



BACK TO SCHOOL INCLUSION GUIDE

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for

INCLUSION
ACTION
IN
ONTARIO

BACK TO SCHOOL INCLUSION GUIDE

Returning to school can bring excitement, uncertainty, and many moving pieces—especially when a child relies on individualized support. This guide is designed to support families and educators as children with disabilities transition back into learning environments that honor their strengths, needs, and identities. The goal of this guide is to help you navigate this transition with clarity, compassion, and confidence. Together, we can create a school experience where every child feels safe, understood, and empowered to thrive.

BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM- AREAS TO CONSIDER

This is a checklist teachers can refer to as they reflect on their classroom environment.

PHYSICAL

I organize my classroom in a way that students with mobility devices can easily navigate.

I have regular conversations about having respect for and including others with my students.

I ensure the workspaces in my classroom support a variety of learners.

I ensure my classroom is set in a way that when needed I can control bright lights, noise and any other sensory stimulants.

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT	I establish treatment expectations for how individuals should be treated. I create a culture where making mistakes is part of learning. I have conversations when students are not following classroom agreements.
LANGUAGE AND ATTITUDES	I use positive language and tone of voice when referring to individuals with disabilities. I believe all students can achieve different things. I celebrate students and their achievements. I teach students to have an open mind.
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES	I ensure positive peer interactions. My instructional activities target a variety of learning styles. I ensure my students are aware of human diversity.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING and DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTIONS

UDL educational framework is designed to improve learning for all people by setting up environments which are flexible and can accommodate individual learning differences.

It provides broad goals for planning including:

1. Universality and Equity - plan activities that accommodate diff student needs
2. Flexibility and Inclusiveness - use different tools, teaching methods, and assessments
3. Appropriately designed space - ensure necessary material is present
4. Simplicity - minimize distracting info and unnecessary complexity
5. Safety - physical and emotional safety key.

Differentiated learning goes hand-in-hand with UDL. It provides specific ways to design learning activities which adapt to different strengths, needs and interest.

3 domains of differentiation

1. Content: differentiate content being taught
2. Process: differentiate approach/teaching method
3. Product: differentiate evaluation methods

Adapted from Learning for All by the Ontario Ministry of Education

🌐 Learning for all: a guide to effective assessment and i...

TIPS FOR SUPPORTING YOUR STUDENT IN THE CLASSROOM

Check students Ontario Student Record for information about their progress.

Have **conversations** with their previous teachers.

Keep in loop and **inform** special education staff/principal if child is struggling.

Implement initial classroom strategies to promote their success.

Record students strengths and needs.

Meet the parents/guardians to discuss concerns/strategies.

Modify strategies when needed.

NOTE: The in-school team can help you determine the best steps to support your students such as implementing additional interventions, providing a referral for an educational or outside assessment or in developing an IEP.

Adapted from Information from Special Education in Ontario, K - 12, Policy and Resource Guide (2017)

🌐 Special education in Ontario Kindergarten to Grade 12 – Policy and resource guide

CAREGIVER/PARENTS ROLE IN RETURN TO SCHOOL

Caregivers are sources of information. They:	connect school and their child's medical team (if applicable). can have conversations about their child for example their level of energy at different times, how the child's social life is, their likes, dislikes and triggers. can help their child as they move across grades and settings. can inform teachers/schools team what they see at home (hours they work at home, fatigues after school).
Caregiver's may be impacted by their child's diagnosis. They may:	be more hands on and protective of their child. feel that challenges faced by their children are minor setbacks compared to what they were told to expect. struggle with routines sometimes.
Caregivers can be included positively in returning to school process by	set up a welcoming environment when having meetings with the parents. using open and positive tone of voice and body language be sure to give clear explanations. welcome the caregivers perspectives and opinions

	discuss children's strengths and not just their challenges. consider the cultural and social factors that may influence a caregivers reactions or parenting. remembering that caregivers are doing the best that they can.
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ROLE OF PEERS

Acting as Behavioral and Social Models	Peers can show everyday classroom habits, transitions, and play skills that students with disabilities can copy. Hearing peers talk gives children with communication delays real-life examples to improve their own speech and interaction.
Providing Direct Support and Assistance	Peers can help read directions, hand out supplies, or partner up during group work and emergencies. Friendly prompts from classmates motivate students with special needs to join in activities rather than isolate themselves.
Acceptance and Empathy	Working together on projects helps break barriers and aids students in identifying each others strengths. Supporting a classmate helps other students grow in empathy, patience, and leadership.

CHALLENGES CHILDREN MAY FACE AND ACCOMODATIONS

Cognitive	Inattention, Poor memory, Disorganization, Slowed thinking	Frequent breaks, One-on-one academic support Visual breakdown of things Assistive technology The following article a great read for further information: https://www.understood.org/en/articles/common-classroom-accommodations-and-modifications
Emotional	Low mood, Anxiety, Loneliness, Outbursts	Daily check in with the child Facilitate mental health conversations Buddy system for children Help in identifying triggers
Communicative	Oral and written language expression, Speech (clarity/speed)	AAC and similar tools Provide key vocabulary for pre-teaching Graphic organizers Here's a good resource to refer to:

		https://www.understood.org/en/articles/classroom-accommodations-for-language-disorders
Behavioral	Impulsivity, Hyperactivity, Loss of interest, Frustration	Employ peer support and modelling Communicate expected behavior Provide breaks when needed
Physical	Vision Problems, Fatigue, Headaches, Dizziness, Mobility changes	Encourage breaks Implement writing aids Comfortable space for students Here's a toolkit for further ideas: https://accessiblecampus.ca/tools-resources/educators-tool-kit/teaching-tips/teaching-students-with-physical-disabilities/

PEOPLE TO REACH OUT TO IN SCHOOL

Caring Adult

Can be any educator or trusted adult at school.

Talks about students and their needs.

Ensures the student has an adult to talk to and who can provide support.

Resource and Student Success Educators

Manages supports for students with different needs.

Discusses support strategies with all educators involved with a student.

Coordinates and plans meetings when needed.

Vice-Principal

Helps initiate formal supports like IEPs.

Manages supports for students with particular needs.

Communicates with parents, the student and their education team.

May refer case to IPRC team. An IPRC meeting will be coordinated if student needs have been identified on a psychological assessment.

FAMILY MEETING:DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

POLICY

Who and how is a student identified as an exceptional pupil?

What is a special education program?

What are special education services?

What is an IEP?

If a student has been placed in a special education program, can the placement be reviewed?

	What special education programs and services are provided by the board? What organizations are available to assist parents? What are the ministry's Provincial and Demonstration Schools? These questions were adapted from 🌐 Appendix D-1: A sample parents' guide to special education Special education in Ontar...
Behavioral/Social/ Emotional Wellbeing	Discuss the child's emotional or behavioral needs. How might they show up at school? How can needs be catered to? What strategies are used at home? How is the child's social life affected? Is their mental health and emotional well being impacted at times?
Academic Functioning and Accommodations	How independently can the child play or work? What difficulties might the child experience/have experienced at school? What accommodations do parents believe would be helpful for the child? In what areas would parents particularly want the child to succeed during the school year? What are your child's interests, hobbies, and activities? Does your child receive any services or therapy outside of school?