

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

**CAREGIVER HANDOUT**



## 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 Caregivers
- Education 101
- Working Together Successfully
- Tips for Helping Young People to Advocate for Themselves
- Perspective inventories, surveys, and forms

## 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.

## Roles and Responsibilities

School Point Person's Role	Caseworker's Role
<p><b>Before the initial Success in School meeting:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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).</li> <li>• Work to find a placement and program for this student. This information is communicated to the caseworker and caregiver.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Discuss the success plan development process with the student and encourage them to actively participate as part of the team.</li> <li>• Schedule the core team meeting in sufficient time to complete the success plan within 8 weeks of the student's enrolment in school.</li> </ul> <p><b>Success in Schools Plan meeting:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team introductions (share names, role they play in the student's life, their hopes for the student in the coming year).</li> <li>• 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</li> </ul>	<p><b>Before the initial Success in School meeting:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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).</li> <li>• Discuss the success plan development process with the student and encourage them to actively participate as part of the team.</li> <li>• Discuss the success plan development process with the student and encourage them to actively participate as part of the team.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul> <p><b>Success in Schools Plan meeting:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet for and participate in Success in School Plan creation</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Inform the caregiver and school of impending moves or changes to in-care status and request that the</li> </ul>

members can ensure the student is comfortable and feels supported.

- 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.

school provides a progress report prior to the student moving schools.

- 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.

### **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 Caregivers

There are many opportunities for caregivers, such as foster parents, group home staff, and extended family, to help children and youth in care be successful in school and in life.

Caregivers help young people in care discover their strengths and abilities and increase their confidence in decision-making. Caregivers celebrate successes with young people in care, and help them learn how to overcome challenges and adversity.

Caregivers are often in a better position than others to identify the strengths and needs of the children and youth in their care. Caregivers are a critical voice in advocating for the young person and working with the school system to meet the educational needs of those in their care. By assisting the child or youth to express wishes and set goals in and out of schools, caregivers help young people in care to build life skills.

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### Youth in Care Say...

■ *“There is nothing someone in care wants more than to feel ‘normal.’ I want to make mistakes and know that I will still be able to stay with you and that you will help me learn how to deal with things in a different way. It’s a lot of pressure for any youth to be ‘perfect,’ especially if that someone is already dealing with other issues in his or her life.”*

■ *“Please remember that I am not the ‘bad guy’ in most cases, but you can’t put parents in foster care, now can you? I sometimes feel like I am stuck paying for my parent’s mistakes. I am away from my friends and my home, and living with this big fat ‘damaged’ stamp on my forehead.”*

■ *“I know it doesn’t make sense that I still want to talk to or visit my parents, even after what happened, but they are my parents, and I need to have a sense that the people who are supposed to love me unconditionally really do love me. So what if I have to make it up in my head? For many of us, love is a need that often comes before shelter or food or clothing. You might not understand, but I need you to stand back and just be there when my world of make-believe shatters.”*

■ *“A lot of what I am feeling is fear – fear of what’s going to happen or not going to happen, not knowing about something, getting attached, making mistakes, my 18th birthday – the list goes on. Most of the time though, I don’t really know what I’m afraid of, so I act it out ... if you could sit down with me and talk it out, it would really help me a lot.”*

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

### AT HOME :

#### ■ Build A Relationship Based On Trust.

Because many children and youth in care have experienced some level of trauma in being removed from their home, it is critical for caregivers to show the young person that they are important, cared for and valued, even when they may test the boundaries.

#### ■ Talk to and listen to the young people.

Communication with young people is very important. Talk with the young person in your care about school, friends, activities, teachers and assignments. Be sure to have a two-way conversation, not a one-way lecture. Be a good listener and let your young person have the stage. Tell them truthfully and confidently what you think and why you think this way. If you're not sure about some issues, it's okay to tell them so.

#### ■ Teach your foster children life skills as you would your own children.

As one teen says, "For the five days or five years that I am with you, I need you to help me be normal. Give me chores and teach me. If I am old enough, let me cook sometimes, make me file my taxes, and talk to me about RRSPs and credit cards."

#### ■ Provide a quiet study area.

Equip a designated study area of your home with items such as paper, markers, a ruler, pencils and a dictionary. Keep the area as free from distractions as possible.

