9 INCLUSION IN THE FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM

This chapter discusses the issues regarding students with special needs and their place in the French Immersion Program. In general, students with special needs have the same entitlement to be in the French Immersion Program as in any other program in any public or funded independent school in Manitoba. Student Services provided by the school and/or division/district will meet the needs of students who have exceptional learning, social, behavioural, cognitive or physical needs. Entry to the immersion program is based on parental decision.

Generally, students with special needs will do as well in the French Immersion Program as they would do in any other program provided they receive the appropriate supports. Students who spend sufficient time in the French Immersion Program are generally able to achieve a level of linguistic competency in the English language equivalent to that which they would achieve in any other program and are able to develop functional fluency in French. Students with special needs should be allowed access to the French Immersion Program.

Legal Implications

Philosophy of Inclusion

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Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth embraces a philosophy of inclusion which states:

> Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued and safe. An inclusive community consciously evolves to meet the changing needs of its members. Through recognition and support, an inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship.

> In Manitoba, we embrace inclusion as a means of enhancing the well-being of every member of the community. By working together we strengthen our capacity to provide the foundation for a richer future for all of us. (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth [MECY], *Appropriate Educational Programming Standards for Student Services*, 2006, p. 7).

The principles of inclusion encourage classroom environments where all students can be taught effectively together. In *Success for All Learners: A Handbook on Differentiating Instruction*, (1996), Manitoba Education and Training has described how classrooms are becoming more diverse as our population becomes more heterogeneous. In addressing this diversity, inclusion demands that teachers use practices such as differentiated instruction and effective professional practices, to accommodate the needs of all students.

Legal Framework

All policy and practice must comply with the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and Manitoba legislation, in particular, the *Human Rights Code* of Manitoba, the *Public Schools Act* and the *Education Administration Act*. This legislation specifies that there must be reasonable accommodation of students' special needs unless they demonstrably give rise to undue hardship due to cost, risk to safety, impact on others or other factors.

The *Public Schools Amendment Act*, (Appropriate Educational Programming) S.M. 2004, c.9, proclaimed on October 28, 2005, ensures that all Manitoba children have a right to an appropriate education in the programs offered by the school divisions/districts in which they are enrolled. Students have the right to attend the designated catchment school for their residence in a regular classroom with their peers or in a program designated by the school board if the school does not provide it. School divisions/districts are mandated to provide appropriate educational programming to students in all grades from Kindergarten to Grade 12 who are eligible to attend public and funded independent schools.

Appropriate educational programming has been defined through an extensive consultation process as: "a collaborative school-family-community process where school communities create learning environments and provide resources and services that are responsive to the lifelong learning, social and emotional needs of all students." (MECY, *Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba: A Formal Dispute Resolution Process,* 2006, p. 1).

Students who are born with or who acquire physical disabilities are easily accommodated in the French Immersion Program. Parents need to be encouraged to consider this option as it is a way to expand their child's social and cultural horizons and to give the child an added advantage later on in a greater variety of social and cultural settings and in the job market. Students with cognitive disabilities or learning disabilities will face the same issues in the French Immersion Program that they would face in the English Program. Having the ability to speak in two languages can be a very positive benefit for students.

What Does the Research Say?

To begin, it is important to mention there is a paucity of research in the area of at-risk students and the suitability of French immersion. Fred Genesse, a renowned researcher in the area of second language acquisition, was commissioned by Canadian Parents for French to write the review entitled, *French Immersion and At-Risk Students: A Review of Research Evidence.* Fortunately, coinciding with the publication of this handbook, permission to reprint segments of a review of research evidence was obtained and we have included them in this section. Because only excerpts of his review are included in this chapter, more specifically, policy implications, readers are strongly encouraged to avail themselves of the complete work if they require more information about the studies included. The complete list of studies cited by Genesee has been included in the reference list. Although Genesee concludes that more research is needed in order to draw any definitive conclusions about the suitability of French immersion for at-risk students, he offers some policy implications to help parents, teachers and educators make decisions about students who are at-risk for or who are experiencing difficulty in immersion. Following is the introduction to his review as well as the policy implications he proposes.

