



Building the
Learning Team

Chapter 2

Encouraging Parent Involvement

2006

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This resource is primarily intended for:

Teachers	✓
Administrators	✓
Health-related professionals	✓
Counsellors	✓
Students	
Parents	
General Public	



A PDF version of this resource is available on the Alberta Education Web site at
www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/specialneeds/resource.asp

Print copies of this resource can be purchased from the Learning Resources Centre. Order online at www.lrc.education.gov.ab.ca/ or telephone 780-427-5775.

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Chapter 2

Encouraging Parent Involvement



The *Standards for Special Education, Amended June 2004* clearly states that schools must invite meaningful involvement of parents in planning, problem solving and decision making related to their child's special education programming.

Parents have unique knowledge about their children that provides an invaluable basis for the IPP process. Furthermore, research clearly demonstrates that parents who understand the school philosophy, know the school staff and participate in school activities are more likely to be satisfied with the education that their children are receiving. Parents need meaningful opportunities to participate in all facets of their child's schooling. They often want to be part of the decision-making process, and have access to information and ideas on a continuous, as-needed basis.

For more
information

This chapter provides sample strategies for supporting meaningful parent involvement in the IPP process. Additional strategies to support parent participation are contained in other chapters in this resource, including:
Chapter 8: *Planning for Transitions*
Chapter 9: *Infusing Assistive Technology for Learning into the IPP Process*.

There are opportunities for meaningful parent involvement at all stages of the IPP process. Consider the following six interrelated steps of the IPP process and how parent involvement can be part of each step.

1. Identifying strengths and areas of need

Parents are an invaluable source of information regarding their child. They are their child's first teachers and have witnessed him or her in a variety of social and learning situations beyond the school setting. As a result, they can often provide unique insights and perspectives about their child's strengths and needs. Consider developing a simple survey or questionnaire to gather information from parents.

Appendices

See *Appendix 2-A for a sample parent survey*.

Parents can provide information about their child in areas such as the following:

- strengths and areas of need
- family and educational history that impacts the child's present learning situation
- relevant medical history and health-care needs
- interests, talents and desires of their child
- aspirations and goals they have for their child
- assistance that the family can provide at home to practise, reinforce and maintain skills

- information about community services, after-school situations or caregivers which could impact their child's learning.

Specialized assessments are often used to help identify a student's strengths and areas of need. Schools must request in writing the consent of parents to assess and evaluate children experiencing difficulties with their education program. Parents need to understand the importance of informed consent. To make an informed decision, parents need to consider:

- purpose of assessment
- nature of assessment
- intended use of results
- who has access to results.

It may be helpful to state what particular test will be used to assess the student and any other informal or formal assessment tools which will be used. Notifying parents as to when the assessment will take place will help maintain trust between home and school. If delays arise, keep parents current on timelines.

Appendices

See Appendix 2-B for a sample permission form.

If the student is receiving an assessment or support from outside agencies or medical service providers, this information may also be helpful in identifying needs and developing programming. In order for the learning team to have access to this information, parents will be asked to sign a permission form to release information from these professionals. Parents should be reassured that this information will be kept confidential.

2. Setting the direction

Establishing priorities helps the learning team focus on what is critical for the student to learn this school year. The team establishes these priorities based on all the information that has been gathered to date.

To determine the most important learning needs, parents can work with the learning team to consider:

- priority areas to focus on
- possibilities for using this new skill or knowledge in other areas and settings
- related areas of strength
- how this need affects overall learning and achievement
- transferability to other subject areas
- contribution to independence
- age appropriateness
- how long it will take to master this new skill
- how the skills and knowledge relate to the student's future goals.

3. Creating a plan

As members of their child's learning team, parents can offer ideas and information in the creation of long-term goals for their child. These goals are what the student might accomplish in one school year. It is important that the team identify what is manageable for the student. This is where a parent perspective can be especially helpful.

All parents have hopes and dreams for their child. Their priorities for their child's learning may differ from those of the classroom teacher. It is important that parents' perspectives are recognized and understood, and that all viewpoints are considered so that the learning team works collaboratively to make the most appropriate programming decisions for individual students. As part of the assessment process, the use of strategies such as the MAPS Planning System creates opportunities for parents to share information about their children.

Appendices

See Appendix 2-C for information on the MAPS Planning System.

