September 2022

Supporting Students with Special Needs and Students at Risk

Note: Given the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and transmission within our communities, guidance may change based on emerging circumstances and information from public health officials.

Learning Continues

The purpose of this document is to assist school teams in supporting remote learning for students with special needs and students at risk.

It includes recommendations for maintaining contact among students, their parents/caregivers, and their direct service providers, and for ensuring students have continued access to appropriate educational programming and social/emotional/behavioural supports.

It includes links to useful tips and resources for supporting students with special needs and students at risk, as well as suggestions for implementing adaptations, modification to curriculum, and individualized programming.

Links to important information on the ethical and implementation guidelines for providing clinical services through distance delivery, as well as information on potential loan sources for augmentative/alternative communication devices and alternate format materials are also provided.

Lastly, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning contact information is provided for additional support, resources, and guidance.

Planning Principles

- Keep communication and collaboration at the forefront. Reach out to all parents and students to maintain regular and ongoing communication with students and families. Ask for parents' input on what supports and resources are required to facilitate ongoing learning experiences. Seek genuine, authentic information that is based on the reality of the home situation. Share the link to the *My Learning at Home Parent/Caregiver Portal:* www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/mylearning/index.html.

- Use a case manager or designate as a go-to person to coordinate services. See considerations and suggestions for case managers at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/rsssn_docs/case_manager.pdf. School team planning will determine roles/responsibilities and prevent parents and students from being overwhelmed by multiple contacts from various support staff. Consider choosing the go-to person based on essential learning, priorities, or existing relationships.

- Encourage the family to develop a simple routine that would be easy to implement and manage.

Mental Health Supports

- Support families to be safe and well. Provide school counselling and divisional clinical supports as needed to support student mental health. Staff, students, parents, and caregivers can access, utilize, and share tips and resources in support of their own mental health or in support of others. These tips and resources are available under Well-Being and Mental Health Tips and Resources for Students, Families, Educators, and Others at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/index.html.

- Provide meaningful connections and reasonable expectations that provide positive learning opportunities.

- Verify that resources, services, and activities for mental health and well-being are made accessible in the context of remote learning and physical distancing. Assist with connections to outside resources as needed.

Children in Care

- Meet as soon as possible with schools to review student-specific plans, and with Child and Family Services agencies to review case plans.

- Clarify key contacts in school divisions and in foster families to establish how communication will occur for learning.

- Ensure that children in care have access to devices and materials to continue their learning. See the *Assistive Technology for Learning* brochure at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/pdf/assistive_tech.pdf.

Student-Specific Planning

- Parents/caregivers, teachers, and the students themselves, where appropriate, are encouraged to discuss the impact of the pandemic on student-specific plans and develop collaborative ways to support learning. As always, goals, strategies, and timelines outlined in the student-specific plan will be based on the student's current level of performance and will be adjusted to meet current needs and contexts.

- The standards outlined in *Standards for Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba (2022)* (available at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/aep/pdf/standards_for_student_services.pdf) and school division policy will continue to be followed.

- Programming for students with special needs and students at risk is a dynamic, interactive process that requires problem solving, teamwork, and trust among educators, students, and parents. Collaboration among home, school, and community is imperative.

Clinical and Counselling Support

- Allow for school guidance and counselling services to remain available to all students to enhance and promote learning.

- Prioritize clinician caseloads in collaboration with school teams and case managers. See considerations for school clinicians at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/rsssn_docs/clinical_support.pdf. Also, review the Canadian Centre for Child Protection guidelines for maintaining professional boundaries during remote learning at www.protectchildren.ca/pdfs/Edu_GuidelinesForTeachers_BoundariesOnline_en.pdf.

- Clinical supports are provided by professionals who are following ethical professional practice guidelines, including ensuring informed consent for the use of school division–approved and security-enhanced technology platforms, devices, and programs. Clinicians should consult with their professional college (see www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/rsssn_docs/clinical_orgs.pdf) practice guidelines for working remotely. See this sample of an authorization waiver form at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/rsssn_docs/telepractice_waiver.docx.

Students with Complex Needs

- Identify students who have complex needs and establish regular contact with families. Some examples of complex needs include students who need interdepartmental/agency supports (including Wraparound Protocol), students with profound neurodevelopmental disorders, or students who have co-occurring disorders.

- Recognize that the level of support may increase for some students during this time. Adjust plans to meet our new living/learning context. Hold regular systems meetings to coordinate and integrate supports (e.g., school, divisional, outside agencies) as much as possible. This may mean some members of the student's support team attend virtually.

Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and/or Students with Low Vision

- The *Guide for Teachers Working with Students Who Are Hard of Hearing* (found at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/rsssn_docs/guide_hard_hearing.pdf) identifies key considerations for students who are hard of hearing.

- *How to Improve Hearing Access During Virtual Meetings* www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/rsssn_docs/improve_hearing_virtual_meetings.pdf is intended to support educators to ensure the most successful virtual meeting/lesson for students who are Hard of Hearing.

- With regard to remote learning for students who are Blind/Visually Impaired (BVI) and using braille and assistive technology, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning Blind/Visually Impaired (BVI) consultants will contact case managers to determine the best way to communicate with the family and discuss required alternate format materials and assistive technology. BVI consultants will share the *Guide for Teachers Working with Students with Low Vision* (found at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/covid/docs/rsssn_docs/guide_low_vision.pdf)and identify key considerations for each student who has low vision. Consultants will provide consultation notes to the case manager.

- Alternate Formats Collection (found at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/afs/catalogue.html): Production of alternate format materials will continue as usual and will be delivered to the student's home. Public Health has stated that this is acceptable with proper handwashing, as advised for those handling paper products.

- The Assistive Technology Lending Library at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/specedu/programming/technology.html can be a consideration for supports for communication and other learning devices on a case-by-case basis, and it can assist with developing low-tech supports.

If you have any questions about the content of this document, please feel free to contact the Inclusion Support Branch, K–12 Division, Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, at ISBinfo@gov.mb.ca or 204-945-7907.