in the regular classroom;
- coordinating referrals to the in-school team;
- assisting the regular classroom teacher in modifying the expectations and providing appropriate accommodations to meet the needs of students;
- conducting educational assessments and observations to identify students' strengths and needs;
- collaborating in the development, implementation, and review of the IEP;
- providing academic support on a withdrawal basis;
- assisting the regular classroom teacher in reporting achievement;
- acting as a liaison with parents and community resources;
- planning additional support with educational (instructional) assistants.

## **Guidance Counsellors**

The ministry document *Choices Into Action: Guidance and Career Education Program Policy for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, 1999* outlines what schools in Ontario are expected to do to help students in Grades 1 to 12 prepare for their adult and working life. It describes some issues exceptional pupils may encounter and the role of the guidance counsellor in helping to meet students' needs.

The guidance counsellor:

- helps to correlate the Individual Education Plan (IEP) (including the transition plan) and the annual education plan (starting in Grade 7) for exceptional students;
- works collaboratively with regular classroom teachers and special education teachers to plan ways of meeting the needs of exceptional pupils;
- establishes and maintains links between elementary and secondary schools and with community partners to coordinate their involvement with the guidance and career education program;
- assists students with the transition to postsecondary education, training, and the workplace.

### **Teacher-Advisers**

The teacher-adviser's role is to help students, including exceptional pupils, to make the transition from elementary to secondary school and to assist them and their parents in making decisions about secondary school courses and future goals. The teacher-adviser program is provided for all students in Grades 7 to 12.

The teacher-adviser:

- helps students to complete and review their annual education plans (AEPs);
- monitors students' academic progress and their progress towards achieving their goals, as outlined in their AEPs;
- helps students to consider their Individual Education Plans in developing their annual education plans;
- encourages students to develop the skills they need to set goals, investigate educational and career opportunities, and monitor their own progress.

If a student needs additional assistance in order to succeed in secondary school or in developing short-term or long-term goals, the teacher-adviser will refer him or her to a guidance counsellor and/or other appropriate staff.

### **School Board Resource Teachers and Consultants**

Some school boards have centrally assigned resource teachers, including itinerant teachers and/or consultants, who are available to assist teachers with assessment and program development and with putting appropriate accommodations in place.

Itinerant resource teachers who provide service to students who are deaf or hard of hearing or blind or who have low vision may also assist classroom teachers with program and classroom accommodations, such as preferential seating and lighting arrangements, and with assessments of students with special needs.

Resource personnel at the Provincial Schools and Demonstration Schools may be a valuable source of information about assessment and programming for teachers with students in their classrooms who are blind, deaf, or deaf-blind, or who have severe learning disabilities. (For further information, refer to Part F, pages F9-12.)

### **Other Professional Services**

The school may sometimes request the assistance of other professionals, such as psychologists, psychological associates, behavioural consultants, social workers, occupational therapists or physiotherapists, speech-language pathologists, and auditory-verbal therapists.

These professionals may assist the teacher and in-school team with:

- observing and interpreting student classroom behaviour;
- assessing students' strengths and needs;
- understanding assessment data and developing appropriate programs;
- providing ongoing direct intervention in the classroom for students in regular or special education settings;
- referring students to outside specialists and agencies when appropriate;
- recommending appropriate medical and community resources to families;
- recommending augmentative communication systems when appropriate.

Such professionals may also provide additional specific information to help identify a student's learning strengths and needs for an Identification, Placement and Review Committee.

Specially trained support services personnel for students who are blind, deaf, or deaf-blind include interpreters, interveners, orientation and mobility instructors, and transcribers. These personnel work with students who require support to develop their communication, academic, and/or vocational skills as fully as possible.

#### **Interpreters**

Interpreters are graduates of a college or university interpreter-training program, or the equivalent, who hold, or will obtain within three years, certification by the Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada. They are assigned to one or more deaf students for a portion of the time that the students are not receiving direct instruction from a specialist teacher of the deaf. The interpreter may be either an oral interpreter or a sign-language interpreter.

#### **Interveners**

Interveners are trained by a specialist teacher of the deaf-blind to communicate with deaf-blind students. They work with a deaf-blind student for the whole of the student's school day to deliver a program designed to meet the individual student's needs. The program is developed by the W. Ross Macdonald School or the Centre Jules-Léger, or by a specialist teacher

employed by the school board who designs the program in consultation with one or both of these schools. Interveners address the implications of combined vision and hearing loss when delivering the student's educational program and support the classroom teacher in delivering the education program.