Some parents may wish to set additional goals that they will work on at home. These goals can either support classroom-based goals or focus on education-related skills and behaviours more specific to home and community. These goals may be incorporated into the IPP process but they should not be considered goals that need to be monitored by the classroom teacher or be formally reported in the IPP review. The role of the teacher is to support families in setting goals for their children and encourage parents to monitor, share and celebrate their successes.

Appendices

See Appendix 2-D for a sample goal-setting form to assist parents.

Parents can often help identify effective accommodations for their child. Ask them about what strategies they use to help their child complete family jobs or homework assignments.

4. Implementing the plan

As members of their child's learning team, parents can take an active role in the implementation process. One important way to involve parents is in reinforcing skills and strategies in out-of-school contexts. When parents understand what the long-term goals and short-term objectives of their child's program plan are, they can decide how to best support their child at home.

5. Reviewing and revising

Review meetings are opportunities for parents to discuss their child's programming and consider possible revisions. The year-end review is especially important as the team reviews the education plan and adds written recommendations to the IPP. This is particularly true for students moving from one school to another or making any kind of transition.

Parents can also be encouraged to contact the school to request a review of the IPP at any time if they have concerns about their child's progress or if their child is experiencing significant changes in achievement, attitude, behaviour or health. This would allow the team to adjust the IPP to better meet that student's changing needs.

6. Planning for transition

Planning for transition involves identifying the kinds of skills and attitudes that need to be in place for students to be successful in future settings, and developing a plan of action to ensure students acquire these skills and attitudes. It may also include specific plans for moving between education placements and programs. As a consistent presence in their child's life, parents play an essential role in planning for and dealing with transitions. In particular, parents may be involved in determining opportunities and supports that are available to the student in the community as he or she gains increased independence.

Getting Off to a Good Start

At the beginning of the year, some parents may be uncomfortable with formal school meetings, particularly if this is their first meeting. In challenging or difficult situations, parents' care and concern for their child might show up as tension, anxiety or frustration. It's important that teachers remain nonjudgemental and don't make assumptions because the parents' presenting behaviours might not necessarily reflect how they truly feel or how they are actually coping. Teachers need to keep in mind that most parents do not have a background in education and some have little or no experience in working with schools. There may also be emotional barriers and other issues that get in the way of creating an atmosphere of collaboration. These can include:

- parents who struggled at school themselves. They may find it uncomfortable to work in partnership with teachers
- a sense of guilt that they are in some way responsible for their child's difficulties. Some families may still be struggling with feelings of loss and grief as they try to come to terms with their child's special education needs
- family situations which can make participating in their child's education a challenge. These could include such things as being a single parent, shift work, language barriers or families that are dealing with more than one child with special education needs
- cultural beliefs that school and home are separate
- issues of trust. It takes time to develop a level of trust where parents feel comfortable talking about their child
- a lack of confidence in the school's ability to provide adequate support for a student with special education needs

- denial. Some parents find it difficult to believe that their child has different needs than other children, particularly those students whose main difficulties are academic, so they may not experience the same degree of difficulty outside of the school environment.

Ensuring parental involvement requires time, trust and a belief that parents are partners in the planning process. Teachers can take a guiding role, particularly in the early stages of parental involvement, to ensure that parents have positive and meaningful opportunities to become actively engaged and committed to the process. Teachers need to help parents understand the value of an IPP and the role that they can play in ensuring that it accurately reflects the strengths and areas of need of their child. Taking time at the onset to provide information and clarify expectations will foster a sense of openness and partnership with parents. As parents become more comfortable working with their child's learning team, they will more readily share information and perspectives that impact their child's learning.

Sample strategies

Sample strategies for encouraging parental participation

- **Maintain an open door policy.** Let parents know that they are welcome to visit the classroom to observe and participate in their child's learning. If there is a sign-in procedure at the office or other jurisdiction protocol, provide this information during the first open house of the school year or through the classroom newsletter. Encourage parents to participate in special day events, expertise sharing, displays and presentations, and other learning opportunities.
- **Acknowledge parents' role and contribution to the team.** It's important that parents hear that their expertise and contributions are valued.
- **Be prepared to answer parents' questions.** Consider the following types of sample questions that parents might ask.
 - How will my input be used?
 - Do we attend all IPP planning meetings about our child? If not, how do we keep informed about information shared and decisions made at those meetings?
 - When are the meetings held and how long are they?
 - How can our child be a part of the IPP process?
 - What kind of special support will there be for my child? Will there be one-on-one support? If so, will this be with a teacher or teacher assistant?
 - Will my child always need an IPP?
 - How is the IPP different every school year? Can it be changed at any time during the school year?
 - How will we know if the IPP is effective?
 - How can I arrange to visit the classroom to see how my child is doing?