> The purpose of the present report is to review the results of research on (1) the suitability of French immersion for students with special educational needs and low levels of academic ability, and (2) interventions and strategies for meeting the educational needs of such students. With respect to students with low levels of academic ability, research was identified that examined immersion students with low levels of intelligence as measured by standardized IQ tests (Genesee, 1976) and students who were identified by school personnel as having academic difficulty (Bruck, 1985, a, b; Trites & Price, 1978/79). With respect to students with special education needs, the literature search identified studies on students who had language impairment (Bruck, 1978, 1982) and students at-risk for or with reading impairment. For purposes of this review, "at risk" is used generically to refer to all of these kinds of students – those with language, literacy and academic difficulties or who are likely to experience such difficulties whether they stem from what might be considered clinical factors (reading disability or language impairment) or non-clinical factors (generally low levels of academic ability). No research on students with other kinds of learning disabilities or special needs, such as those resulting from hearing and visual impairments or severe cognitive impairments, was identified in the literature search.
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> Numerous researchers, educators, and parents have expressed concerns about the suitability of immersion for students who are at-risk for poor academic performance in immersion owing to below average levels of academic ability, learning disabilities, or first language difficulties (Bruck, 1978; Calvé, 1991; Genesee, 2004; Hayden, 1988; Lapkin, Swain & Shapson, 1990; Majhanovich, 1993; Mannavarayan, 2002; Murtagh, 1993/94; Obadia & Thériault, 1997; Trites & Price, 1978-79; among others). It is often

reported that students who are expected to have difficulty in immersion for such reasons are discouraged from registering in immersion and/or are counseled out if they experience difficulty in the program. There are a number of important educational, ethical, and legal questions at issue when it comes to including students in immersion who are at-risk for or have a learning disability or are otherwise prone to academic difficulties in immersion.

Policy Implications

While acknowledging the need for further research on all aspects of the suitability of immersion for at-risk students, we must also acknowledge the immediate need of parents, teachers, and educational professionals to make important decisions about students who are at risk for or who are experiencing difficulty in immersion owing to language or learning disabilities or other special needs. In response to this need, the following policy implications are offered while at the same time it is acknowledged that we currently lack definitive information with respect to most of these policy issues.

(1) Should at-risk students or students with identified disabilities (language or cognitive, for example) be discouraged (or actually disqualified) from enrolling in French immersion programs because it would seriously jeopardize their basic education?

Research evidence that students who are experiencing academic difficulty in immersion due to low levels of academic ability or language or reading impairment or who are at-risk for academic difficulty in immersion for these reasons is scant at best and methodologically weak. Reports of improvements in the performance of immersion students who transfer to all-English programs do not necessarily imply that immersion students who are experiencing academic difficulty should transfer because none of these studies included control groups of students with academic difficulty who remained in immersion and none compared the performance of students who transferred with that of immersion students with academic difficulty who remained in immersion and received additional support. In sum, while it is still possible that immersion is not suitable for some students, at present, the evidence does not allow us to identify beforehand who these students are.

Research evidence that students who are at-risk for or are experiencing academic difficulty can benefit from immersion is more substantial, albeit limited. In particular, research by Genesee and by Bruck, with respect to both low academic ability and language impairment indicates that such students are not at differentially greater risk in immersion than similar students in all-English programs. To the contrary, it appears that at-risk students with academic and language learning challenges can acquire substantial communicative competence in French while maintaining parity in their academic and first language development with similarly challenged students in all-English programs. Studies that have examined at-risk and poor readers in immersion report that there are significant cross-linguistic correlations between the predictors of reading ability; in other words, students who are good readers in English are likely to be good readers in French, and poor readers in

English are likely to be poor readers in French. The reading studies provide no evidence to support the argument that students at-risk for reading difficulty are likely to be at differentially greater risk in immersion.

(2) Is it possible to identify students who are at-risk for language and academic difficulty in immersion prior to or at school entry? In other words, do we have the requisite empirical knowledge to devise reliable and valid diagnostic instruments for this purpose?

