

**Success in School for Children and Youth
in Care (SIS):
PROVINCIAL PROTOCOL FRAMEWORK**

TEACHER HANDOUT



Your Learning Support Teacher focused on Inclusive Education can help you with your Success in School plans for any of your students in care.

Package contents:

This package includes various pieces of information about Success in School and working together to support students in care, tip sheets, and information sheets.

We have included the following documents in this package:

- Success in School: Provincial Protocol Framework
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Provincial data guiding this work
- Tips for Educators
- Working Together Successfully
- Tips for Helping Young People to Advocate for Themselves
- Enhancing Success in Schools- An Adult Perspective

Success in School: Provincial Protocol Framework

Success in School for Children and Youth in Care – Provincial Protocol Framework (PPF) is a joint initiative between Alberta Education and Children and Youth Services (CYS) to support children and youth in care.

Currently, educational achievement results for children and youth in care lag behind those for the general student population. Significantly more children and youth in care drop out of school, do poorly on achievement tests, fall farther behind in school as they get older, and are less likely to graduate from high school compared to students in the general population.

Education and CYS work together at the local level with the child/youth, their caregivers and other appropriate partners to share information and create a Success in School plan that allows the whole team to be involved in decision-making and planning to support school success for children and youth in care.

Core Values:

- Children and youth in care must be valued, accepted, cared for, supported, and treated with dignity and respect. They should not be stigmatized or labeled.
- Confidentiality must be maintained and the dignity of children and youth in care must be preserved.
- Aboriginal children/youth in care as well as those from other ethnic and multicultural groups, receive the cultural supports they need for success in school.
- Children and youth in care require access to appropriate supports to succeed in school.
- Children and youth in care have the right to be involved in decisions that affect them, as appropriate to their age, developmental status and cognitive ability.
- The needs of the children and youth in care must be central to all planning and plans must be individualized according to each child/youth's unique situation.
- The core team and all partners are important, valued and respected and share responsibility to support success in school for children and youth in care.

| School Point Person's Role | Caseworker's Role |
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| <p>Before the initial Success in School meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the student is new, work with the caregiver or caseworker to obtain information (i.e., student's performance, strengths and needs from staff at the previous school). • Work to find a placement and program for this student. This information is communicated to the caseworker and caregiver. • Work collaboratively with the caseworker to make an initial contact with the caregiver (group home/foster parent) and others that are important in the student's life and may be members of the core learning team. • Work with teaching staff/ paraprofessionals /administrators within the school to identify the learning team and work with the caregiver, caseworker and/or other service providers and the student to identify other core team members external to the school. Gather input for use in determining potential goals/strategies to increase success in school. • Discuss the success plan development process with the student and encourage them to actively participate as part of the team. • Schedule the core team meeting in sufficient time to complete the success plan within 8 weeks of the student's enrolment in school. <p>Success in Schools Plan meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team introductions (share names, role they play in the student's life, their hopes for the student in the coming year). • Student (caseworker or caregiver if the student is not present) gives his/her story, and talks about what his/her goals are for the coming year including academic, social, activity, work experience or other areas of participation in the school community. He/she also identify concerns he/she has (what doesn't work for him/her, fears, etc.) so that team members can ensure the student is comfortable and | <p>Before the initial Success in School meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caseworker contacts school point person to register child/youth in school and provide basic information (i.e., the previous school program, placement, contact information and identification of special needs, relevant assessment data as well as caregiver information, and contact information for any service providers that should be included as part of the core team). • Discuss the success plan development process with the student and encourage them to actively participate as part of the team. • Discuss the success plan development process with the student and encourage them to actively participate as part of the team. • Assist with scheduling to meet with the core team in sufficient time to complete the success plan within 8 weeks of the student's enrolment in school. <p>Success in Schools Plan meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet for and participate in Success in School Plan creation • Meet with the learning team members at least twice during the school year to review progress toward goals identified in the Success in School Plan, to problem solve, to identify accomplishments and/or to identify effective practices to celebrate and make modifications to the plan, as required. • Inform the caregiver and school of impending moves or changes to in-care status and request that the school provides a progress report prior to the student |