- What am I expected to do at home to support my child?
 - What does our signature mean on the IPP document? What happens if we don't sign it?
 - What are our options if we don't agree with the IPP?
 - Will my child need to write provincial achievement tests?
 - Will my child graduate with a Grade 12 diploma?
 - We noticed a transition section on the IPP, but our child has just begun new programming. Why is transition an issue?
- **Make print information about the IPP process, such as *The Learning Team*, available to parents.** In addition to sharing the handbook (or Web link for a downloadable copy of the handbook), selected information can be used in school newsletters or displays. See the end of this chapter for ordering information.
 - **Organize an IPP information session** to ensure that parents understand the IPP process. Schools that have a large number of students with special education needs may find an orientation session for parents to be an effective way to build understanding of and commitment to the IPP process. For example, an orientation session could be an opportunity to:
 - introduce the stages of an IPP
 - review a sample IPP
 - discuss how the IPP should change from one year to the next
 - answer common questions such as those listed above.
 Be sure the parameters of the session are clear and that parents understand it is an introduction to the process, not a time to discuss individual students and their specific needs.
 - **Use parent–teacher meetings as opportunities for developing partnerships.** When possible, offer parents a choice of meeting times and communicate directly with them through a written notice or phone call. Give them sufficient time to arrange their schedule. Make sure the meeting notice gets to parents. Even the most conscientious student may neglect to pass a message along and a follow-up phone call may be necessary. Always provide information on how to contact the school if the meeting needs to be rescheduled. If possible, consider including an agenda or brief overview of the planning meeting content. This is helpful for parents as they consider the kinds of questions they want to ask and the issues they would like to discuss.
 - **Make effective use of IPP meetings.** Manage the IPP meetings so that there is time for questions and discussion. Use these meetings as an opportunity to share information about the child's special learning needs. The more knowledgeable parents are about their child's learning challenges, the better partners they can be. Resources might include: copies of articles of interest for them to read at home, information about upcoming conferences or relevant parent workshops, and new Web sites that might be of interest. Consider having someone keep notes of the action items and provide a copy to all team members.

- **Ensure that parents understand the kinds of decisions that need to be made when developing an IPP** and then ask them to choose which areas of the IPP they would like to have input into. For example, parents may wish to share their child's strengths, areas of need, information about how he or she learns best, medical information, successful strategies used at home and goals they would like to see addressed in the IPP. Encourage parents to speak with their child about his or her strengths, areas of need and potential goals, and share this information as well.

Appendices

See Appendix 2-E for sample tips for parents for participating in the IPP process.

Sample strategies

Sample strategies for increasing parents' comfort levels at meetings

- Arrange meetings at mutually convenient times in a comfortable and appropriate setting.
- Consider parents' comfort level when determining the number of staff to attend meetings.
- Provide parents with an agenda a day or two in advance. This allows them time to think about the items to be discussed and to collect relevant information to bring to the meeting.
- Consider what information parents might have that could be of value. Include a list of questions with the meeting notice or proposed agenda, such as:
 - Have there been changes at home that you want to share (such as a new family member, a change in a parent's work schedule, new after-school activities or day-care arrangements)?
 - Are there new supports in place for the child (such as a tutor or time spent with a mentor or older student)?
 - Has there been a change in medication or dosage?
- Encourage parents to create a list of questions they want answered during the first and subsequent meetings.
- Use the arrangement of chairs and tables to establish an atmosphere of collaboration.
- Use chart paper and markers to record notes and decisions made during the meeting.
- Value the information which parents share, and allow adequate time within meetings for thoughtful reflection and discussion.

School boards are required to make every reasonable effort at the school and jurisdiction level to resolve concerns collaboratively with parents. However, despite these efforts there may be differences of opinion about the education of children with special education needs between parents (or in some cases, an older student) and the school. When this happens, there are a number of strategies for successfully resolving these differences. The first course of action is to try and resolve issues directly with the people who are working with the student. This means meeting as a learning team and looking for win-win solutions.