### **Orientation and Mobility Instructors**

Orientation and mobility instructors hold certification to provide instruction in orientation and mobility to students who are legally blind and can benefit from this type of training. The instructor:

- assesses the needs, skill level, level of conceptual understanding, and competencies of the student;
- prepares an individualized program to meet the student's identified orientation and mobility needs;
- helps the student to develop basic pre-cane skills and sensory skills;
- helps the student to develop safe-travel skills, including:
  - cane techniques;
  - environmental awareness;
  - techniques for using specialized aids;
  - problem-solving skills.

### **Transcribers**

Transcribers may be hired by a school board to transcribe assignments from the classroom teacher and/or specialist teacher of the blind into Braille for the day-to-day educational use of the student.

### **Paraprofessional Services**

Some school boards hire paraprofessionals to work under the supervision of qualified professionals. Paraprofessionals may be hired as teaching assistants, child and youth workers, health care assistants, and so on, to provide a variety of services under the direction and supervision of the teacher and school principal. These services may include:

- assisting the student with personal care;
- providing behaviour-management support;
- providing support for instructional programming.

### **Volunteers**

With appropriate training and effective supervision, volunteers can also make an important contribution in supporting students with special needs. Volunteers take their instructions from, and are responsible to, the principal of the school.

## **Parents**

Responsibility for student learning is shared among the student, the parents, and the teacher. The interest and participation of parents can significantly enhance the student's motivation and ability to succeed. Parents are encouraged to request a meeting with school staff to discuss their child's progress.

The insights and observations of the parents may help the teacher to assess the student's educational skills and identify his or her interests. The student's insights into his or her own strengths and needs are often helpful, as well. Parents may already have had assessments completed by other professionals. Parents are encouraged to share such information with the in-school team, as it may be relevant to discussions about possible educational interventions to help the student.

# ASSESSING A STUDENT'S STRENGTHS AND NEEDS

All information gathered about a pupil must be carefully documented and stored in a secure place to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. School board policies regarding the implications of the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act must be followed.

## Teacher Observation and Data Gathering

Teachers observe the children in their classes every day. They often know when a child is learning or achieving differently from the rest of the class, even in the earliest grades. As soon as a teacher or a parent has a concern regarding a particular student's progress or behaviour, it is important to begin a data-gathering process. This information will be important should the teacher require the assistance of the in-school team.

Assessment is a continuous, complex process that is an integral part of teaching. It is something the teacher does every day, in a variety of informal and formal ways. An assessment provides information about:

- a student's achievement;
- the level of the student's understanding;
- the effectiveness of a particular teaching technique.

Data from this type of assessment are collected primarily for use in program planning. These data help teachers to improve student learning and develop programs appropriate to each student's strengths, interests, needs, and level of functioning. It is as important to identify a student's strengths as it is to determine needs. A teacher can use a student's interest in sports, or love of music, or visual memory to help the student overcome weaknesses or insecurities. For example, a student who loves baseball may find it easier to understand some mathematical concepts if they are presented as examples from baseball (e.g., batting averages).

When teachers observe students, they record many different aspects of a student's behaviour and achievement. In observing the student, teachers may watch for such things as:

- how the student responds to text and non-print alternatives, approaches new tasks, persists with tasks, interacts with others, organizes time and materials, uses language, performs individually and in group activities, and responds to cues (including auditory, visual, and direct and indirect verbal cues);
- how the student responds to the number of people in the immediate area and the behaviour of teachers and support staff, interacts with peers, and responds to authority;
- how the student's learning is affected by environmental variables such as lighting, sound, temperature, the physical arrangement of the classroom, the time of day, and routines and schedules.

Teachers can gain valuable additional information from parents and others who have worked with the student.

If the teacher requires assistance in programming to meet the student's needs, he or she may make a referral to the in-school team or request the support of other professionals. Referring a student for further assessment does not necessarily mean that the student has a special need but may simply indicate that there are areas in which the student might benefit from short-term assistance or in which the teacher might need further programming ideas.