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| <p>feels supported.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All team members provide their perspectives on goals to assist the student to be successful at school during the school year. • The team identifies the most important 2 or 3 goals – those goals that make the most significant impact on creating success for the student and to develop one or two strategies that are reasonable, doable and directly focused on achieving the goal or outcome they are designed to address (check with the student and caregiver to ensure they feel their issues, concerns or perspectives have been included in the goal and strategy development) • Once goals and strategies have been identified, the team members create measures and targets and provide evidence or progress or goal attainment. Then the team agrees on the methods that will be used to collect evidence and the frequency with which this data will be collected. • Team members discuss communication strategies and determine the methods to be used to communicate student progress, accomplishments to celebrate, and problem resolution for issues that arise. • A meeting date to review implementation of the plan is set with core team members. | <p>moving schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition meetings are planned and facilitated through the school point person or caseworker to maximize success and minimize adjustment difficulties. • Students, caregivers and other core team members are engaged in transition planning along with caseworkers and school point persons/staff. |
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Provincial data findings that indicate:



- Significantly more children and youth in care drop out of school, do poorly on provincial achievement tests, fall farther behind in school as they get older, and are less likely to graduate from high school, compared to students in the general population.
- The baseline provincial data indicates that over 50% of children and youth in care have an assigned special education code as determined by Alberta Education criteria.

Consultation with children and youth in care and stakeholder groups that indicate:

- **Children and youth in care often feel stigmatized, labeled and disconnected.**
- **Children and youth in care have special academic, emotional and behavioral needs** as a result of their circumstances, which are often compounded by pressures of adolescence such as negative peer groups, cliques, bullying, discrimination, racism, alcohol/drugs, teen pregnancy, and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.
- **A lack of teamwork, information sharing, communication, and planning** among caseworkers, school staff, and caregivers contributes to poor school results for children and youth in care.
- **Placements impact school outcomes:** Changes to placements of children/youth in care often lead to school changes, feelings of disconnection and a lack of stability that adversely affects success in school. Youth residing in independent living situations frequently have a reduced focus on education, which may contribute to school dropout.

A review of current literature that indicate:

- Quality early learning experiences support future school success
- Mobility, resulting in school moves, impacts high school completion
- Strong literacy skills support school achievement
- Grade retention is linked to lower school completion rates
- Parent involvement in school supports school success
- Prevention of child maltreatment promotes success in school
- Positive engagement with school correlates to academic achievement
- Youth in care may require additional time to complete high school

For more information:

<http://education.alberta.ca/admin/crossministry/ppf.aspx>

Success In School For Children and Youth In Care

Tips For Educators

Educators can have a significant impact on improving results for young people in provincial government care by working with caseworkers, caregivers and the students themselves, to plan and implement strategies for success. With the adults in their lives demonstrating understanding, realistic expectations and compassion for them, students in care can experience increased success in school and life.

Compared to the general student population, children and youth in care do poorly on Provincial Achievement Tests, fall farther behind in school or drop out as they get older, and are less likely to graduate from high school. When children and youth in care speak about their school experience, many share that they feel stigmatized, labelled and disconnected. As with other students, they also say they want to succeed in school and have adults in their lives who care, support, mentor and advocate for them.

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Youth in Care Say...

- *“Just knowing that someone at school cares about me makes all the difference.”*
- *“Please try to find out what is ‘right’ with me. Sometimes, when you are in care, people are trying to figure out what’s ‘wrong’ with you, and I would like them to find out what’s ‘right.’”*

■ *“I often feel like teachers don’t expect me to succeed. Please set the bar high, and support me in reaching it.”*

■ *“Switching schools is never easy. Please allow me time to adjust and wait until we get to know each other before doing an assessment to see where I am at.”*

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How Can I Support Educational Success for Young People in Care?

LISTEN, SUPPORT AND CARE:

- School staff who make an extra effort to build a relationship with young people in care can have a tremendous positive impact on their success in school. Young people in care want and need to have supportive adults in their lives who they can count on to provide stability. Young people in care want to be shown love, dignity, and respect, and to have a voice in decisions affecting them.
- Identify one or more caring adults in the school who can commit to touching base regularly with the young person, and who will help him focus on his strengths and abilities.
- Involve the student in her educational plan, envisioning short and long term goals and identifying her strengths and needs.
- Students in care say that when they want help, they would like the adults to pull them aside and speak privately with them about what they might need, rather than being offered the help in front of their peers.
- Make positive phone calls, celebrate successes, and set up positive contracts for school success in areas such as attendance, behaviour or achievement.
- Talk with the student and help him connect to activities that interest him.
- Encourage and support positive relationships with peers in and out school.

