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Policy IHBA

Organization of Educational Services for Students with Handicaps, Social Maladjustments or Learning Disabilities

1. Purpose or Intent

This policy determines the guiding principles for the organization of services for students with handicaps, social maladjustments, or learning disabilities, as well as for students who are at risk for educational success. It is complemented by an organizational guide of specific administrative procedures to support the application of the policy.

The goal of the policy is to set optimal conditions for *Success for All* for a wide range of learners in terms of knowledge, social development, and qualifications. It aims to establish optimal conditions for accommodating individual differences and identified special needs, while acknowledging that success can have different meanings for different students.

2. Definitions for the Purpose of this Policy

- **Board:** The “Board” refers to the “New Frontiers School Board.”
- **Complementary Services:** “Complementary Services” refers to the school board level department of non-teaching professionals and specialized services, overseen by the Coordinator of Complementary Services.
- **IEP:** “IEP” refers to an “Individualized Education Plan,” a formal document required as per the Education Act.
- **Integration:** “Integration” refers to the educational practice of including a student with identified special needs as a member of a regular class group or school activity.
- **IP:** “IP” refers to an “Intervention Plan,” an intervention planning tool described in the Board’s Organizational Guide IHBA.
- **MELS:** “MELS” refers to the “Ministry of Education, Leisure, and Sports.”
- **OG IHBA:** “OG IHBA” refers to the New Frontiers School Board “Organizational Guide on the Ad Hoc Committee and the Use of Special Needs Forms, Special Needs Identification: Learning Difficulties, Behaviour Difficulties, and MELS Codes, and IHBA Forms.”
- **Parity Committee:** “Parity Committee” refers to the board level parity committee of teacher union representatives and school board representatives, as described in the teachers’ collective agreement, dealing with provisions for students with special needs. Locally named the *Central Special Needs Committee (CSNC)*.
- **QEP:** “QEP” refers to the Quebec Education Program.
- **School Level Committee:** “School Level Committee” refers to the school level committee, composed of teachers and an administrator, as described in the teachers’ collective agreement, dealing with the provisions for the allocation of resources for special needs.
- **Special Needs Advisory Committee (SNAC):** “Special Needs Advisory Committee (SNAC)” refers to the advisory committee on services for handicapped students and students with social maladjustments or learning disabilities, as defined in section 185 of the *Education Act*.
- **Students at Risk:** “Students at Risk” refers to those students deemed “At Risk” as defined by the criteria set by MELS and who have been informally identified at the level of the school.
- **Students with Special Needs:** “Students with special needs” covers the term “Students with Handicaps, Social Maladjustments, or Learning Disabilities,” as defined by the criteria set by MELS and who have been formally identified by the school board.
- **Services to Students with Special Needs:** “Services to Students with Special Needs” will be used as the encompassing term for the “Organization of Educational Services for Students with Handicaps, Social Maladjustments, or Learning Disabilities.”

3. **Guiding Principles**

The New Frontiers School Board's vision is to "motivate its students to become lifelong learners and to empower them to become responsible, contributing members of society, applying their knowledge in order to adapt to a diverse and changing world."

In accordance with this vision, and in keeping with the *Quebec Education Act*, the *QEP*, and the *MELS Policy on Special Education*, the Board endorses the general principle of the harmonious integration of students with physical, social, and/or academic challenges into a regular class or group and into school activities. This guiding principle of favoring integration has 'optimizing individual student success' as its goal, rather than access to programs. It recognizes that educational success has different meanings, depending on the abilities and needs of different students. The Board undertakes the integration of students with special needs, taking into consideration that based on the evaluation of a student's abilities and needs, the integration would facilitate the student's individual learning and social integration, and it would not impose an excessive constraint or significantly undermine the rights of the other students.

To ensure educational success for all, emphasis is to be placed on early intervention, prevention, and adaptation of teaching and services as the first line of response, prior to the formal identification of special needs or consideration of special education placement options. The Board will provide and organize a range of special needs services which include preventative measures, early intervention initiatives, integration support services, and special education services.

It is acknowledged by MELS and accepted by the Board that there exists a small number of students with special needs who cannot always be successfully integrated into regular class groupings or into any of the established school settings within the Board. In such cases, it is the responsibility of the Board, within the student-parent-school partnership, to seek alternatives, either inside or outside its jurisdiction.

The Board will engage in all required consultative processes, including the applicable teachers' provincial and local agreements, for allocation of resources, and will utilize all available financial resources allocated through MELS Budgetary Regulations for special needs services. To this end, the Board is committed to providing education and support for each student with special needs within the setting most appropriate to the student's development and needs, within the resources available.

