



Transition To School for Children with Special Needs

An Information Guide for Parents
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School District #57



northern health
public health

partners in wellness

This is your workbook to assist you in making the transition from preschool to school.

“Remember you are the parent, you know your child best.”

Use it as a guide for your child’s entry into school. The transition checklist works both as an overview of this process and your record of your contacts with school personnel. This workbook is really the first step in your advocacy for your child. Its pattern will become very familiar.

Your child’s transition into the school system will follow a definite timeline, so the rest of the workbook is divided into months, each with an appropriate question from the checklist. There’s a month-by-month outline of what actions you could be taking as the school district learns about your child. Provided are work sheets that should help you to prepare for meetings and to document their outcomes.

This timeline is meant only as a guide and can be adjusted to fit the particular circumstances and timelines of your community and school district.

As you are going through this transition process remember you are a member of a larger team that could include a Supported Child Development Program consultant, therapists, childcare providers or other professionals. Use these other team members as a resource at any stage along the way.

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TRANSITION CHECKLIST

Countdown to Kindergarten...

JANUARY

- Check out your neighborhood school.
- Sign a Release of Information Form in order to share records with the school district.

MARCH

- Have you registered your child at school?

APRIL

- Therapists currently involved with your child will be preparing to write the reports about your child for the school district.

MAY to JUNE

- Contact the school's resource teacher for a transition meeting.

JUNE

- Have you and your child visited the kindergarten class?
- Have you signed a Release of Information form to share records with the school district?

JULY/AUGUST

- HOLIDAY TIME ENJOY!!!***

SEPTEMBER

- Check in with the school to ensure they are ready.
- Share information about your child to assist with the school's IEP preplanning.

OCTOBER

- Has your child's IEP meeting been scheduled?**

Before you begin . . .

Have you reflected upon your hopes and dreams for your child?

Throughout this transition into the school system, you will be asked to tell the story of your child many, many times. Hopefully, you will be asked to describe the goals that you have for your child. Your school-based team will want to know these goals to begin working with your child in the next few months.

You are the parent, and being a parent means that you already imagine your child's future years beyond these transition meetings and kindergarten. More than day-to-day goals, your hopes and dreams are the heart of your advocacy. *Don't lose sight of them!*

Take a few moments and reflect. As with many families, it's **your** hopes and dreams that will help keep you going through this and many other transitions to come.

*"Parents need professionals. Professionals need parents.
The children need us both."*

"Federation of Invisible Disabilities"
Parent Reference and Resource Kit

www.fids.bc.ca



Your Support Network

Who will be there for you at a meeting?

One part of making the transition into the school system is saying good-bye to a team of professionals that has been a resource to you and your child. Another is introducing your child to a new team that will focus on your child's education. During these changes, you are the constant in every part of your child's life. You are your child's constant advocate. It is during this time of change that you might consider those people who are a constant in your life, your support network. This could be someone you trust who would come along with you to a meeting; who is there for you and not because it's their job. Such a support network could include family, friends, childcare providers, a community advocate, and other parents from a support group, spiritual counselors, and former team members.

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

SCHOOL PHONE LIST

SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. _____



SD Contact Name: _____

Phone No. _____

School Name: _____

Phone No: _____

Your child's school-based support team:

Principal: _____

Resource Teacher: _____

Teacher: _____

TA: _____

Other resource personnel:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Role: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Role: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Role: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Role: _____

Countdown to Kindergarten ... **JANUARY**

1. Have you visited the school, met the principal and the teacher? Have you observed the classroom?

When you meet the principal it is also important to:

- Clearly state your child's needs and what you feel your child may require for support in order to go to school. This is another opportunity to outline your child's strengths and other positive attributes that you feel he/she will bring to the new school setting.

You can also ask the principal:

- What support services are available at the school? Schools offer different models of support services, including learning assistance and/or resource room options. This gives the principal a chance to share the school's philosophy.
- Will the current kindergarten teacher be the receiving teacher for September? If so, see if it is possible to meet with that teacher and observe the kindergarten classroom.