#### ■ Help with homework.

Show enthusiasm about school and homework. When the caregiver takes the time and effort to help a young person with homework, it sends the message that school is important and that you care about their success at school. Talk with the school about the homework needs for the young person. Share your observations with appropriate teachers about how the young person is doing with his or her school work.

#### ■ Help your young person get organized.

Help the young person break down assignments into smaller, more manageable parts. Teach and help them to set out needed items (clothes, homework, permission slips, etc.) the night before to avoid last-minute rushing around in the morning.

#### ■ Play games and engage in activities together.

Many young people love to play age-appropriate games that also develop and support different aspects of growth and learning. Take them places and participate in different activities together such as sports or cultural events. These support well-rounded development and educational achievement. Having fun together promotes a sense of family togetherness and belonging, and shares your enthusiasm about the importance and enjoyment of learning.

### IN SCHOOL :

#### ■ Recognize that the young person in your care needs extra love, care and respect.

The youth in your care has extra needs because of their past experiences and circumstances. Work with the school to help the staff recognize, empathize and accommodate for these needs, which are important to success in school.

#### ■ Become active members of the core team.

Caregivers are automatically a part of the core team that also may include a school point person, the classroom teacher, the caseworker, the student and any other guardian of the student. Make sure that you include yourself in the decision-making process, and keep an open mind. The caregiver has a unique perspective from the amount of time spent with the young person. Share this with the core team.

#### ■ Advocate for the young person to help ensure their success in school.

Share what you know about what works to support the young person's success. Help school staff understand behaviours and let them know what has been successful at home, as well as what has not worked. Help the student and the school staff to know that some behaviour is a reaction to circumstances rather than a symptom of who the student is.



## IN THE COMMUNITY :

### ■ Help school staff understand that the young people in your care may be worried, frightened or miss their parents.

Despite the difficult situations that young people in care may have experienced within their family, most love and care for their families. They may have ongoing concerns which interfere with concentration, learning, socialization and behaviour.

### ■ Talk with the school staff on an ongoing basis.

Decide on a communication plan with the school and the core team that will work for everyone. To better understand the student, ask staff questions related to curriculum, assessments, social involvement, extra-curricular activities and other aspects of school life that may arise.

### ■ Support involvement in extra-curricular activities.

Extra-curricular interests such as sports, drama, clubs and volunteering, all contribute to building positive relationships and self esteem. Encourage and assist the young people in your care to participate in activities they enjoy.

### ■ Spend quality time with your foster child.

Caregivers step into the role of parents for the foster child. Family activities such as going to the movies or taking part in outdoor activities send important messages to young people that they re valued members of the family and community.

### ■ Support your foster child's attempts to make and keep positive friendships.

Friends, peers and relationships with others are important to young people. Having and maintaining friendships helps to normalize the difficult situation of being in foster care.

### ■ Assist foster children with making appropriate and discrete self-disclosures.

Most young people in care have experienced abuse or neglect. Coach the young person on appropriate and safe disclosure of information about themselves. Assist the young person with identifying what they should tell their friends or others about their background or experiences. Ask the caseworker or therapist for support in this area.

### ■ Educate yourself about the various disabilities young people in care may have.

Be prepared to advocate on behalf of the young person and teach others about what does and does not work. However, be cautious about making assumptions of a diagnosis of a young person in care. For example, it may be inappropriate to diagnose for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Organic Brain Dysfunction, Post Traumatic Stress disorder or attachment issues; instead, document and share your concerns with the young person's caseworker or doctor.

## A Message from Caseworkers to Caregivers

You are an important part of the team because you provide hands-on parenting, warmth, guidance and supervision. Because you are there every day, you are the team member who is most perceptive to the needs of the young person.

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 available resources and legal and policy requirements. While I try to find the least disruptive option, sometimes I am required to move the young person to a new placement, a new school or return them to their biological home.

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 information about the young person, general information about the needs of children and youth in care. I have legal authority to make important decisions on behalf of the child or youth in care.

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 e-mail 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 back-up 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 Educators to Caregivers

You are an important part of the core team because you care for the young person on a daily basis. When working with me, please understand that I may make suggestions about how you can support the student's education at home. Please emphasize the importance of school to the young people in your care, and stay involved to demonstrate your commitment to their schooling. By letting your young person know how important their attendance, behaviour and achievement are, you are helping me to help them. Please attend school functions, participate in parent meetings, and encourage and support other school activities.