Research on second language reading acquisition in both French immersion and English-as-a-second language contexts suggests that indicators of early reading acquisition, or word decoding, could be used to identify immersion students who are at risk for early reading difficulty in French in immersion programs. We currently lack adequate information to know if predictors of risk for language impairment in English are equally predictive of risk for language impairment in French-as-a-second language, although research by Paradis et al. (2003) and by Gutierrez-Clellen, Wagner, & Simón-Cereijido (2006) would suggest they are. We also lack evidence concerning the diagnosis of other forms of learning disability in the case of French immersion students.

(3) Are some forms of immersion more suitable for certain at-risk students than other programs; for example, Trites (1978) and Wiss (1989) have suggested that late immersion may be more suitable than early immersion for students with learning disabilities that are due to developmental lags.

At present, we lack adequate empirical evidence to determine this.

(4) If a student is identified as learning disabled, language or reading impaired, or experiencing academic difficulty in immersion for other reasons AFTER enrolling in the program, should such a student be transferred to an English program? At what grade level would it be appropriate to transfer such a student and what kinds of follow-up support should he/she receive in the English program?

At present, we lack adequate empirical evidence to answer these questions confidently. Evidence, although somewhat inconsistent, suggests that transfer to an all-English program can be beneficial for students experiencing difficulty in immersion; but, this does not mean that transfer is the only or optimal response to such cases since it may have been additional services in English rather than transfer to English per se that benefited the students who switched; arguably, students experiencing difficulty in immersion would also benefit from additional support, but this is seldom provided. We do not know at what grade level transfer would be most beneficial; nor do we know what kind of follow-up support would be most beneficial. That follow-up support is advisable is suggested by Bruck's research on students who switch out of immersion.

(5) If students who are at-risk for academic difficulty or who are experiencing difficulty are retained in immersion programs, what kinds of additional support are required to meet their specific needs and in what language(s) should it be provided (in English, in French, or in both)?

Available evidence suggests that intervention for students who are experiencing difficulty in immersion can be effective. However, we currently lack sufficient information to determine how effective intervention can be because current research has not always included appropriate control groups. Nor do we know what constitutes effective intervention. At the same time, research on students who are at-risk for reading difficulty in immersion, as well as reviews of research on literacy development in second language learners (August & Shanahan, 2006; Genesee, et al., 2006), suggests that the same kinds of intervention that are appropriate and effective for students learning to read in their first language would be effective for students learning to read in French-as-a-second language. However, research is needed to examine this issue directly. The reading research also suggests that intervention in French or in English could be effective in supporting immersion students who are at risk for reading difficulty. We lack evidence to know what would be effective for students who are at risk for or who are experiencing other kinds disabilities.

(6) What professional competencies should immersion teachers and other professionals who provide special services to immersion students have in order to provide appropriate and effective instruction for students with special needs in immersion?

While a response to this question goes beyond research evidence per se and calls for input from a broad range of researchers and education professionals, some general suggestions are made here. Obviously, greater awareness of the extant evidence on the performance of students who are at-risk for or who are experiencing language and reading impairment, along with an understanding of the limitations and generalizability of this research, could be of use to immersion teachers in their day-to-day work as well as to education professionals in making recommendations with respect to individual children. Increased knowledge of interventions that are effective for first language readers and are likely to be effective for second language readers could also be useful. Arguably, a broader understanding of language development, second language learning and teaching, first and second language reading acquisition, and assessment of bilingual students could all be beneficial. Finally, increased knowledge of assessment methods to identify students who are at-risk or are experiencing reading, language or other forms of learning impairment could be useful.

Before ending, it is important to consider socio-cultural and family variables. Arguably, the need to learn and use French in such areas as Montreal, for example, is greater and more immediate than in settings where there are few or no francophones. Learning both French and English in school is also, arguably, more important for students in families with dual ethnolinguistic heritage. Thus, decisions to recruit, retain and support at-risk students in immersion might be different if they