PROVIDE A POSITIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT:

- Plan ahead for transition times and offer additional support if needed. Consider having a “buddy” for a new student, who will show her around the school and share time with her at recess, lunch and other times.
- Young people in care, of all ages, have emphasized they just want to be “normal” and treated like everyone else. They do not want to be labelled, judged or singled out as being a young person in care.
- If a new student in care is registered, gather as much information as possible about past academic achievement, enrolled courses, assessments and any special programming needs to help with planning and academic continuity.
- Encourage and support the young person in care to become involved in extra-curricular activities. If there are problems with costs or transportation, work with the core team to help resolve those problems.
- Offer cultural alternatives for students in care, if appropriate. For example, some students may benefit from having a community elder provide guidance and support.
- If a student in care is suddenly moved to a new school, try to arrange an opportunity for them to return to their old school to collect phone numbers or email addresses, and say good-bye to their friends and teachers. Alternatively, have the class create farewell pictures or write notes to the student.

BE FLEXIBLE:

- Allow for as much continuity as possible from one school to another in terms of coursework so they do not lose high school credits due to mid-year school changes.
- Help the young people in care set realistic, achievable goals, without underestimating their abilities.
- Help young people in care participate in school field trips and extra-curricular activities by contacting the caseworker or caregiver if there is a question about obtaining required fees or consents.
- Help to maintain young people in care in their home school whenever possible. If a foster home placement changes, assist the caseworker to do whatever is possible to ensure the young person can remain at the school until a natural break.

A Message from Caseworkers to Educators

You are an important part of the team because you can best address the young person's learning strengths and needs, observe and influence their social interactions and influence the way that a young person views lifelong learning. You spend a large part of every day with the child or youth.

As the caseworker, I play a pivotal role in supporting a young person in care with school success and in working with the core team. I have general information about the needs of children and youth in care, and specific information about individual young people in care. I have legal authority to make important decisions on behalf of the child or youth in care.

When working with me, please understand that at times, I have to make difficult decisions based on the safety of the young person, while considering policy, the legal requirements, and resources available. While I try to find the least disruptive option, sometimes I am required to move young people to new placements, a new school or return them to their biological home.

Please remember that I am often out of the office responding to emergent situations or meeting with children, youth and families. It is helpful when you leave messages or email me. Please give me as much notice and information as possible about what you and the young person need, so that I can respond within the time required. If I cannot be reached and there is an emergent need, please press zero and ask for a backup worker or supervisor. In an after-hours emergency you may need to call the **Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-387-5437**.

I understand that educators and caregivers play a critical role in helping to keep young people in care safe and supported for success. Thanks for all you do.

A Message from Caregivers to Educators

I am an important part of the team because I spend my days with this young person. I know about his wishes and aspirations. I wake up and comfort him when he is distraught in the middle of the night. I supervise his phone calls with his parents and his day-to-day activities. I support him as he comes to grips with any issues he faces, and celebrate with him when things go well.

When working with me, please understand that I am an important resource for you. I am a part of the team. And, at the end of the day, when all is said and done, we all need to work together to overcome challenges and address the young person's needs. I am willing to help you to understand the young person's needs from my perspective, as we work together.

Success In School For Children and Youth In Care

Working Together Successfully

WORK TOGETHER TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER:

One measure of successful core team collaboration is evident when the child or youth in care is adapting and thriving in school and in life. Creating a successful core team takes time, effort and commitment. The relationships that we create are strongest when built upon trust, knowledge and common goals. Everyone involved is impacted in a positive way through the creation of powerful relationships and collaborations. Such relationships are critical for helping young people in care.

The student's strengths, needs, hopes and dreams help to determine who should participate in collaborative team meetings. Team members surrounding the young person in care can include a variety of people such as the caseworker, caregiver(s), families, school point person, school principal, counsellor, classroom teacher and others as appropriate. Some students may wish to include a person they feel close to as part of their team, such as a trusted teacher, support staff, coach, friend or community member. By helping children and youth in care in a positive and proactive way, the team is not only helping to prevent crises in their lives but also helping the students become independent, capable, confident individuals who experience success in school and in life.

The following strategies are based on research and successful practices and are intended to assist communities and teams as they plan together to help young people in care.

BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS:

- Host a get-together with local agencies that serve children, youth and families to connect and share information about roles and responsibilities.
- Talk with each other and learn about your partners' work. Confirm your joint commitment to collaborate in helping students in care be successful in school.
- Agree to involve and listen to young people in care, and set goals and objectives with them.
- Evaluate progress regularly and work on issues or conflicts that may occur.
- Build trust by sharing successes through notes, phone calls, e-mails, etc., and by meeting regularly to celebrate those successes.