### **Assessing Students for Whom English Is a Second Language**

Because so much depends on a student's fluency in the language of instruction, students who do not speak standard English at home may have difficulty with their work, routines, and social interaction at school. Caution is needed in determining the cause of the student's difficulty. Many school boards employ teachers who provide extra help in English as a second language (ESL) and English literacy development (ELD). Rates of language acquisition vary; for some students it can take considerably longer than for others. Students who are not fluent in standard English should be given English-language experience and support before they can be considered able to manage their schoolwork, routines, and social interaction on their own.

In assessing students for whom English is not a first language and who have possible exceptional needs, such as learning difficulties or gifted abilities, teachers should take the following factors into consideration:

- educational background (e.g., previous school experiences, attendance patterns, languages spoken);
- medical history (e.g., need for hearing or vision testing).

After taking these factors into account, observers may conclude that a student's problems are not due to lack of language fluency and that special education intervention is required.

### **Educational Assessment**

An educational assessment may consist of formal and informal testing. The assessment may include diagnostic and achievement tests that focus on specific areas of academic achievement. Where school staff are concerned about a student's achievement, the teacher should inform the student's parent before such assessments are undertaken. (Depending on the type of assessment, parental consent in writing may be required.)

An educational assessment is required by an IPRC in order to make a decision about identification of a pupil as exceptional or placement of a pupil in a special education program.

Achievement tests provide information about:

- a student's skills;
- a student's skills in comparison to his or her peers;
- the need for a change in the student's program.

Diagnostic tests give information about:

- a student's skills;
- a student's strengths and needs;
- specific areas in the student's program that require adjustment.

After an educational assessment has been completed, the information can be used to make an evaluation, which is a judgement based on the assessment data. **Results from province-wide testing alone should not be used as the basis for a referral to an IPRC.**

Other types of assessments may also be requested by and/or presented to the IPRC in order to assist with decision making. These may include speech and language, health, and psychological assessments. These are described in greater detail below. When such assessments are requested, informed consent must be obtained before the assessments can be done.

### **Speech and Language Assessment**

A speech and language assessment, also known as a communication assessment, is conducted by a speech-language pathologist and may be included as a part of the assessment package for a referral to an IPRC.

A speech and language assessment will:

- provide a professional opinion about the student's communicative ability;
- determine the existence and severity of a communication difficulty and how the difficulty interferes with the educational process;
- determine if communication programming would be appropriate;
- assist in determining an appropriate placement;
- provide screening for referral to an outside agency;
- determine whether a more in-depth assessment is necessary.

The person doing the assessment may:

- administer standardized tests;
- use non-standardized tests (e.g., informal measures such as observation);
- use curriculum/classroom-based procedures;
- confer with parents, outside agencies, and resource teams;
- review materials in the OSR;
- provide and/or obtain professional opinions;
- engage in preventive intervention, when appropriate;
- analyse, interpret, and synthesize information;
- prepare oral and written reports;
- communicate the results to parents and the in-school team.

## Health Assessment

A health assessment must be administered by a legally qualified medical practitioner (such as a family doctor) or a medical specialist (such as an audiologist or ophthalmologist). Consent must be obtained before an assessment is carried out.

## Psychological Assessment

Under the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, and the Psychology Act, 1991, psychological assessments must be conducted by a member of the College of Psychologists (a psychologist or a psychological associate). Most boards employ or have access to psychological services staff who can provide or supervise psychological assessments. When a psychological assessment is requested by either the IPRC or the principal, consent must be obtained before the assessment can be done.

A psychological assessment could include information from a number of sources, including the school staff, the student, and the student's parents, in order to understand the student's characteristics as a learner. Other information that may assist in the analysis includes the results from interviews, consultations, and individual psychological tests. A psychological assessment typically evaluates the student's functioning in the following areas:

- thinking and reasoning;
- perception;
- memory;
- attention;
- social/emotional development; and sometimes
- academic achievement.

A profile of learning strengths and needs is developed from this information and can then be used to guide the formulation of appropriate program adjustments for the learner. A diagnosis is provided where applicable.

**Only a registered psychologist or registered psychological associate can provide a diagnosis. When the IPRC identifies the student as exceptional and applies the ministry's definition to describe the exceptionality, it is not diagnosing a condition but merely indicating an educational category. The IPRC identification should not be interpreted as a diagnosis.**

## Health Care Consent

The Health Care Consent Act (HCCA), 1996, sets out the elements of a valid consent to treatment. These include the following:

- Consent must relate to the treatment.
- Consent must be informed.
- Consent must be given voluntarily.
- Consent must not be obtained through misrepresentation or fraud.