Sample strategies

Sample strategies for handling conflict and resolving differences with parents

- Establish that the child's interests must come first at all times.
- Express motivation to resolve the difference for future mutual benefit (e.g., "I appreciate your willingness to ..." or "I'm committed to finding a plan that will work for everyone").
- Deal specifically with solutions to the identified issues and be prepared to offer alternatives.
- Focus on the issues, and not the emotions and the personalities involved.
- Give parents opportunities to state their understanding of the situation and then paraphrase what you have heard.
- Ensure your understanding of their concerns and perspectives is accurate.
- Sometimes a disagreement occurs as a direct result of misunderstanding. Always clarify exactly what the issue is before jumping ahead to solutions.
- Decide what you can compromise on. Effective resolution usually requires some form of compromise on both parties' behalf.
- Be sure that your expectations are realistic and reasonable.
- Explicitly state you are committed to the agreed-upon solutions and encourage parents to also do this.

Appendices

See Appendix 2-F for more information on solution-focused meetings and a sample meeting planner.

Resources for parents

There are a number of Alberta Education print and online resources that can provide information and ideas that parents can use to participate more effectively in their child's IPP process. All of these resources are available for purchase from the Learning Resources Centre at www.lrc.education.gov.ab.ca/ or telephone 780-427-2767.

- *The Learning Team: A handbook for parents of children with special needs* (2003) provides practical information on building a learning team, the IPP process, transition planning, resolving differences and keeping informed. It can be downloaded as a PDF file from Alberta Education's Web site at: <http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/educationguide/special-ed/partners>.
- *The Journey: A handbook for parents of children who are gifted and talented* (2004) offers information and strategies that parents can use to nurture their child's learning and emotional well-being at home, in school, and in the community. It can be downloaded as a PDF file from Alberta Education's Web site at: http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/K_12/curriculum/resources/TheJourney/journey.asp.

- *A Handbook for Aboriginal Parents of Children with Special Needs* (2000) provides Aboriginal parents with information about the education of their child with special education needs, as well as tips to enhance communication between home and school. It can be downloaded as a PDF file from Alberta Education's Web site at http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum/AboriginalParentHandbook.pdf.
- *The Parent Advantage: Helping children become more successful learners at home and school, grades 1–9* (1998) includes strategies parents can use to help their child improve organizational, reading, writing, spelling, math, test-taking and project skills.

Other resources

- *Our Words, Our Ways: Teaching First Nations, Métis and Inuit Learners* (2005) offers information and sample strategies that teachers can use to help their Aboriginal students be successful learners. This resource provides information on Aboriginal cultures and perspectives, and discusses the importance of family and community involvement. It includes shared wisdom from Elders and Aboriginal scholars, and related stories shared by teachers of Aboriginal students. It also includes information on learning disabilities and recognizing the gifts of individual students. It can be downloaded as a PDF file from Alberta Education's Web site at: http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum/OurWords.asp.

Appendices



These tools are available in PDF format at www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/special_needs/resource.asp and on the CD-ROM packaged with the print version of this resource.

Encouraging Parent Involvement

The purpose of these sample tools is to enrich the IPP process. These tools should be used selectively and can be adapted to best meet the needs of individual students. Many of these tools will be used informally as part of the IPP development process and not as products for the student's permanent school record.

- 2-A Sample Parent Survey
- 2-B Sample Permission Form for Specialized Assessment
- 2-C The MAPS Planning System
- 2-D Family Goal Setting
Completed Sample of Family Goal Setting
- 2-E Tips for Parents for Participating in the IPP Process
- 2-F Solution-focused Meetings
Sample Planner for Solution-focused Meeting



Sample Parent Survey

Name _____ Date _____

Parent's Name _____

The following questions are designed to help your child's learning team begin the Individualized Program Planning (IPP) process. We value your input and invite you to think about the following questions in preparation for the learning team meeting.