SHARE INFORMATION:

- Talk about information sharing issues and constraints ahead of time.
- Discuss your roles and mandates in regards to sharing information. The cross-sector Information Sharing Guideline (<http://infosharing.gov.ab.ca/home/publications.cfm>) is an excellent resource for the team as members work to understand and resolve information sharing questions.
- Share information about the strengths and challenges of the young person in care from each person's or system's perspective. Determine methods to share information on an ongoing basis.
- Sharing information about past assessments, school experiences, critical incidents and medical diagnosis is critical for supporting appropriate school programming decisions. Such information can also help to provide supports for the young person at home and in the community.
- Where appropriate, share information about significant experiences in the young person's life so the team can better understand difficult behaviours or emergent needs.
- To ensure appropriate levels of supervision and protection of all, it is important to share current or prior behavioural needs that may pose a risk to the young person in care or someone else.
- Discuss other community resources that can be accessed to support the young person.
- Inform the team about any caseworker or caregiver change and provide contact information.

PREPARE THE STUDENT IN CARE FOR TEAM MEETINGS:

- Have a trusted adult talk with the student in care prior to the collaborative team meeting to explain the purpose of the meeting and reinforce that this a meeting to plan for the student's success. Remind the student that his input to the meeting is important to help make school a positive experience.
- Ask the young person about aspects of school she likes and about her challenges with school. Ask about her hopes and goals and how the team can help with achieving those goals.
- Ask the young person to think about what he would like the team members to know about him and to think of any questions he might have for the team. The young person may want to put this in writing or ask an adult to pose the questions on his behalf.

Keep Meetings Positive and Student Centred

BEGINNING THE MEETING:

- Consider having refreshments or a simple snack for the team to share to help make the atmosphere more relaxed and informal. The student might like to help prepare the snack as a contribution to his meeting.
- Consider the purpose of the meeting and invite only those who are necessary. Having too many adults can be overwhelming for students or create an atmosphere of discomfort for them and/or their caregivers. Larger numbers of participants contributes to length of the meeting and reduces opportunities to speak.
- Take time to introduce each member of the team. When meeting for the first time, have each member tell a bit about themselves and their relationship with the student. Ensure the young person knows who everyone is and their role in helping with her success.
- Talk about the purpose of the meeting; describe everyone's roles at the meeting and the process that will be followed, including who is chairing, who will keep notes and who will act as timekeeper.
- Before the meeting, ask if there are cultural protocols that need to be followed and allow time for this in the meeting process.

ENGAGING THE YOUNG PERSON:

- Remind the team that the meeting is about the strengths, hopes and needs of the student in care, and about determining how the team will work together to help the young person achieve his goals.
- Encourage the young person to talk about her hopes, dreams and goals for her education and school-related activities. Be sure to listen and ask questions for clarification without reacting negatively or challenging what she is saying. Focus on the positive.
- Encourage team members to share information about the strengths and talents of the child or youth. Young people have said it helps knowing there are trustworthy adults who care about them and recognize their strengths and interests. Helping the young people by reflecting their strengths back to them builds resiliency, self esteem and enhances those strengths.

PLANNING FOR TEAM SUCCESS:

- Share contact information and various ways of reaching each team member to ensure ease of communication.
- Record decisions and agreed-upon actions of the team including who is responsible to follow up with each action. Provide copies to each team member after the meeting.
- At the end of the first meeting, set future meeting dates, when applicable. Delegate a team member to arrange the meeting logistics and send reminders to the rest of the team. This task could be completed by a support staff person.
- Allow time at the end of the meeting for questions or comments and to thank everyone for participating.
- When possible, combine the collaborative team meetings with other meetings such as student/parent/teacher conferences or Individual Program Plan (IPP) discussions to reduce the number of meetings. Caseworkers could arrange for concurrent plan discussions to occur immediately prior to, or after the school success meeting for the convenience of those involved. School staff would typically not be involved in these discussions.

CELEBRATE SUCCESSES:

- Make time at least once a year for the team to celebrate successes. In a relaxed setting, review the year's accomplishments and discuss suggestions for the future. Take time to celebrate the successes of the students and the good work of the team.
- Some acknowledgement of successes may be as simple as a note or a phone call, while other celebrations could involve a small gift or going out together for a special event.
- Events such as completing high school deserve special recognition and the celebration of success should be a collaborative effort of the team. Some regions host a lunch or dinner with guest speakers where they take the opportunity to honour each young person in care who has graduated with a special ceremony. Other regions give a gift of significance to the young person, including a cultural component where applicable, such as involvement of elders or a gift of an eagle feather or blanket. Youth in care should be supported by their caregivers and caseworkers to attend their high school graduation events as any other graduating student.