have dual ethnolinguistic backgrounds or live in bilingual or francophone regions of the country. As noted earlier, there are also advantages to being bilingual as a result of globalization of communication and the economy and, thus, policies with respect to the inclusion of at-risk students in immersion go beyond local and even national considerations. Of course, consideration must always be given to individual learner profiles and circumstances. Thus, it is advisable to monitor the performance of at-risk immersion students on a regular basis in order to determine if their participation in immersion should be re-evaluated. Evidence that a particular student is happy and progressing in accordance with his or her individual capacities despite difficulty would support continuation in immersion; evidence that a student is experiencing difficulty in language, reading or academic domains and is having difficulty coping with his or her difficulties would call for a re-assessment of the student's participation in immersion. An additional important consideration should be the child's sense of well being as well as their actual success in immersion. Students who are unhappy in immersion or feel that learning through French is a burden are serious candidates for transfer, even though they might be doing well academically. In any case, a general policy regarding the recruitment and retention of students who are at risk or are experiencing difficulty in immersion should make provisions for decision-making on a case-by-case basis, with periodic re-assessment of progress by students who are considered to be at-risk or who have a learning disability. At present, we lack sufficient evidence to exclude students on the basis of specific risk or impairment profiles. (Genesee, in press)

F. Genesee. « French Immersion and At-risk Students: A Review of Research Evidence », *Canadian Modern Language Review*. University of Toronto Press, vol. 63, no. 5. 2007. http://www.utpjournals.com
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Appropriate Educational Programming for Students in French Immersion in Manitoba

The Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth document, *Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba: Standards for Student Services* (2006) embodies the spirit of human rights legislation and regulations, elaborates upon the education regulations and establishes standards for school divisions which are applicable in all programs, including the French Immersion Program. An inclusive learning environment is one in which all students can learn, grow, be accepted and enjoy the benefits of citizenship. School communities develop plans for the full diversity of their student population. Collaboration among home, school and community is imperative. Core values and beliefs in an inclusive French Immersion Program include:

- Immersion students come from diverse backgrounds and want their differences respected.

- Learning takes place in different places and locations.

- Immersion students have the right to appropriate educational programming.

- The provincial French immersion curriculum should be the starting point for educational programming.
- Parents and students must be involved in the individual education planning process.
- The Individual Education Plan is the basis for decision-making for students with exceptional learning needs in French immersion.
- The number of individuals involved in a student's planning will increase as the complexity of the needs increases.

Access

Access to learning for all students should be maximized in consideration of universal design principles in all planning processes. School divisions/districts must make reasonable efforts to accommodate all learners within the French Immersion Program, ensuring that physical barriers are removed, and that all activities are designed to reasonably accommodate the needs of all students. School divisions/districts should provide direction for staff and parents on how to reasonably accommodate the needs of all students, including direction on:

- access to information;
- procedures;
- roles and responsibilities;
- the continuum of programming available in the school division/district;
- transportation; and
- a process for dispute resolution (MECY, *Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba: Standards for Student Services*, 2006, p. 11).

Administrators play an important role in promoting the French Immersion Program as a program for all students. Administrators should make available to the public descriptions of programming options and available services within French immersion for students with exceptional learning needs. Administrators must ensure that appropriate supports are in place for all students to succeed. These support systems include supports for the special needs of students such as physical accommodations, resource and counseling, access to specialized services, library resources, French language software for computers, and all other resources that are available to students in other programs. Some students will require accommodation such as adaptations, curricular modifications or individualized programming to support their learning.

Early Identification

Students with exceptional learning needs should be identified as early as possible. School divisions/districts should outline a process for identifying exceptional learning needs and a process to be followed when students are either not meeting or exceeding the expected learning outcomes as identified in the regular French immersion curriculum and including social/emotional, behavioural, sensory, physical, cognitive/intellectual, communication, academic and health outcomes.

Procedures to Consider

Administrators should ensure that local French immersion policies and procedures

- Include all persons
- Respect the rights and needs of all persons
- Intentionally avoid negative outcomes
- Reflect the goals of equity and fairness for all (Manitoba Family Services and Housing, *Full Citizenship: A Manitoba Provincial Strategy on Disability,* 2001, Appendix).

In the case of a student who is beginning to experience difficulties in school, communication with the home is essential. Parents are a tremendous resource when it comes to identifying and understanding their child's needs and well-informed and supported parents are an educator's best allies in supporting and working with students in order to meet their differing needs.