1. What are your child's strengths and interests?
2. Describe successes your child had in school.
3. Describe any challenges your child had in school.
4. What are your child's learning needs for this school year? (These could be skills that your child needs to acquire or improve on.)
5. What type of learner is your child? How does your child learn best?
6. Does your child display any behaviours that are of concern to you? If so, please explain how you deal with this type of behaviour at home.
7. What are your goals and hopes for your child this year?
8. Where do you see your child five years from now?
9. Is there any other information that could help us gain a better understanding of your child?
10. Are there any specific concerns that you would like us to address at this meeting? If so, please explain.

Thank you for sharing your ideas.



Appendix 2-B

Sample Permission Form for Specialized Assessment

Dear Parent:

We are requesting your permission to schedule a specialized assessment for your child in the following areas.

- ☐ Educational (for reading, writing, spelling and math)
- ☐ Speech and language
- ☐ Fine and gross motor
- ☐ Behavioural
- ☐ Social-emotional
- ☐ Cognitive
- ☐ Other: _____

These assessments will be conducted by our jurisdiction assessment team within the next six weeks. Each of the assessments will take approximately two hours and will be done in a one-to-one situation with your child. At that time we will talk with your child and explain why we are doing these assessments and how this information will help the teacher understand his or her learning needs better.

Upon completion of the assessments, we will arrange a meeting with you and members of the assessment team to discuss the results and make plans for improving your child's school success.

Please return the signed form below to the school office by October 30, 200_.

Thank you for your ongoing support. Please feel free to contact me if you have additional questions or concerns about these assessments. The best time to reach me is in the morning between 10 and 11 a.m. at [phone number] or [e-mail address].

Sincerely,

Principal

Permission for specialized assessment

I give permission for my son/daughter _____ to be assessed by the jurisdiction special education assessment team for the purpose of _____.

I understand that the granting of my permission is voluntary and that I may withdraw it at any time.

Parent's signature

Date



The MAPS Planning System

- MAPS is a seven-question process for planning for a child's school success. Usually all seven questions are the basis of the planning framework, although there may be some flexibility in the order of the questions or whether a question is used or not. The format will depend on the needs of the individual student and his or her family.
- This process takes a minimum of two hours and typically occurs in one or two sessions.
- Information and ideas are recorded on chart paper during the process and copies are made for team members as part of the follow-up.

The Seven Questions

1. What is your child's history?
(Parents' input on this question is vital. Invite them to share their child's history, including key milestones.)
2. What is your dream for your child's future?
(Invite parents to share the vision of their child's future, maybe five years from now, or in adulthood. This will help set direction and identify meaningful goals.)
3. What are your fears for your child's future?
(It is important for everyone to understand these fears and potential barriers so the team can work together to overcome them.)
4. What are three key words that describe your child?
(Parents identify what is most important about their child in their eyes.)
5. What are your child's strengths, gifts and abilities?
(Ask parents to share examples of what their child can do, what he or she likes to do and what he or she does well.)
6. What are your child's needs?
(Identify needs from the parents' perspectives and then prioritize.)
7. What would an ideal day at school look like for your child, and what must be done to make it happen?

Wrap-up

As a group, identify specific actions to be initiated and prioritize them. Identify who will be responsible for what and set reasonable timelines.

Adapted with permission from Mary A. Falvey et al., *All My Life's a Circle: Using the Tools: Circles, MAPS and PATH* (Toronto, ON: Inclusion Press, 1997) and from John O'Brien and Jack Pearpoint, *Person-Centred Planning with MAPS and PATH: A Workbook for Facilitators* (Toronto, ON: Inclusion Press, 2002). MAPS is one of a family of Person-Centred Planning tools that focus on the capacities (gifts) of a person—then turn it into a plan of action. Books, videos, DVDs and other support materials are available from Inclusion Press, <http://inclusion.com>.



Appendix 2-D

Family Goal Setting

Student's Name _____ Date _____

Parent's Name _____

My child has these five strengths:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

My child has these five areas of need:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Goal #1

A. My first goal for my child this school year is:

This is what I will do at home to help achieve this goal:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How I will know my child has successfully accomplished this goal:



Family Goal Setting (continued) page 2/4

Goal #2

B. My second goal for my child this school year is:

This is what I will do at home to help achieve this goal:

1.

2.

3.

How I will know my child has successfully accomplished this goal:

I would like to discuss these goals at each reporting period as part of the IPP process.

☐ Yes ☐ No

Parent's signature

Date

- ☐ I need more information! Please send home a sample of what a completed family goal setting sheet might look like.
- ☐ I need more ideas. Let's work on this together at the IPP meeting.