## **Assessment Information and Confidentiality**

School personnel involved in administering specialized assessments must do so in accordance with requirements for protecting confidentiality. For a discussion of legislation regarding confidentiality of information, see Part A, pages A30–32 of this guide.

In the case of certain specialized assessment information that is required to assist in the understanding of the student's profile, the raw data may be determined to be confidential information with restricted access. Several pieces of legislation, including the Copyright Act, the Regulated Health Professions Act (RHPA), and the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA), may limit access to test protocols from educational and psychological tests.

## **Release of Confidential Information**

When a parent obtains a psychological or health or speech and language assessment from an outside institution, agency, or practitioner, he or she may wish to provide this information to the school board. In order for the school board to obtain this information directly from the institution, agency, or practitioner, the parent must sign a consent permitting the institution to release the confidential information to the school. Different institutions may have their own specific forms regarding consent to release information.

When information is sought from an outside agency that falls within the definition of a psychiatric facility under the Mental Health Act, a Form 14 may be required to release this information. Parents need to be aware that the Form 14 will allow disclosure to the school board of the "clinical record" compiled in such a facility. **Because Form 14 was devised for this very specific purpose, it should not be used as a school board consent form for the release of a student's personal/educational information from the student's OSR.** School boards are often asked to release personal information about students, and the expectation is that they should design a form or forms suitable for their purposes. School board forms for consent to release personal information should specify the type of information to be released, to whom it will be released, and the length of time for which the consent is valid. (For examples of such forms, see Appendix 6.)

# PROGRAM PLANNING FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Recognizing the special needs of students and providing programs for them are important aspects of implementing the curriculum. For some students, the appropriate choice of instructional methods and settings will allow them to achieve the expectations. For others, some or all of the expectations will need to be modified. To achieve at their highest possible level, some exceptional pupils may need to participate in special programs.

Curriculum implementation for these students requires:

- careful and perceptive adaptation of courses and programs developed from curriculum guidelines;
- a constant awareness of standards and expectations;
- flexible organizational structures;
- selection of the strategies, resources, activities, and assessment procedures most appropriate to the student's needs;
- accommodation for individual differences;
- an Individual Education Plan (IEP).

For most exceptional pupils, the learning expectations will be the same as or similar to the expectations outlined in the relevant curriculum policy documents. Accommodations such as specialized supports and services may be provided to help the student achieve the expectations. For some exceptional pupils, the curriculum expectations will be modified to meet the student's needs, and a small number of students may require alternative expectations that are not derived from the curriculum expectations. In either case, accommodations to facilitate learning may also be provided. The assessment of student achievement of modified and alternative expectations is discussed in *Ontario Secondary Schools, Grades 9 to 12: Program and Diploma Requirements, 1999* and in *Individual Education Plans: Standards for Development, Program Planning, and Implementation, 2000*.

Steps should be taken by the special education staff to ensure that teachers know where to find information on meeting the needs of exceptional pupils in specific subject areas. In planning instruction and activities and developing course materials, teachers must take into account the strengths, needs, learning expectations, and accommodations identified in the student's IEP. Teachers may find it necessary to make changes in their style of presentation, their methods of organization, the amount and type of material covered, their use of technology and multimedia, and their assessment and evaluation strategies (for example, some students may need to be given additional time to complete tests or the opportunity to take tests orally or in other forms). The assistance of professional and paraprofessional staff and the use of specialized equipment may also be required to accommodate the exceptional pupil's needs.