Success In School For Children and Youth In Care

Tips For Helping Young People To Advocate For Themselves

Decisions that directly affect children and youth in provincial government care are made through the core team, which includes caseworkers, caregivers, a school point person, the classroom teacher, the student and any other guardian of the student. As these decisions are being made, it is important for a child or youth in care to be able to advocate on their own behalf by expressing their perceptions, preferences, concerns, and opinions.

Assisting children and youth in care to self-advocate in educational or other settings is important. While there are many reasons why this is so, there are two reasons that stand out.

The first is that including the young person's input leads to better decisions, which have a greater likelihood of being successful. No one else has as complete or direct knowledge of the young person's history, including their successes and failures, worries and concerns, or hopes and aspirations, as they do themselves. These are all important considerations that can inform decisions. In addition, the young person's participation in arriving at a decision, even if it is an outcome with which they disagree, increases the chances of them supporting the process.

Secondly, involving youth in decision-making enhances the maturity and development of the young person. The ability to make responsible decisions is a gradual and learned process that takes time and practice. Most youth in family settings have regular and gradual experiences in which they can practice decision-making and taking on additional responsibility for self-determination as their capacity develops. This natural process is often hindered for youth in care. Not only do many of these young people have disadvantages that interfere with the process of maturation, they often perceive the child intervention and/or education systems as unfriendly, intrusive and disempowering. To counteract these effects, it is important to provide youth in care with structured, supported occasions to participate in and practice decision-making.



Youth in Care Say...

■ *"Please make decisions with me when you can; that is MY life in that file folder. I might not always like the decisions you make, even when they are for my safety, but the more involved I am and the more control I have, the better I will feel."*

■ **"My Voice," a poem by Grace-Anne Timmins**

*My voice is a powerful wave
That crashes through cities and towns It
is a ray of sunshine That breaks through
darkness It isn't always spoken It can
be written, or shown through a facial
expression My voice provides leadership,
A comforting home for those who feel
misunderstood Or a place for people to
disagree with me No one can shake it from
me No one can make me stop using it This
is my opinion, expression, emotion and
experience You can ignore it if you like
But you will never be able to mute it*

<http://www.youthnewsletter.net/pdf/YICNewsletter2009.pdf>



How Can I Support Educational Success for Young People in Care?

- Give the young person a clear message that you support him, and that he has the right to be heard. Work with the young person to identify other support persons who can also help him.
- Advise the young person that it is alright for her to ask to have a support person in the core team meeting or other decision-making forums, and help the young person decide who she might like this to be.
- Support the young person in focusing on his strengths, abilities and resources in being able to help himself and overcome obstacles.
- Help the young person to see decision-making as a process and not a onetime event.
- Inform the young person of the process for making, influencing and appealing decisions.
- Encourage her not to give up if she is unhappy with a decision.
- Explain to the young person that in some instances, he has a right and responsibility to participate in the decision-making process, but may not have a right to decide.
- Assist the young person in developing her thoughts about what she wants, and the reasons why. It might help her to put it in writing to organize her thoughts.
- Offer to assist the young person to see the consequences of what he is asking for and if asked, provide your opinion. Be careful not to override the young person or to pressure him to accept your views.
- Do not do anything in public to undermine or discount the young person's wishes or desires. Speak with her in private if you feel she really needs to reconsider her views.
- Offer to role play what the young person wants to say. You can model by first taking the role of the youth and then give him the chance to practice.
- Help the young person anticipate how she would respond or what she might say if the adults do not understand or disagree with her requests.
- Help the young person anticipate that he may be asked to compromise, which is part of responsible decision-making. Assist the young person to identify if there are some aspects of his desires or wishes he would give up or change, and under what conditions.
- Model and coach these strategies with other adults who work with young people to build their capacity to assist young people in care with effective self-advocacy.

Enhancing Success in Schools- An Adult Perspective

Adult filling out this form: _____

Role this adult plays in the child's life: _____

1. What are your hopes and dreams for this child?
2. What are your worries or fears for this child?
3. What are the child's strengths, talents, and interests (think about academically, socially, physically or athletically, culturally, etc.)??
4. What are the child's needs or areas for growth (think about academically, socially, physically or athletically, culturally, etc.)??