4. **Procedures for Evaluating Students with Special Needs**

Evaluation of Students with Identified Special Needs

The individual progress of a student with identified special needs as defined by MELS criteria is evaluated through the IEP process and reviewed as necessary through Ad Hoc Committee procedures, as outlined in the Board's *Organizational Guide IHBA*.

New Registrants

Parents/guardians registering a new student for school are required to indicate on the registration form whether their child has previously been identified or diagnosed with special needs. Parents/guardians are responsible for submitting evaluation reports or providing consent for the Board to obtain this information from outside agencies or previous schools. Evaluation reports on special needs will be reviewed by the school administrator and forwarded to the Coordinator of Complementary Services upon receipt.

Evaluations will be reviewed by the Coordinator of Complementary Services prior to the student starting school to ensure that the student's needs are able to be met within the available services and classroom settings in the zoned community school or to plan for a special education placement inside or outside of the Board. With parental consent, pre-attendance screenings will be conducted by Complementary Services professionals for children with identified special needs, newly registered for the upcoming school year. If necessary a case conference will be arranged at the school with a member of the Complementary Services team, to review the student's needs. This may result in special needs identification with a MELS Handicap code and the development of an IEP, planning for strategic interventions or support service needs, or special education placement prior to the student starting school.

The provision of strategic interventions or support services may be limited due to parents/guardians who:

- neglect or refuse to inform the Board of prior needs upon enrollment
- refuse to allow their children to be formally assessed by a professional
- refuse to release prior records or assessments completed by outside professionals

Request for Evaluation

If a student is experiencing learning, behavioral, or developmental difficulties, a teacher's responsibility includes the implementation of a variety of preventative measures and differentiated instruction to address and respond to individual student needs. When concerns persist in spite of teacher interventions, a request may be made by the teacher or parent to the school administrator for an Ad Hoc Committee meeting to address the difficulty through additional intervention planning, referral for an evaluation of the student by a non-teaching professional, or other follow-up actions.

A teacher's request for an Ad Hoc Committee meeting is submitted in writing, as per OG IHBA, to the school administrator who convenes an Ad Hoc Committee within fifteen working days. A parental request may be signaled, in writing, through the child's teacher or school administrator.

Ad Hoc Committee

Following the request, an Ad Hoc Committee shall be made up of a representative of the school administration, the teacher(s) concerned, parents/guardians, student where appropriate, and professionals and support staff upon request. If a referral for an assessment by Complementary Services professionals is anticipated, it is advisable to include them whenever possible. Parents/guardians have the right to be included and should be invited, but their presence is not required in order to have an Ad Hoc Committee meeting.

The Ad Hoc Committee serves as a problem-solving mechanism to develop a plan of action to address the concerns about a student's progress. The recommendations, which may include a referral for assessment by a Board or outside professional, are summarized in writing as per OG IHBA, with the appropriate form signed by the school administrator. Requests for formal assessments by a professional or requests for parental consent for evaluation by a professional may only be done through Ad Hoc procedures, and may not be initiated by teachers directly to parents.

If an Ad Hoc recommendation includes a request for a formal assessment or consultation with a professional, the referring teachers and school administrator complete the required paperwork as per OG IHBA and a psycho-educational or speech and language consultation or assessment ensues in as timely a manner as available resources permit. Upon completion of the assessment, the professional meets with the teachers concerned, the school administrator, parents/guardians, and student where appropriate, to review the results and make recommendations concerning any of the following: intervention strategies and adapted teaching methods, adjustment or addition of supports or services, special needs identification, the development of an Intervention Plan or IEP, or a referral to outside services.

Identification of Special Needs

The Board has the responsibility for identifying or not identifying a student with special needs. All requests for special needs identification or removal of special needs identification takes place through the Ad Hoc Committee process, using the procedures and special needs forms outlined in the OG IHBA. In the case of a new registrant whose parents/guardians provide the required documentation for a recognized MELS Handicap code, the Board will identify the student with special needs upon registration. The appropriate documentation is forwarded to the school administrator, who informs the teachers concerned of the child's situation and the need to develop an IEP.

School administrators, with the support of Complementary Services, will assist school teams in following the OG IHBA for Ad Hoc Committee procedures and assessment protocols, the use of required forms, special needs identification, and the maintenance of student confidentiality and confidential records.