Appendix 2-D

Completed Sample of Family Goal Setting

Student's Name Anne ExampleDate September XX, 2XXXParent's Name Anne Parent

My child has these five strengths:

1. team member (successful goalie of her soccer team)
2. very helpful around house
3. enjoys school
4. excellent with money
5. good sense of humour

My child has these five areas of need:

1. organizational skills
2. control of her temper
3. willingness to read independently
4. needs more confidence
5. self-edit own writing

Goal #1

A. My first goal for my child this school year is:

To find books she enjoys reading (to the end)

This is what I will do at home to help achieve this goal:

1. Discuss what kinds of books she likes (and what kind she doesn't)
2. Library card - monthly trips
3. Encourage quiet bedtime reading

How I will know my child has successfully accomplished this goal:

I have to tell her "Turn off your light and stop reading!" at bedtime.



Completed Sample of Family Goal Setting (continued) page 4/4

Goal #2

B. My second goal for my child this school year is:

Safe play on the playground

This is what I will do at home to help achieve this goal:

1. Encourage participation in structured noon-hour activities
2. One month without playground problems earns one lunch at Dairy Queen
3. Every day, ask: Morning – "What do you plan to do at noon?"
Afternoon – "How did noon-hour go?"

How I will know my child has successfully accomplished this goal:

No notes home from the lunch room supervisor

Fun lunches at Dairy Queen every month

I would like to discuss these goals at each reporting period as part of the IPP process.

☐ Yes ☐ No

Parent's signature

Date

- ☐ I need more information! Please send home a sample of what a completed family goal setting sheet might look like.
- ☐ I need more ideas. Let's work on this together at the IPP meeting.



Appendix 2-E

Tips for Parents for Participating in the IPP Process

Individualized program planning (IPP) is the process by which families, teachers and other school staff work as a team to meet the individual needs of students with special education needs. As a parent, you are an important member of your child's learning team.

You can participate in the IPP process by:

- providing information about your child's past experience and his or her goals, interests and areas of need
- having regular contact with your child's teacher
- taking an active role in the decisions made for your child
- learning about the services and resources available
- working with your child at home to support the goals set through the IPP process
- actively participating in IPP planning meetings, using strategies like those described below.

Before IPP meetings

- Discuss the positive elements in the individualized program plan with your child.
- Find out about your child's involvement and role in the meeting. Decide if your child will benefit from participating in the meeting or at least part of the meeting.
- Review the comments from your child's last report card, and goals and objectives from the last IPP. What progress have you seen? Note any areas of concern.
- Ask your child questions such as the following. (If your child attends the meeting, he or she may be able to give this input directly.)
 - What do you like best about school? What do you feel are your successes?
 - Are there any problems that we need to find some solutions to? What are some changes that would help you learn better at school?
 - What goals do you have for yourself?
- Be prepared. Write a list of questions and concerns that you want to discuss, including questions like the following. Prioritize your concerns.
 - Whom should I call if I have concerns about my child's school program?
 - Will the IPP be reviewed at every report card time?
 - What kinds of changes in our home does the school need to know about?
- If you need additional support, consider arranging for another person to accompany you. This person can offer a different perspective, hear important points you may miss or take notes.

At IPP meetings

- Ask if there are any new assessments, reports or observations.
- Ask about your child's strengths, interests, areas of growth, areas of need and friendships.
- Ask any other questions you have about your child's progress or programming.
- Share your present and future goals for your child.
- Discuss any specific concerns you have about your child.
- Share any home conditions that may impact your child's performance or behaviour at school and any recent documents or medical updates.
- Share samples of your child's work completed at home, if you think this can contribute to a better understanding of your child. Teachers often have samples of student work to share, but if not, ask to see samples.



Tips for Parents for Participating in the IPP Process (continued) page 2/2

At the close of IPP meetings

- Establish mutually agreed upon goals and strategies for your child.
- Find out how you can support your child at home.
- Take notes on recommendations and timelines, such as additional services or assessments.
- Verbally summarize your understanding and interpretation of the decisions made, actions to be taken, timelines, and roles and responsibilities of each participant.
- Give feedback to the people working with your child in areas where you noted positive effort, growth or change.
- Sign the IPP to indicate your agreement with the plan. If you do not agree with the IPP and do not wish to sign, the school has an obligation to document the reasons for your decision and what actions are taken to resolve the issue.
- Ask for a copy of the IPP to refer to at home.
- Decide on the next meeting date.