For students who are receiving special education programs and services and who have an IEP:

- The IEP must identify the student's learning expectations. (Regulation 181/98, subsection 6[3]; *Ontario Secondary Schools, Grades 9 to 12* [OSS]; Ontario curriculum policy documents; and the IEP standards document)
- The IEP will outline how the school will address the student's learning expectations through an appropriate special education program and services and will identify the methods by which the student's progress will be reviewed. The IEPs of students with disabilities who are 14 years of age or older will also contain a plan to help them make the transition to postsecondary education, the workplace, or community living. (Regulation 181/98, subsection 6[4]; OSS; Ontario curriculum policy documents; and the IEP standards document)
- In developing the student's IEP, consideration shall be given to any recommendations made by the IPRC concerning special education programs and services for meeting the student's needs. Also, there shall be consultation with the parents and with the student who is 16 years of age or older. Once the IEP is developed, the parents and the student who is 16 years of age or older must be provided with a copy. (Regulation 181/98, subsections 6[6]–[8]; OSS; Ontario curriculum policy documents; and the IEP standards document)
- Exceptional pupils and students not identified as exceptional but who have an IEP and who are receiving special education programs and services should be given every opportunity to achieve the curriculum expectations set out in the Ontario curriculum policy documents. For most students with an IEP, the curriculum expectations for a course or subject will be the same as the course expectations outlined in the appropriate provincial curriculum document, except that accommodations such as supports or services will be provided to help the student achieve the expectations. Student achievement of these curriculum expectations will be assessed in accordance with the provincial achievement levels and with course-specific assessment information, as described in provincial curriculum policy documents. (OSS)
- For some students with an IEP, curriculum expectations may be modified – that is, they may be derived from the expectations outlined in the curriculum policy document for a grade level, or levels, above or below the student's age-appropriate grade level. At the secondary school level, the principal will determine whether achievement of the modified expectations will indicate successful completion of the course and will decide whether the student is eligible to receive a credit for the course. The principal will communicate this determination to the parents and the student. (OSS)
- A few students may require alternative expectations that are not derived from provincial curriculum policy documents. Student achievement of these alternative expectations is assessed not according to the levels of

achievement in the provincial curriculum policy documents but in relation to the expectations set out in the student's IEP. At the secondary school level, the student will not be granted a credit for the successful completion of a course that consists of alternative expectations. (OSS)

- Assignments and activities must take into account the strengths, needs, goals, learning expectations, and accommodations identified in the student's IEP. Exceptional pupils may require an individual program that differs in content, process, and evaluation strategies from the program of most other students. Accommodations may include reducing the workload, simplifying tasks and materials, and providing more time for learning and the completion of activities. The assistance of professional and paraprofessional staff and the use of personalized equipment may also be required to accommodate the student's needs.

# REPORTING ACHIEVEMENT

## **The Assessment and Evaluation of Student Achievement**

The assessment and evaluation of student achievement is intended to improve learning for each student. Teachers should ensure that their assessment and evaluation strategies and procedures are designed to measure how and what students learn, that they are varied in nature and administered over a period of time, and that they are communicated clearly to students and parents. Teachers should also provide accommodations to assessment and evaluation strategies to meet the needs of exceptional pupils. The Individual Education Plan (IEP) of a student with special needs must include a statement of the student's learning expectations and the methods by which the student's progress will be reviewed.

Classroom assessments are designed to gather information related to the student's learning expectations and other goals set out in their IEP. Where the expectations are the same as or modified from those in the curriculum policy documents (e.g., are those of a lower grade or are modified in some other way from the regular expectations), the student's achievement is assessed in accordance with the assessment policies given in the curriculum policy documents. When the learning expectations are not derived from the curriculum documents, the student's achievement is measured in relation to the expectations in the IEP. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches should be used in assessing student achievement. Teachers may use such strategies as oral questioning, tests, and examinations and may review student products, performances, work samples, audiotapes, videotapes, and portfolios to determine how well an individual student is doing. Assessment and evaluation of student achievement provide teachers with an opportunity to think critically about their methods of instruction and the overall effectiveness of their program. Teachers will report on student achievement based on the data collected in the process of assessment.

## **The Reporting of Student Achievement**

The Provincial Report Card is only one among several means used by teachers for reporting student achievement to parents. Communication with parents about the student's progress should be continuous throughout the school year and may include, in addition to the report card, parent-student-teacher conferences, interviews, phone calls, and informal reports. Samples of student work can be used as the basis for discussions with parents about student progress.

The student's achievement of the goals and expectations identified in the IEP must be reflected in his or her report card. Reporting progress for students who are identified as exceptional or who have special needs and are receiving special education programs and services will be done in accordance with the procedures outlined in the *Guide to the Provincial Report Card, Grades 1-8, 1998* and the *Guide to the Provincial Report Card, Grades 9-12, 1999*.