Some of the questions to be asked may include:

- Has the student recently had a hearing test or a vision test?
- Is there anything the school needs to know that could be influencing the student's engagement at school?
- Is anything happening at home to account for the fact that a student is more tired, more stressed or having difficulty engaging in learning at school?
- Is the student looking forward to coming to school and if not, why not?
- How are the parents attempting to address these issues at home?
- Does the student need extra help in a particular area?
- Does the student have a sense of belonging?

Questions the parents may want to explore with the school include:

- Is the classroom a secure environment for my child?
- Is my child confident about being successful?
- Is the material being presented relevant, authentic and of interest to the learner?
- Does my child have opportunities to interact with the language?
- Is my child doing better in some subject areas than in others?
- What can I do to support my child's learning at home?

A school-based student services support team approach may include the involvement of many professionals in communication and collaboration with the parents. The team will designate a case manager, assess the student's needs and begin to build in programming support to accommodate the student's needs within the regular curriculum in the classroom. Appropriate adaptations will be made to the student's program, and if deemed necessary, specialists will be consulted and an individual education plan will be put into place.

Assessment

In accordance with the *Public Schools Act*, Manitoba school divisions/districts have an obligation to conduct regular assessments of student learning and to report to parents at the regular reporting periods. Student assessment may take the form of teacher observation, portfolios, outcome rubrics, classroom testing and provincial assessments. Information gathered by the classroom teacher is the first source of information regarding student learning (MR155/05). The resource teacher may routinely test students to further assist the classroom teacher. Some students may require further individualized assessment, or specialized assessment.

In the case of specialized assessments, school divisions/districts must ensure that parental permission is obtained, that assessments are conducted by qualified professionals, and that the results are interpreted meaningfully to teachers and parents to inform programming decisions (MR 155/05).

When an in-school team is unable to assess why a student is having difficulty meeting the learning outcomes, it is the administrator's responsibility to ensure that the student is referred for specialized assessment as soon as reasonably possible. To move in that direction, the administrator will have some evidence that the student cannot meet learning outcomes with differentiated instruction and adaptation. Principals should ensure that professionals who assess students in the French Immersion Program are familiar with research on second language acquisition. This information will be taken into account by the school team making recommendations for further action.

Planning in Education

Student Services Planning

Manitoba school divisions/districts are required to engage in a process of educational planning and to report on progress toward meeting identified outcomes annually (PSA 41(1), 58.1, 58.6). It is important to involve the parents, the community and the students in planning. Progress reports to the community must include reporting on:

- Supports and services available to students;
- Information on how to access supports and services; and
- Information on expenditures related to student services.

Educational planning includes school division/district, school, classroom and students-specific planning. Student services teams develop a profile of the needs of students in the school, and ensure that systems are put in place to meet their diverse needs.

Individual Education Planning

School divisions/districts may develop student-specific plans where students do not require individualized programming. These plans outline processes for meeting learning outcomes in the regular curriculum or outline interventions or support required in the regular curriculum in the areas of health care, remediation or technological adaptations. Parents should be included in the planning and progress should be monitored, documented and reported to parents.

An individual education planning process should occur when a school team has identified that a student in the French Immersion Program has exceptional learning needs that require student-specific outcomes that are additions to, are different from, or exceed the curricular outcomes. To the extent possible, the Individual Education Plan (IEP) should be based on the curriculum and should consider classroom activities to promote inclusion.

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth requires an IEP when:

- it is not reasonable to expect the pupil to meet or approximate the expected learning outcomes;

- a student receives Special Needs Funding Level II or III; and

- a student is determined to be eligible for the English as Second Language (E) designation, the Modified (M) course designation or the Individualized Programming (I) designation in Grades 9-12.

  (*Appropriate Educational Programming: Standards for Student Services*, 2006, p. 16.)

School divisions/districts shall provide the opportunity for parents to participate and shall, whenever possible, include students in all decisions affecting their education including the development and implementation of IEPs. Parents are entitled to receive progress reports identifying progress in relation to targeted curriculum outcomes at all regular reporting periods and whenever a significant programming change occurs. School administrators are responsible for ensuring that IEPs are prepared annually and that they are consistent with provincial protocols on transition to and from school. School administrators are also responsible for ensuring that a student's parents and the student, if appropriate, are given the opportunity to participate in preparing and updating the student's IEP and to be accompanied and assisted by a person of their choosing.