After IPP meetings

- Give your child feedback from the meeting.
- Discuss what needs to happen in order to reach the IPP goals. Discuss what your child's role is and also how the school staff and your family will support the plan.

To review the effectiveness of your child's IPP, consider these questions

- How does the IPP build on my child's strengths?
- How does the IPP address the individual needs of my child?
- Does the IPP focus on key goals for my child?
- How are accommodations tailored to the strengths, areas of need and learning style of my child?
- What is an appropriate balance for my child? (Each student should participate in the regular curriculum as much as possible with accommodations to support success.)
- Does the IPP use more than one source of assessment data to determine strengths and areas of need?
- Does my child have social and behaviour needs that should be addressed in the IPP?
- How does the IPP address planning for transition?
- If there are several teachers responsible for my child's education program, are there procedures for all of them to have access to the IPP so they can use it to plan instruction, monitor progress, and contribute to evaluating and changing goals and objectives?
- Does the IPP use a number of strategies to measure and communicate my child's progress?
- Is progress on IPP goals monitored frequently? If objectives are met, are new ones set? If my child is not demonstrating progress, does the team review the program and make changes?

For more information and strategies for participating in your child's education, check out *The Learning Team: A handbook for parents of children with special needs* (2003), www.education.gov.ab.ca/educationguide/special/partners. This resource is also available for purchase from the Learning Resources Centre at www.lrc.education.gov.ab.ca or 780-427-5775.



Solution-focused Meetings

Solution-focused meetings can be an effective way to resolve particularly difficult situations, or when it is important to promote communication among all learning team members. Ensuring input from all members of the learning team in an open, honest and respectful manner will contribute to increased commitment to the IPP process by teaching staff, parents and the student.

A solution-focused meeting uses a process such as the following.

1. One member of the learning team agrees to act as the facilitator for the meeting. This individual needs to be positive, attentive, task-oriented, and have the ability to clarify issues and summarize. It is also important that the facilitator help each team member stay on topic and work toward appropriate, practical solutions.
2. The facilitator begins the meeting by inviting the learning team member who initiated the meeting to state clearly and concisely what the concern is. It is important to find out specifically what the team member wants to happen as a result of this meeting.
3. The team members ask questions to clear up any uncertainties they may have as to exactly what the issue is or what the related circumstances are. The facilitator may need to encourage team members to look for factors that appear to trigger or contribute to the problem, and to identify and analyze conditions that seem to alleviate the problem. As part of this analysis, team members may also identify the strengths of the student and available resources.
4. Once the problem or issue is clearly defined, the learning team uses a round table brainstorming session to generate suggestions for how the problem may be solved. All ideas are recorded on chart paper. It is important at this stage of the process to let ideas flow freely and not to comment directly on any one idea.
5. The facilitator and the referring teacher review the strategies together and then rate each suggestion by assigning a number value to it.
For example:
1 = an idea or strategy that the teacher and/or parent wants to try
2 = an idea or strategy that has merit, but is not a priority
3 = an idea or strategy that has already been tried and didn't seem to resolve the issue
4 = an idea or strategy not immediately practical at this time.
6. The learning team develops an action plan for each strategy selected, including materials and resources required, persons responsible, and dates for follow-up and review.
7. The facilitator closes the meeting by thanking everyone and asking for feedback on the process. The team generally agrees to meet for a progress review in four to six weeks.

Adapted with permission from Gordon L. Porter et al., "Problem Solving Teams: A Thirty-Minute Peer-Helping Model," in Gordon L. Porter and Diane Richler (eds.), *Changing Canadian Schools: Perspectives on Disability and Inclusion* (North York, ON: The Roeher Institute, 1991), pp. 224–228.



Sample Planner for Solution-focused Meeting

Date _____

Referring learning team member _____

Learning team members participating in meeting

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Student name _____

A. Key concern

B. What we would like to see happen/change

C. Description of student's strengths and priority areas of need

Strengths	Areas of need	Other resources

D. Potential strategies

What can make this happen?

• _____	_____
• _____	_____
• _____	_____

E. Follow-up meeting _____

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