### ***Guide to the Provincial Report Card, Grades 1–8, 1998***

For students in Grades 1 to 8, if the student has an IEP that applies to a particular strand/subject, teachers should check the IEP box for that subject. If the expectations in the IEP are based on *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8* but vary from the expectations of the regular program for the grade, teachers must include the following statement in the "Strengths/Weaknesses/Next Steps" section: **"The (grade/mark) for (strand/subject) is based on achievement of the expectations in the IEP, which vary from the Grade \_\_\_ expectations."**

Teachers are not required to check the IEP boxes for students requiring only accommodations.

In very few instances, where none of the expectations in *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8* form the basis of the student's program, an alternative format may be used to report achievement (e.g., the evaluation section of the IEP). Teachers should indicate the student's achievement relative to the expectations identified in the IEP and should comment on strengths, weaknesses, and next steps. Page 3 of the report card is recommended for student use wherever possible.

### ***Guide to the Provincial Report Card, Grades 9–12, 1999***

For students in Grades 9 to 12, if the student has an IEP, teachers should check the IEP box for every course to which the plan applies. Teachers are not required to check the IEP boxes for students requiring only accommodations.

If some of the student's learning expectations for a course are modified from the curriculum expectations but the student is working towards a credit for the course, it is sufficient simply to check the IEP box. If, however, the student's learning expectations are modified to such an extent that the principal deems that a credit will not be granted for the course (see section 7.12 of *Ontario Secondary Schools, Grades 9 to 12: Program and Diploma Requirements, 1999*) or if the expectations are alternatives to the curriculum expectations, teachers must include the following statement in the "Comments" section (along with comments about the student's achievement): **"This percentage grade is based on achievement of the expectations specified in the IEP, which differ significantly from the curriculum expectations for the course."**

If the student is not working towards a credit in the course, teachers should enter a zero (0) in the "Credit Earned" column.

In the very few instances where none of the student's learning expectations are derived from the curriculum expectations, an alternative format may be used to record achievement (e.g., the evaluation section of the IEP). When using such a format, teachers should indicate the student's achievement relative to the expectations set out in the IEP and comment on strengths, areas for improvement, and next steps.

Wherever possible, students should be encouraged to complete the "Response Form". (See *Guide to the Provincial Report Card, Grades 9–12, 1999*.)

Parents of students who have an IEP should have a clear understanding of the learning expectations that make up the student's program. Although parents must receive a copy of the IEP when it is first developed and should receive copies of modified versions, boards may also choose to attach a copy to the student's report card.

### **Provincial Assessment**

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) expects all students in publicly funded schools to participate in provincial assessments of reading, writing, and mathematics in Grades 3, 6, and 9.

Students who entered Grade 9 in 2000–2001 or subsequent years and who are working towards an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) under *Ontario Secondary Schools, Grades 9 to 12: Program and Diploma Requirements, 1999* (OSS) must successfully complete the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) in order to earn the OSSD.

Students working towards the OSSD will normally take the literacy test in Grade 10. Students who do not take the test in the year following the year in which they entered Grade 9 will require a deferral or an exemption, in accordance with Ministry of Education Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) No. 127.

For more information on the tests and on possible accommodations, deferrals, and exemptions, see PPM No. 127 and visit the EQAO website, at [www.eqao.com](http://www.eqao.com).

### **Accommodating Students With Special Needs**

An underlying principle in education in Ontario is that students with special needs are to be accommodated. Teachers and principals must make every effort to enable students with special needs to participate with their peers in all aspects of a provincial assessment in order to demonstrate the full extent of their learning. In rare cases, a student may require an exemption from a specific portion of the assessment or from the entire assessment unit.

A student who has been identified through an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) process – or even one who has not been formally identified but who is receiving special education programs and services – may be considered for accommodations. The accommodations permitted are, with some exceptions, generally the same as those set out in the student's IEP.

### **Deferrals from the Secondary School Literacy Test**

At the secondary level, the principal, in consultation with the parents, adult student, and appropriate school staff, may decide to have the student defer writing the provincial secondary school literacy test.

### **Exempting Students With Special Needs**

An exemption may be considered if the full range of permitted accommodations has been considered and it is determined that the student still would not be able to provide evidence of learning under these conditions. The decision about any exemption must always be made on an individual basis.

Please see the annual EQAO instructions regarding the exemption policy.