**Together I know we can make a difference for your child and my student.**



# Education 101

Education 101 is intended to describe Alberta's education system for individuals who may not be familiar with how this particular system serves young people in Alberta. Additional information can be obtained from the people who work within the education system and on the Government of Alberta website. The information contained in this document is based on the education system in 2011 and, as with all human services, may evolve as the needs of children, youth and families change over time.

## What is the structure of education in Alberta?

- The *School Act* is the foundation for education in Alberta. The Alberta Programs of Study outline the learner outcomes for students in the public system.
- Education is provided through school authorities overseen by the Government of Alberta through the Ministry of Education.
- Alberta's public education system includes public, separate, francophone and charter schools that are governed by elected school boards.

Go to Alberta Education at <http://education.alberta.ca/> for more information.

## Who is eligible for public education in Alberta?

- Children and youth are legally required to attend school from ages 6 to 16. School boards may set their own minimum age requirements for entering school; many allow students to enter Grade 1 if they are 6 years old by March 1 of the current school year. Some determine that the student must be 6 by September 1 or December 31 of the school year.
- Public education in Alberta is provided free of charge to students who are under 19 years of age, meet certain citizenship requirements and whose parents reside in Alberta. School authorities may provide education for students who are under 20 years of age as of September 1st.
- Kindergarten refers specifically to the education program for children, less than 6 years of age, in the year prior to Grade 1. Kindergarten is part of a broad, co-ordinated system of local and provincial programs referred to as Early Childhood Services (ECS). Parents may choose to have their child participate in an ECS program but it is not mandatory for children to attend a program prior to Grade 1.
- To find out more about available ECS programs in your area, please contact your local school authority. For more information about ECS programming, please visit <http://education.alberta.ca/parents/ecs.aspx>

## What choices do parents, foster caregivers and guardians have for education in Alberta?

■ Parents, guardians and foster caregivers have a variety of choices for educating their children in Alberta. The Alberta government supports choice in education to facilitate meeting the needs of students and the community. Parents may choose to educate their children with a public, separate, Francophone or charter school authority, or with a private school, or they may choose to educate them at home, supervised by a school authority. General information for parents and caregivers is available at

<http://education.alberta.ca/parents.aspx>

■ School authorities, including charter schools, may offer a range of programs to meet the needs of their students. This may include outreach programs, on-line education, locally developed courses, alternative programs, virtual schools, specialized language, sports, arts or faith-based programs, as well as other programs that the local school board has determined will meet the needs of their students and the community.

■ Children and youth are educated based on joint decisions between families, schools and other professionals. For some students, their educational needs are met in grouped programs based on specific needs, for others it means participating in class with their age peers and having instruction within the Alberta Programs of Study. For others, it's a combination of the two experiences.

■ Private schools are another option and may charge tuition and other fees as required. Private schools may follow the Alberta Programs of Study and employ certificated teachers or they may follow a curriculum of their own choosing and may or may not hire certificated teachers. These differences are then reflected in the level of funding from and accountability to the government.

## What is available for younger children?

■ Parents are a child's first and most important teacher, but other early learning opportunities may take place in a variety of settings outside the home. What young children learn at this stage will have a major impact on successful learning experiences in school, their personal development and future participation in society. School authorities, private ECS operators and community-based organizations may provide programs to give children early experiences in socialization, literacy, language development and numeracy in a play-based environment. To find out more about programs in your area, contact your local school, Child and Family Services Authority or Family and Community Support Services office.

■ Children with a disability or delay may need extra supports to be successful in preschool or kindergarten. There are choices available and parents should explore the options to choose the one that best meets the needs of their child or family. For more information on Early Childhood Services visit <http://education.alberta.ca/admin/special/ecs.aspx>

■ Children with special education needs may require additional supports, accommodations and adaptations to ECS programming. Eligibility for ECS special education programming is based on an assessment that shows the child's need for educational programming and support. This assessment may have to be completed by a psychologist, occupational therapist, speech-language pathologist or other professional. If you are concerned your child may have a disability or delay, please contact your family doctor, Alberta Health Services <http://www.healthlinkalberta.ca/default.htm> or, 1-866-408-5465, your local school authority, or private ECS operator. For more information please see:

**Early Childhood Programming for Special Needs** [http://education.alberta.ca/media/1176475/2010-aug\\_fs-elb-programmingsn.pdf](http://education.alberta.ca/media/1176475/2010-aug_fs-elb-programmingsn.pdf)

**Disability/Delay Fact Sheet: Where can Parents go for help?**  
<http://education.alberta.ca/media/1231917/fselbdelayordisability.pdf>



## What is Special Education?

■ There are many opportunities for students who have special needs. Special education refers to the education of all students and children identified with mild, moderate or severe disabilities, or as gifted and talented. It is founded on the belief that all children can learn and reach their full potential given opportunity, effective teaching and appropriate resources.

■ Alberta Education's *Setting the Direction for Special Education* initiative and the Government of Alberta's *Action on Inclusion* recognize inclusive education as essential for meeting the learning needs of all students. Inclusive educational supports may be provided in a regular classroom, a separate class with specialized supports or a combination of the two based on the needs of the child and the collaborative decisions by those involved with the student. In some cases, education is provided through alternative programs or specialized schools.

■ Quality instruction, with a focus on the unique needs of each child, rather than setting, is the key to success. Decisions related to the placement of children are best made on an individual basis, in a way that maximizes their participation in the experience of schooling. Parents of students with special education needs may have options to send their child to a designated special education private school. The Government of Alberta provides additional funding to the operators of these schools, but the operators retain the right to charge parents a tuition fee.

## How do students access services?

■ Every student is the responsibility of a public or separate school board. Residency is based on geography and religion. Students are considered to be residents of the area in which their parent(s) or guardian(s) normally reside. A student can only claim one place of residency.

■ Where there is a separate school district established in the area, children with a parent of the same faith as the separate board, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, are residents of and the responsibility of that separate school board. All other children are considered residents of the local public school board.

■ Schools are required to enroll students residing within their designated attendance boundaries. Students residing within the attendance area must be accepted for enrollment in that school if there is a suitable program and have priority over students residing outside the attendance area if there are insufficient resources and facilities to accommodate both.

■ Parents may want their children to attend a school outside of their attendance area or board jurisdiction, but they may have to pay for or arrange their own transportation.

■ Some services may be more challenging to access in some areas of the province due to levels of availability of specialists and resources as well as distance from larger municipalities.

## What programming and instruction is delivered in Alberta?

■ The Alberta Programs of Study, established and mandated at the provincial level, identify the outcomes for all subject-area courses and programs and apply to all students at all grade levels.

■ At the school level, planning involves decisions about how Programs of Study can best be implemented with particular groups of students and with individuals.

■ School authorities have the responsibility to provide instructional programs for students to meet the provincial high school completion requirements and prepare for entry into the workforce or post secondary studies.

■ Schools are to ensure that students understand personal and community values, and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, while they develop the capacity to pursue learning throughout their lives. More information can be found at <http://education.alberta.ca/department/policy/standards/goals.aspx>

## What are the roles of students, teachers and parents?

**Everyone, including parents, students, educators, the community, business and government, has an important and co-operative role to play in public education. Roles include:**

■ **Students** assume responsibilities and follow the code of conduct of their school; complete their homework and assignments; contribute to a caring, respectful and safe climate in their school; and make choices about their learning and career paths.

■ **Teachers** provide instruction; foster and encourage students to achieve learning expectations; stay up-to-date on curriculum and teaching methods; evaluate and provide results to students, parents and the board; maintain discipline and a caring and safe climate in their classroom and school; and engage partnerships with students, parents, guardians and foster caregivers.

■ **Parents and Caregivers** foster a positive attitude toward learning; make sure their children come to school ready to learn; make decisions regarding their children's education, including choice of schools and programs; help their children to develop good study habits; and maintain positive and ongoing communication with teachers and the school.



## How is public education funded in Alberta?

### Government education funding is distributed in three categories:

**1. Base Funding:** A set dollar amount for every student enrolled by September 30th of the school year is provided to the school authorities. After this date, no further funds are provided.