Afterwards, this is a good time to ask for a tour of the school to identify any structural obstacles for your child such as stairs and washroom location.



JANUARY (cont'd)

2. This is when you sign a Release of Information form to share records with the school district.

At this time of the year the school district will meet with the staff of the organization(s) entrusted with your child's information, e.g., CDC, preschool, daycare. This exchange helps the district to learn about the needs of the children who will be coming in September. It is through this process that the school districts determine what resources will be required for their district, individual schools, and ultimately, specific children.

These records provide the school district with documentation for your child's needs. They will assist school personnel with meeting Ministry requirements for developing education plans.

In order for any professional to share information with a school district, parents sign a ***Release of Information Form***. Besides giving your permission, this form outlines exactly what information, from verbal to written reports, is shared. A release form should be provided for any organization with staff on your child's team.

All future reports/documents are kept in your child's Permanent Record or Special Services file – you can have access to this file at your request (as per Freedom of Information Act).



MARCH

1. Have you registered your child at school?

Even if you are undecided it is a good idea to register your child. Registering your child opens up the possibility of discussing and asking questions of the principal. It also secures a place for your child at the school in September in case circumstances change over the next several months.

- Contact your school district office to find out what catchment area you live in. You will register at this school.
- The District Principal for Special Education or the District Special Education Resource teacher can also inform you of any special programs or schools for your child which are outside your catchment area.

When you register:

- You will be asked to choose either morning or afternoon kindergarten. (Unless the school offers full day kindergarten which may be organized as 2 days one week, and 3 days the next week.)
 - If you want your child in the same classroom with peers from your neighborhood or childcare setting, find out from their parents which class their child will be attending.
- School principals start organizing class lists in May or June and will often wait until the fall to make final alterations to the lists.

APRIL

During this time, the therapists currently involved with your child will be preparing to write the reports about your child for the school district

- A discharge summary report will reach the school district in early September. These summary reports often describe the child's treatment, any current assessment results, your child's current level of functioning, and recommendations for school support.
- Prior to reports being released, therapists may review the contents of the reports with you. Often in these final reports, recommendations for school support will be outlined.
- The report information and recommendations will be shared with school district personnel for consideration in their planning for your child.
- Keep a copy for yourself.
- Create a binder to keep all information on your child in one place.
 - * Assessments
 - * Discharge summary reports
 - * Report cards
 - * Correspondence

MAY TO JUNE

1. Contact the school's resource teacher for a transition meeting.

2. Has your transition meeting been planned?

“School district staff and professionals are people too; let them get to know you.”

- Because you know your child best, a transition meeting should be organized so you can describe to school staff your child's strengths and your education priorities.
- Current team members can then share with the receiving school's team which learning strategies have helped your child to progress.
- Team members ask questions, voice concerns, and clarify what supports have been provided for your child.

This transition meeting can be organized and/or chaired by Supported Child Development Program (SCDP), therapist, school district personnel, or childcare provider. You can also give out your written description of your child to help set the tone of the meeting.

Be prepared to ask school staff how ready they are to receive your child.

Here are some sample questions from other transition meetings (some of these questions might not be able to be answered until the fall).

Some of the things parents have asked about the kindergarten teacher are:

- When will the kindergarten teacher be assigned?
- Will I be able to meet with the teacher before school starts?
- Will the teacher be able to observe my child in their childcare setting?
- What is the teacher's personal philosophy around inclusion?
- How will the teacher prepare the rest of the class for my child's special needs?
- Does the school have gradual entry in September?

Some questions parents have asked about the teaching assistant are:

- How will the assistant be selected?
- When will the teacher's assistant be assigned? Will this be the person who stays with my child all year?
- Do I have input into the hiring of my child's teaching assistant?
- Will the teaching assistant be released for prep time, to attend meetings and training sessions specific to my child's disability? If yes, who will take over care of my child at this time?
- Will the assistant be assigned to my child or to the classroom?
- What if we arrive at the school in September and there is no assistant in place?
- Who will train the assistant to carry out procedures in my child's Health Care Plan?
- What happens if the assistant is ill? What is the policy for substitute assistants?
- Can I communicate with the TA directly or through other media (e.g., written communication book)?