# TRANSITIONS: IDEAS FOR SUCCESSFUL PRACTICE

## **Introduction**

Transitions from home to school, from one grade or level of schooling to another, from one school to another, and from school to work can be difficult and confusing for exceptional pupils and their families. A coordinated plan that forms part of the student's IEP and is implemented well before any anticipated move can ensure that the student has supports in place to lessen apprehension about the transition.

The key transition periods in a student's schooling are:

- entry to school;
- a change from one division or school to another;
- the move from elementary to secondary school;
- the transition from secondary school to postsecondary activities.

Information about planning for a child's initial entry to school may be found on pages C3–4. Information about the transition to secondary school and from secondary school to postsecondary education or work forms part of the student's annual education plan (see *Choices Into Action*).

## **Preschool-to-School Transitions**

Because children arrive at school with different backgrounds and experiences and at different stages of development, planning for transition to school should begin early to ensure that each child can make as smooth a transition as possible. As part of the transition process, the learning needs of all children should be identified initially through the board's early identification procedures. These procedures, which are part of a continuous assessment and program planning process, ensure that educational programs are designed to accommodate each child's learning needs and to facilitate his or her growth and development.

A successful transition to school depends on the ability of all those involved to communicate effectively and to share information about the child. Teachers, early childhood educators, members of the community, and families must work together to provide constructive and consistent learning experiences that will build students' confidence, encourage them to continue to see learning as both enjoyable and useful, and provide a strong foundation for their future intellectual, physical, and social development. Any exchange of information must be in accordance with freedom of information legislation and appropriate regard for confidentiality.

## **School-to-School Transitions**

Because of program considerations or relocation of the family, many students change schools. Whether the move is within the same school board or to another board, the transition can be made smoother with advance planning. Planning for a smooth transition is particularly important with exceptional pupils. To the extent allowed under the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and *The Ontario Student Record (OSR): Guideline, 2000*, all pertinent information about the student should be shared with the receiving school prior to the student's arrival so that appropriate supports are in place. Boards should use any assessments available from the originating board. Doing so may make it easier to achieve consistency of programming across the province.

The IEP should be stored in the OSR for transfer to the new school. In this way, any relevant medical information and details of special education services and of the student's strengths, needs, and specific learning expectations are immediately available at the new school for use in planning the student's program.

## **Transition to School From Care and Treatment Facilities and Correctional Facilities**

Where the staff in the facility agree and ongoing assessment indicates the readiness of the child/youth, admission to a school of a board may be appropriate. The facility and the school board providing the educational program are strongly encouraged to work together with community agencies and the receiving school to create a plan for the successful transition of the student. Until the end of the transition period (usually a few weeks to a few months), the child/youth should remain on the facility register. A child/youth must not be included on the register of a facility and the register of a day school at the same time.

Various educational alternatives may need to be considered to facilitate the integration of a student into a new educational setting. The plan may provide for:

- gradual integration;
- sharing of documentation and records and regular communication with parents;
- adjustment of the education program and, in the case of secondary students, opportunities to gain partial credits.

Suggested procedures for transfer from a facility to a local school should be specified as part of the agreement between the school board and the facility.

Upon the student's enrolment in the school, especially if a referral is made to an IPRC, the facility staff should participate in discussions about placement.

(For further information, see *Guidelines for Regional Office Approval of Educational Programs Provided in Government-Approved Care, Treatment, Custodial and Correctional Facilities, 1995* and the accompanying [2000] memorandum, COGA97-4.)

### **Transition to School Following Prolonged Medical Absence**

Depending on the medical condition, advance preparation with staff and students could be helpful in terms of awareness and sensitivity to the student's needs. It will be essential to discuss the transition with parents and, after proper consent is obtained, with medical personnel who have been involved with the child/youth. Organizations that support persons with the particular medical condition may be able to provide useful in-service training for teachers and other school staff.

The focus should be on meeting the needs of the student. The following strategies may be helpful:

- arranging for remedial sessions for the student after initial assessments of level of functioning are completed;
- setting up a buddy system to ease the student's adjustment to school life;
- shortening the school day, at least initially, for the benefit of the student. In some cases where endurance is a problem, and if the student has been identified as exceptional, this may be helpful. Shortening the instructional day for an exceptional pupil is authorized by R.R.O. 1990, Regulation 298, subsection 3(3). This option should be exercised only when it is in the student's best interest to do so.