**2. Additional Funding for Differential Factors:** These funds are allocated according to the student population that a jurisdiction serves and the unique jurisdictional and environmental factors where a school board operates. Funding is provided to the school authority based on a profile of historic circumstances, such as numbers of severe special needs students and not on the actual numbers from year-to-year. The dollars are neither targeted for specific students nor for prescribed services such as teacher assistants or transportation, but instead the school authority has the responsibility to determine and address the needs of all students within available resources.

**Additional student population funding allocations** range from just over a \$1,000 dollars for every self-identified First Nation, Métis or Inuit student, and students who are learning the English language, to amounts ranging from a few to several thousand dollars per student, depending on the special needs

category and the district historic profile. For students with mild or moderate disabilities, school authorities must meet the needs of these students using the base funding as no additional dollars are allocated for this level of need. Currently students are “coded” in special needs categories according to Alberta Education criteria.

**3. Targeted funding to address specified outcomes:** Targeted funding for provincial initiatives is allocated for specific priority programs as determined by Alberta Education.

With the exception of targeted funding, government does not specify how school boards should spend their funds. It is the responsibility of locally elected school board trustees to use their funds effectively to address local needs. In some school authorities, funds are allocated to schools where site-based decisions are made according to the school's population and priorities, and considering available resources within the school authority. Specialized services may be more difficult to access in some areas of the province or are only available during specific times.

## What is Alberta Education's role with children and youth who are in the care of Alberta Children and Youth Services?

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. Compared to the general student population, children and youth in care tend to do poorly on Provincial Achievement Tests, often fall farther behind in school, may drop out as they get older, and are less likely to graduate from high school. The Provincial Protocol Framework outlines the expectations for educators, caseworkers, caregivers and other partners working with children and youth in care in school. More information about the Framework can be found at <http://education.alberta.ca/admin/crossministry/ppf.aspx>



## What information can educators share in order to support success in school for students?

- Educators are expected to report student progress and achievement to the students and their parents or guardians.
- Legislative and policy provisions affirm that school staff, caseworkers and service providers can share relevant and necessary information to collaboratively support and provide programming for students.

## Are there alternatives to suspension and expulsion?

If a student is having difficulty demonstrating appropriate behaviour in school, it is important to work with the student's team to consider alternatives to suspension and expulsion. Examples may include students working at school, but removed from the other students, or having the student work in an alternate classroom or at a site that can provide special assistance. For students who need time to adjust to a new setting or home, consider the advisability of transitioning with a partial school day or practice bus rides to help the student cope with the new setting or bus route. Parameters around suspensions and expulsions are outlined in the *School Act*.

It should be noted that expulsion requires a process that is determined by the *School Act*. It only occurs after a student has been suspended, the principal has submitted a written report outlining the circumstances to the board, and the board has agreed to expel the student. Parents and guardians have a role to play in the expulsion process, including the right to make presentations to the board and the right to request a review of a decision to expel. Expulsion is not simply that the school has provided advice to the student about withdrawing from school or a school statement about not returning to school, but is the result of a formal process involving the school, the board and the student, which describes the student's rights and the board's offer of another educational program. School jurisdictions that expel students are required to provide another education program for expelled students for the balance of that school year.

## What is the Attendance Board?

In most cases, truancy problems are resolved at the local school level where students, parents and school board employees can work together before there is a need to involve the provincial Attendance Board. It is worth noting that attendance at school is a shared responsibility of students, parents and schools. When a truancy problem cannot be resolved locally, school boards may refer the matter to the provincial Attendance Board.

The Attendance Board conducts a hearing into why a student is not attending school. Members of the Attendance Board are appointed by the Minister of Education and may include parents, lawyers, members of the general public, retired educators, business people and other professionals.

The Attendance Board has the same powers as the Court of Queen's Bench to summon witnesses and obtain information and records. On the hearing date, a panel of the attendance board inquires into the nature and extent of the issues or problems, services being provided, and possible options or strategies to encourage the student's regular attendance at school. The panel reviews the evidence and testimony of witnesses before deciding on the best course of action and issuing a verbal order.

Truancy is often the first visible sign of a number of problems a student may be experiencing. In many cases, there is a need for a collective and sometimes innovative approach. Although directives to the student and parents that the student must be sent to and attend school are key actions in most cases, these are not the only solutions. The panel may direct the student to an alternate education program, course or student program, or make other rulings it considers appropriate in the circumstances. For example, it may direct that the student be assessed or become involved in counselling, or could impose a monetary penalty on the parent. The matter may also be reported to the Child and Family Services Authority when the panel has a protection concern. In exceptional circumstances where a student, parent or other party fails to obey an order of the Attendance Board, the order may be filed with the Court of Queen's Bench for further action.