In cases where it is deemed that a student requires an IEP, please consult Manitoba Education and Training, (1998), *Individual Education Planning: A Handbook for Developing and Implementing IEPs, Early to Senior Years*, at **http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/K12/specedu/iep/**

The 10 steps of the planning process:

- Establish a team
- Establish the focus for planning
- Collect and analyze data
- Establish a vision
- Develop a mission statement
- Establish strategic goals and objectives/key questions
- Develop an action plan
- Implement and communicate the action plan
- Monitor and evaluate the plan
- Reflect and celebrate

The planning process will not always follow these steps in order and number may depend on circumstances.

Manitoba Education, Training and Youth. (2001). Supporting Inclusive Schools – A Handbook for Student Services.

Student Support Team

Coordinated Services

For some students who have exceptional learning needs, it is not unusual for health, law enforcement agencies or other government departments to work in collaboration with education in an inter-agency or coordinated planning process. The Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet has signed interdepartmental agreements directing their departments to participate in a collaborative process for students who:

- have exceptional learning needs;
- are in the care of child welfare;
- have special health-care needs;
- are involved in youth justice issues; and
- have profound emotional and behavioural difficulties.

(MECY, *Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba: Standards for Student Services*, 2006, p. 21.)

School divisions/districts shall:

- make reasonable efforts to plan with community agencies, organizations and associations, other education authorities, and regional health and children's services authorities to support appropriate educational programming for students (MR 155/05)
- ensure that all teaching, professional (clinical/resource) and support staff are aware of the access and privacy provisions of the PSA, FIPPA, PHIA and the YCJA and comply with the requirements of these Acts and with the policies established by the board. (MECY, *Manitoba Pupil File Guidelines*, 2004, p. 7.)

Professional Support

Staff in the Manitoba school divisions/districts must accommodate the diverse needs of all students. As the employing authority, school divisions/districts are responsible for ensuring that staff have, or can develop, the skills needed to meet the identified needs of the student population. Teachers have a professional responsibility to engage in ongoing professional development.

Hiring processes should ensure that all staff have, or are provided with an understanding of inclusive education as well as an excellent knowledge of differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all students. In the French Immersion Program, this includes a belief that all students can succeed in immersion.
Peer collaboration should be facilitated through the time-tabling of planning meetings, opportunities for co-teaching, consultation regarding behaviour or instructional strategies, opportunities to meet with teaching assistants and ongoing training and support. A climate of trust, active resolution of conflict and the pursuit of common goals are the characteristics of good teams.

Educational Assistants

Educational assistants are non-teaching support personnel assigned to support the classroom teacher, and are not to assume the professional duties of the teacher. While these assistants may be trained to respond to the medical needs of students or to assist in managing behaviour, the classroom teacher remains responsible for the educational programming of all students in the classroom. Educational assistants, with appropriate training and under the supervision of a teacher may help with many classroom tasks, including material preparation, data collection and supervision of review activities. In the French Immersion Program, bilingual educational assistants help to reinforce French language learning and enhance inclusion.

Transition Planning

Students with special needs frequently experience difficulty in making transitions. The new situations faced because of life changes such as entering or leaving school require a specialized plan.

There are many types of transitions:

- entering the school system;
- moving between activities and settings; and
- moving from level to level.

Beginning School

Entering the school system is an important event in a young child's life. Much of a child's future success in school depends on the transition into school. Typically parents contact the school in the spring of the year prior to enrolment. If special supports and programming are required for a child, a one-year notification period is advised. A longer notification period may be needed if physical changes to the school or classroom setting are required. This timeframe allows the division/district to prepare any extra supports necessary to meet the child's needs.

Guidelines for Early Childhood Transition to School for Children with Special Needs (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2002) is a protocol designed to facilitate information sharing and collaborative planning between community-based agencies working with pre-school children with special needs and the school system prior to the child enrolling. The goal is to ensure continuity of appropriate supports.

Guidelines for Early Childhood Transition to School for Children with Special Needs (Healthy Child Manitoba, 2002) was developed in partnership with Manitoba Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism, Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, Manitoba Family Services and Housing, Manitoba Health, Manitoba Justice, Status of Women.

