



SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN ALBERTA SCHOOLS

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Many caregivers of patients at Alberta Children's Hospital have questions about educational programming and supports that their child's school system provides. It can be challenging to navigate school systems when your child has been diagnosed with a special need(s). In Alberta schools, the term students with special needs means children who need special education programming because of their behavioural, communication, intellectual, learning or physical challenges.

How do I work with school systems?

Talk to your child's teacher at a time that is convenient for both of you. Ask the teacher specific questions to help you understand how your child is performing academically, emotionally, socially, and behaviourally. If there are concerns, ask for a meeting with the school learning team. This team may include the teacher, the principal, assistant principal, resource teacher and/or student/instructional services personnel. At the meeting, create a written plan and make sure everyone understand it. Ask if and when another meeting should occur.

Alberta Education's Standards for Special Education outlines school boards' requirements to deliver education programming and services to students with special education needs, from pre-school to grade 12.

<https://education.alberta.ca/media/1626539/standardsforspecialeducation.pdf>

See also:

Standards for the Provision of Early Childhood Special Education -

https://education.alberta.ca/media/3227597/2016-06-08_ecs_specialedstds2006.pdf

What questions should I ask?

- Is my child delayed academically compared to classmates?
- Has my child been assessed in reading, writing and/or mathematics?
- Does my child have friends at school?
- Is my child able to play or work cooperatively with classmates?
- How well does my child focus and pay attention in school?
- How does my child's behavior compare to other students my child's age?
- Does my child's teacher have concerns that they believe need to be addressed by other professionals, like a doctor or psychologist?
- What kind of supports or programming are available to meet my child's special needs?

How do I advocate for my child who has special needs?

You know your child best so it is important that you speak up about your child's needs. Being an advocate is a collaborative and ongoing process. Working as a team with school staff is the best approach and will have the best outcome for your child.

<https://education.alberta.ca/diverse-learning-needs/meeting-the-needs-of-each-student/everyone/librarieslearning-supports/>

What is the Special Education Coding Criteria and what is it for?

The Special Education Coding Criteria has information for teachers and principals about different types of disabilities and delays. School staff must have documentation before they assign a special education code. This includes a diagnosis of a disability or disorder by qualified professionals, such as a doctor, psychiatrist, psychologist, or speech/language pathologist. Caregivers are encouraged to provide documentation of their child's diagnosis to school staff. Once a special education code is assigned, school staff must develop an Individualized Program Plan (IPP) for the student.

What are Individual Program Plans (IPPs)?

An IPP is a plan of action designed to guide a student's special education needs. Each IPP should detail your child's strengths and needs and outline learning goals, instruction strategies, additional supports and services provided. It should also say how your child's progress will be assessed and reported to you. Teachers, school administrators, and caregivers are all involved in the development and delivery of IPPs. The IPP is a working document that needs to be reviewed during the school year.

<https://education.alberta.ca/instructional-supports/individualized-program-plan-ipp/everyone/ippisp-overview/>

Funding Framework for K to 12: Funding Manual - <https://education.alberta.ca/funding-framework-for-k-12/funding-manual/>

Early Childhood Services (ECS)?

Children with disabilities are eligible for up to three years of ECS programming, depending on their age, how severe the disability is, and the impact on the child's learning and development.

<https://education.alberta.ca/early-childhood-education/early-childhood-services/everyone/ecs-fact-sheets/>

What about special education placements?

In Alberta, the preferred placement option for all students should be in the regular classroom in the neighbourhood school or private ECS program. Caregivers should be consulted when other placements are being recommended for their child. Every school system and ECS operator has different education placement options. Staff at your neighbourhood school or private ECS site are able to provide caregivers with information about the range of placement options available.

What can I do if the relationship between the caregivers and school staff has broken down?

Children are most successful when caregivers and the school staff work together as a team. It is worth your time and patience to repair misunderstandings and unclear expectations. Ask the principal for guidance about how a difficult situation can be resolved. Most school systems also have student services staff who may be able to help resolve conflicts.

For more information, see the Learning Team Handbook at <https://education.alberta.ca/diverse-learning-needs/meeting-the-needs-of-each-student/everyone/librarieslearning-supports/>

Alberta Children's Hospital Family and Community Resource Centre Resources

Child Health Information Resource Lists (Information Prescriptions) - <http://fcrc.ahs.ca/rx/>

Parents as Partners Tip Sheets - <http://fcrc.ahs.ca/family/pfcc/documents/Tip-Sheets-1-4.pdf>

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