**School Act at:** [http://www.qp.alberta.ca/574.cfm?page=s03.cfm&leg\\_type=Acts&isbncIn=9780779733941](http://www.qp.alberta.ca/574.cfm?page=s03.cfm&leg_type=Acts&isbncIn=9780779733941)

**Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12 at:** <http://education.alberta.ca/media/832568/guidetoed.pdf>



# 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 SUCCESSSES:

- 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.



## **Perspective Inventories, Surveys & Forms**

It is often very helpful to the team to share information about each of the team member's perspectives about the student. Sometimes it's helpful to think about what you'd like to say before a meeting. Doing this beforehand and bringing your thoughts and ideas will make sure that everyone's perspectives are heard and that we can create an excellent plan.

Inside your package are different sheets to help you think about what you want to say before the team meets to create your Success in School Plan.

Parent perspective forms:

- Enhancing Success in Schools- An Adult Perspective
- Sharing Information
- Goal setting with My Child
- Letter to Parents: Let's Stay in Touch
- Questions I Have about My Child's New School

More parent and student perspective sheets can be found at,  
<http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/iept2/library/index.html>

\* Each adult participating in the meeting should fill out one or two documents that they feel best assist them in sharing their thoughts and bring it with them. Please remember that you are thinking of the child from a holistic perspective.







## Sharing Information

Student Name ..... Date .....

Use this organizer to record information you can share with your child's teacher and learning team.

1. What are your child's strengths and interests?

.....  
.....

2. How does your child learn best?

.....  
.....

3. Describe successes your child has had in school.

.....  
.....

4. Describe challenges your child has had in school.

.....  
.....

5. What are your child's learning needs for this school year?  
(These could be skills that your child needs to acquire or improve on.)

.....  
.....

6. What signs may indicate your child is struggling in school and may need more support?

.....  
.....



## Sharing Information

Student Name ..... Date .....

7. What has helped your child be successful at school in the past?

.....  
.....

8. What are your goals and hopes for your child this school year?

.....  
.....

9. Where do you see your child in five years?

.....  
.....

10. Does your child have specific medical concerns or disabilities that we need to be aware of?

.....  
.....

11. Is there any other information that could help us gain a better understanding of your child?

.....  
.....



## Goal Setting with My Child

Dear Parents,

Your child's new teachers will need your help to identify your child's strengths and needs. Please complete this form so your child's new teachers can use it for planning and discussion at the beginning of the school year.

Thank you.

School .....

Year .....

Student name .....

Our child has these five **strengths**:

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

Our child has these four **areas of need**:

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





# Letter to Parents: Let's Stay in Touch\*

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

The list below contains ways you and your child's teacher might want to communicate. Please check off the methods that work best for you.

1. Ideally, how much contact do you wish to have with your child's teacher?

- daily
- once a week
- once a month
- once a term
- other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

2. Would you prefer

- to contact your child's teacher?
- the teacher to contact you?
- both?

3. Which methods do you find most valuable?

- written notes
- telephone calls
- school newsletters
- parent/teacher/student meetings
- Individualized Program Planning (IPP) conferences
- student-led conferences
- school council meetings
- classroom observations
- e-mail
- other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

4. Contact information

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Cell phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

The best times to contact me are \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

\* This appendix adapted from Alberta Education, *Individualized Program Plans* (Edmonton, AB: Alberta Education, 1995), p. IPP.17.





## Questions I Have about My Child's New School

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



School schedule

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Daily routines

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What my child will learn

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Teachers

---

---



Homework

---

---



Services for my child

---

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Extracurricular activities

---

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Opportunities for parent involvement

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## Feeling Better: My Parents' View

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

If your child is feeling **sad**, what kinds of things might help make him or her feel better?

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If your child is feeling **angry**, what kinds of things might help make him or her feel calmer?

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If your child is feeling **frustrated**, what kinds of things might help him or her feel better?

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If your child is feeling **worried** or **anxious**, what kinds of things might help him or her feel more confident?

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If your child is feeling **overexcited**, what kinds of things might help him or her calm down?

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