The guidelines are based on the belief that those who know children with special needs well, their family, pre-school service providers and support agencies are the most effective people to work with school personnel to ensure a successful transition into the school system. The guidelines encourage collaboration among participants in the transition – the child, the family, sending and receiving service providers – and introduce a process of long-range planning. The roles and responsibilities of each partner in the transition are described and forms to assist information sharing (*Early Years Transition Planning Inventory and Authorization of Exchange of Information*) are included.

The benefits of transition planning prior to school entry include:

1. continuity of programs that suit the child's development and learning;

2. involvement of parents in the transition process, including choices of programs and services. Participation in a step-by-step process will help alleviate the anxiety and stress of change;

3. continuity of interventions from pre-school to school;

4. preparation within the school system to receive students with special needs, including professional development of staff; and

5. long-range planning of supports and services the child will require (personnel, environmental modifications, professional development) in the school system.

The exchange of information between all partners will support the transition to school.

Transition between Activities and Settings

Students with special needs often have difficulty when a regular routine is disrupted. The key is to ensure they are prepared for change before it occurs. This may be accomplished through several strategies.

•   Let the students know well in advance of schedule changes.

•   Ensure students know of an impending change in their daily schedule (e.g., a fire drill). Provide clear, concise instructions to prepare for the change.

•   Create schedules students can refer to frequently so that they know what is coming up in the day.

•   Help students organize materials required for the next activity.

•   Develop a strategy for use when the teacher is away and a substitute is in the room.

For some students, the staff will need to use a structured routine that includes:

- providing a signal or cue that an activity is changing;
- reviewing the routine for the new activity that is changing;
- stating the actions that are required; and
- assisting students (as needed) in the transition.

Transition between Schools

When preparing for the transition between school levels (e.g., from an Early Years school to a Middle Years school), it is necessary to prepare the student and the receiving school. Preparation should begin in early spring.

Processes to provide written documents on all students' transitions between levels have been used successfully in many schools. Documents usually include profiles of students and information regarding their academic progress, behaviour, vision, hearing and special requirements.

A student may be moving from a treatment centre or special program into a regular school or classroom. This may occur after the student has spent a short time in the alternate setting or after several months or years. Careful planning helps ensure success.

KEY STEPS

1. Arrange transition meeting.
2. Share information.
3. Arrange a tour of the new school.
4. Develop a plan with student's input.
5. Involve key contacts.
6. Start slowly to ensure success.

It is up to the planning team to establish a strategy that best suits the individual needs of each student. It is this plan that will set the stage for success.

Important Considerations for Postsecondary Planning for Students with Special Needs

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Where possible, if a student is able to complete programming within the regular curriculum, a student with special needs will graduate with a regular provincial diploma and go on to postsecondary studies in the student's area of choice. Universities and colleges are becoming more able to accommodate the physical and learning needs of students. In order to acquire and maintain adult functional fluency in French, it is essential to continue to use the French language on a regular basis.

In the case of a French immersion student who will likely graduate with a Modified (M) or an Individualized (I) program designation, transition planning should begin when the student enters high school so programs or service agencies are involved in a timely manner. Collaborative planning for a student with special needs, requiring government support (financial, residential, social and/or vocational) after leaving school, necessitates intensive and coordinated planning because of the need for long-term support for further education, employment and adult living possibilities.

Typically, when students with special needs reach 18, a children's worker formally transfers case responsibility to an adult worker. Universities and colleges have begun to accommodate students with cognitive disabilities particularly to those who demonstrate a particular strength or interest in a specific subject area. Depending on the community in which the student lives, there may also be a variety of supported employment and supported living opportunities. It is important to identify strengths and interests and to plan well in advance. To this end, *Manitoba Transition Planning Process Support Guidelines for Students with Special Needs Reaching Age 16* (1999) outlines individual transition planning processes, agency interaction roles and timelines and provides resource information about strategies and current best practices to assist with transition planning.

In conclusion, the French Immersion Program is a program designed to meet the needs of all students. Students with exceptional learning needs should experience school as much as possible like their peers without special needs in any public education program. Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth is committed to fostering inclusion for all people. With collaboration between the home, the educational team and the community, all students should be able to meet their full potential.

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