### **Transition From Elementary to Secondary School**

It is expected that, as a general rule, exceptional pupils will proceed to secondary school within two years of the average age for entering secondary school. However, it is recognized that there may be some exceptional pupils who will need additional time at the elementary school level to prepare for secondary school. There may also be some school boards that do not yet have secondary school programs that are suitably modified to meet the needs of all exceptional pupils. School boards should have plans to develop appropriate secondary school programs that will meet the needs of their exceptional pupils. (See *Ontario Secondary Schools, Grades 9 to 12: Program and Diploma Requirements, 1999*.)

### **Transition From Secondary to Postsecondary Education**

In accordance with Regulation 181/98, where the exceptional pupil is 14 years of age or older (except for gifted students, unless they have other exceptionalities), the IEP must include a plan for transition to appropriate postsecondary activities, such as work, further education, and/or community

living. In developing a transition plan, the principal must consult with the parent or the student, if the student is age 16 or older, and with such community agencies as the principal considers appropriate. The plan should reflect the student's needs and goals for the future. It should assist the student to obtain the support(s) necessary to achieve educational and vocational goals by ensuring the coordination and sharing of information between the school and postsecondary educational institutions.

The transition plan may also identify additional successful instructional strategies and appropriate resources and settings that should be provided for the student. A carefully developed transition plan will specify the supports and services necessary to enable the student to be successful. Once the student is 14 years of age, his or her annual education plan should be coordinated with the transition plan. While boards may develop transition plans for gifted students, it is expected that the career planning needs of these students will be sufficiently addressed through the development of their annual education plans.

Guidance counsellors in secondary schools are knowledgeable about postsecondary institutions and the services they offer to exceptional pupils. The student and his or her parents should work with the secondary school guidance office to ensure that the most appropriate choices are made. Valuable links can be established with the college or university before the student arrives at the institution. In fact, with the consent of the student, many guidance offices telephone ahead about particular students to inform the postsecondary institution about special needs, in order to ensure as smooth a start as possible. In disclosing such information, guidance counsellors must be aware of legal requirements with respect to consent. Some students may prefer not to disclose information about their special needs.

The secondary school guidance office staff can play a role in modelling behaviours the student will find useful. For instance, when contact is made with the postsecondary institution, the guidance counsellor might make the calls with the student present, after having drawn up a list of required information in collaboration with the student. The student will also find it useful to do research on the skills that are necessary for particular courses.

It is important to establish a link for the student with someone who can provide help with a variety of "settling in" activities. For instance, in the early stages, the student may need assistance in dealing with the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) or performing a variety of necessary tasks (such as buying texts, finding living accommodation, and sorting out a new timetable) within a short period of time.

It is at this stage that the student's skills in self-advocacy are especially important. Often at the intake interviews, questions are asked about previous special education assistance and/or special assessments that have been done. If the student has collected a profile of information, this would be a good time to share it. An example of such a profile, the Learning and

Employment Assessment Profile (LEAP), is available for use with groups, through the Learning Disabilities Association. A facilitators' manual is also available.

Community colleges offer special programs for exceptional pupils. For instance, the Toronto area has an AIMS (Academic Improvement and Monitoring Service) program through which students can receive early assistance. The program is primarily for at-risk students, but is open to all.

### **Transition From Secondary School to the World of Work**

In many cases, strategies used to smooth transitions from secondary school to other destinations are also effective for the transition to work. The new employer may use strategies suggested by a teacher or guidance office staff to assist the new employee in making a good transition. In particular, the assignment of another employee to act as a buddy/orientation guide can ease the adjustment.

The student services department/guidance office of the secondary school should provide students with information about job search and job application strategies, interview skills, and post-interview follow-up procedures.

The student should accept responsibility for acquiring the knowledge and skills required in the new setting and adapting his or her skills to the requirements of the job. If some skills are underdeveloped and the student is still interested in the position, he or she should have a plan for gaining the missing knowledge or skills through such things as additional courses, reading, or job-shadowing.

A good mentor can be a valuable asset to a student making the adjustment to a work setting.

Self-advocacy is very important, as well. The student should be able to suggest strategies that will address potential problems, perhaps indicating accommodations that have been effective in the past.