Some questions parents have asked about their school based team are:

- Can I come into the school and be a part of my child's classroom activities?
- Will my child receive therapy services through the school?
- How quickly will a therapist see my child?
- Will the therapists be welcome in the classroom to observe and consult?
- Where will direct therapy occur? How long? How often?
- When will the first Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting be and who will organize it?
- If I have a home-based team, are they involved and able to have input at the meetings?

Other questions parents have raised include:

- How will home/school communication be set up? Will a communication book be used?
- Will my child receive supervision at recess and lunch?
- Are the necessary toileting and diapering facilities available for my child?
- How will my child's progress be monitored?
- What experience has the school staff had with including other children who require extra supports?

Besides the transition meeting there are other ways that you can share information about your child with the new team:

- Take all relevant reports to the teacher and the principal.
- Loan professionally produced information videotapes about your child's disability.
- Invite the teacher and the teaching assistant to your home before school starts in September so your child can be seen in his/her own setting.

JUNE

1. Have you and your child visited the kindergarten class?

Most schools have organized special days for parents and children to visit the kindergarten class. This is an opportunity for you and your child to meet the teacher, the children who will be in the class, and their parents. Your child will have a chance to become more familiar with the classroom and the school.

Individual visits for your child can also be arranged with the school, if familiarity with this new setting needs to be more established.

You may have questions and concerns about the school's plans for September. The following page offers some questions to help guide your initial discussions.

You can also refer to the Resources (page 24) for relevant websites and suggested helpful publications.

2. Making a plan for September

The school will want to begin to develop an appropriate educational plan for September to address your child's needs. Depending upon the type or severity of those needs, this may involve a school-based team meeting to determine whether an individualized program will need to be established and to identify any resources required.

Resources could include special materials, resource teacher time, specialist staff services, or teacher assistant time.

Although many decisions cannot be finalized until after school entry, here is a list of questions that schools may be able to answer beforehand:

- What are the procedures for deciding the support services my child will need?
- Will my child require an individualized education plan (IEP)?
- When and how can I share information about my child? E.g., communication log(s).
- Who will be responsible for coordinating my child's program?
- If the school district determines the need for a teacher assistant, how will that person be selected?
- Will an assistant be available on the first day of school?
- Can I come into the school in September and be a part of my child's classroom activities?
- How will I be notified of planning meetings?



**JULY/AUGUST HOLIDAY TIME!
ENJOY!!!!**



SEPTEMBER

1. Have you checked to see if the school is ready for your child?

There are many things that may have been identified at the transition meeting that team members felt were important to have in place for September. School district personnel are usually back in the office by the end of August. This is the time for you to check where everyone is in his or her preparations for September.

Transportation:

If your child requires transportation, check with your school district office to see what transportation options (if any) are available, and to determine pick-up times.

Teacher Assistants:

Often principals are involved in hiring assistants at this time. See if the assistant who will be working in your child's classroom has been hired. What if they're not a "good fit?" Ask the principal how the teacher assistant/student match will be monitored.

Orientation:

During the last week of August, drop by the school to let your child become more familiar with the school's layout and the playground. You can clarify with the principal and the school district staff if equipment and the modifications are either in place, or have been ordered, if necessary. (Depending on your child's needs, it may also be possible to arrange for a private tour or some other way for the child to become oriented to the school and classroom.)

Support Team and Documentation:

If you have not heard from your child's school based case manager by September, you may want to give them a call and set up a team meeting. Check whether the school has received all the reports that you are willing to share about your child. September is the time for IEP preplanning and you can expect to be contacted to participate. This will involve sharing information about child in meetings and/or informational surveys.



OCTOBER

Has your child's Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting been scheduled?

An ***Individual Education Plan or IEP*** identifies how the school program will be adapted or modified to meet the special learning needs of your child. Putting together an IEP is done in partnership with you and your child's educators. You should be included in the process and your involvement in planning is an IEP requirement.

- Confirm with the school principal whether your child is eligible for an Individual Education Plan (IEP). All students with a Ministry Designation must have an IEP.
- Usually the IEP meeting is scheduled once the teacher is more acquainted with your child. This may be in late September or early October or even later in some school districts.
- You can take the plan home and look it over to ensure it is appropriate for your child. The Ministry of Education does not require that you sign the IEP but your comments and feedback are valuable. Ask if you can sign the IEP and if there is a venue for you to provide written comments. The IEP is a working document that everyone will use throughout the school year to record program plans and regularly review progress.

See the Ministry of Education's *Parent Guide to Individual Education Planning* (www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/iep).

Getting Involved

Have you decided how you and your child will be involved in school?

Going to school is much more than learning and acquiring academic skills. Going to school also means developing friendships for your child. Here are some useful suggestions from other parents.

1. Join the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC). Contact the principal of your child's school about the next PAC meeting.
2. Encourage your child to participate in extracurricular activities.
3. Write a letter to the parents of the children in your child's classroom. Tell them about your child and offer them to call you or write their questions out. Websites are also a good way to get the right information out there.
4. Talk to all the staff at the school about your child. This helps the staff who do not work with your child this year get to know them for the future.
5. Talk to the children in your child's class. Ask them if they have any questions about your child. If your child has specialized equipment, talk about it. If you can, let the classmates try it out.

These suggestions sound like a lot of effort, and some certainly are. But, this is the reality of having a child with a disability in the school system.

Remember you are the parent and this is for your child. Being in school will open up a whole new world to you and your child.

A sample letter written by a parent to describe her child to parents of the other children in the classroom

Dear Parents:

Our name is (Parent's name) and we are writing this letter to introduce to you to our child (Child's name), who is in your child's class. (Child's name) is 10 years old. He has a rare genetic disorder called Sanfilippo Syndrome Type A. (Child's name) was born with this syndrome. There are many things that happen to (Child's name), he is no longer able to talk, he is starting to have problems with walking, and many other things are happening to him.

(Child's name) is a happy child, who loves to go to school, be around his friends, he goes shopping, and loves to swim. He does use a wheelchair part of the time, and does have a teacher aide with him.

As his parents we hope that he gets as much out of school as your children do, and maybe your children can learn something new from our son.

(Child's name) has a lot of great things about him, and we hope that you and your child get to know (Child's name) for who he really is.

If you have any questions please call us at 555-5555, or write us a note and pass it to (Child's name) in his backpack on his wheelchair. If your child has questions please be supportive, and encourage the questions.

Thank you

Sincerely,

RESOURCES

Advocacy for students in public schools: *Speaking Up*, 1999.
BCCPAC www.bccpac.bc.ca/advocacy/resources.htm

PARENT REFERENCE AND RESOURCE KIT

The newly revised and expanded Parent Reference and Resource Kit is available from the Federation of Invisible Disabilities.

The kit brings together existing documents, guidebooks, and relevant information surrounding issues and concerns of caring for children with invisible disabilities so that parents, caregivers and others have one handy reference or guide. www.fidsbc.ca

Parent's Guide to Individual Education Planning. Published by the BC School Superintendents' Association and the Ministry of Education. Updated July 2002
<http://www.bcssa.org/topics/IEP.pdf>

Other useful web addresses:

www.sd57.bc.ca

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/iepsn/impiep.htm

Individual Education Planning for Students with Special Needs

Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/ppandg/iep_1.htm

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/ppandg/iep_6.htm

Parent's Guide to Individual Education Planning
Includes Preparation for a school-based or IEP team meeting.

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/iep/

Ministry Policy Site

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/special_ed.htm

Contains planning sheet for parents and sample IEP forms