5. **Procedures for Preparing IEPs**

The purpose of an IEP is the development of a plan for individual student success. It should be solution oriented, with goals, strategies, and accommodations which are clear, practical, and useful to the student, parents, and school team who are collaborative partners in IEP development. The IEP is linked to the evaluation and reporting process. An IEP is the prerequisite for adjustments to evaluation on a regular report card: an IEP makes note of curriculum adaptations, modified instructional levels, and/or accommodations for or exemptions from exams or evaluation situations.

All students with identified special needs must have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), as described in the Board's OG IHBA. Principals are legally responsible for IEPs, but teachers share professional accountability for developing, implementing, and evaluating IEPs for the students in their class. Parents have the right to be part of the decision-making in the IEP process and should be viewed as key partners in the development of the plan. Students, where appropriate, should be invited to participate in the IEP process. Complementary Services professionals may be called upon to facilitate IEP development. While professionals, pedagogical support staff or health and social service personnel (with parental consent) may be invited to participate in the IEP process, it is the responsibility of the team of administrator and teachers, who develop and sign IEPs, to ensure they are implemented.

Students at risk or in the process of receiving preventative intervention or undergoing evaluation may have an Intervention Plan (IP). Students who are at risk and in particularly vulnerable situations should have an IEP as a preventative support measure and to plan for and document needed accommodations. This is done at the discretion of the principal, in consultation with the parents and staff concerned. In situations where it is determined through an Ad Hoc Committee that an IEP is no longer necessary, i.e. the student is achieving cycle competencies and is no longer in need of support services, the removal of a special needs identification may be requested.

IEPs must be developed or revised annually. This generally takes place in the first quarter of the school year, with progress evaluated in the last six weeks of the year. IEPs may also be revised each term or as needed. In situations where a student with special needs arrives mid-year, or a request for special needs identification occurs mid-year through the Ad Hoc Committee process, an IEP is developed in a timely fashion to set the student up for individual success.

In addition to guiding the school team with respect to the implementation of the OG IHBA, each school principal should also develop clear school procedures and designate responsibilities as needed for the coordination and implementation of IEPs. This ensures that annual IEPs are completed and printed, and that signed IEP copies are both provided to parents and placed at the end of each year, with progress comments noted, in the student's Confidential File.

Parents are encouraged to call upon the school team and/or principal first for direct assistance in IEP development or to ensure collaboration on the implementation of the plan. In situations where there is difficulty establishing or implementing an IEP within the parent-student-school partnership, the principal can call upon support from the Board through Complementary Services to facilitate IEP collaboration. In exceptional circumstances, and following meetings with both the school principal and the Board to reach consensus on an IEP, a parent may consult the Special Needs Advisory Committee (SNAC) to provide an opinion to the Board on IEP implementation.

6. **Services and Conditions Required to Integrate Students with Special Needs**

Support services for special needs should be viewed as part of a continuum of support, which begins with differentiation of instruction and implementation of diverse behavior strategies to assist a wide range of learners in acquiring cycle competencies within the regular classroom settings. Adjustments to curriculum and adapted teaching methods, the use of technology, and evaluation of learning to inform teaching practice should be part of preventative and early intervention at all levels. Support services for students at risk or students with special needs will include a range of preventative measures, intervention initiatives, individual or group interventions, integration supports as a priority, and special education programs at either a school or board-wide level as determined by the Board. The provision of ongoing support services outside of the regular classroom, such as remedial sessions or psycho-social support, should be communicated to the parents/guardians of students under the age of fourteen.

Support services for special needs should be organized in a way that promotes successful integration into both regular classes and other school activities wherever possible. The principles of prevention and early intervention for students at risk should be balanced with the deployment of available services to support identified special needs. Services for special needs may be provided by teachers in special education or intervention roles, non-teaching professionals, pedagogical support staff, or administrative personnel. Services may also include opportunities for training, time for planning and collaboration, technology, material resources, etc. A non-exhaustive list is provided in an appendix to this policy.

The Board, in consultation with the Parity Committee as per the teachers' provincial and local agreements, will assign available human and material resources to schools in an equitable manner according to the needs of the students in order to provide appropriate services. In turn, schools, in consultation with the school level committees where applicable, are expected to organize resources and staff in a way that assures the equitable distribution of students with special needs and the services provided to them.

Integrating Students with Special Needs

To facilitate the successful integration of students with special needs, the following conditions should be in place:

- An evaluation of the abilities and needs of the student, available in a Confidential File at the school
- An IEP
- Support services as organized by the Board and the individual school
- As needed, orientation of the staff (teaching and non-teaching), and peers where appropriate and with parental consent, to the particular special needs of a student
- Transition planning as needed
- Collaboration of all available partners to support the student's individual progress

7. Conditions for Grouping Students with Special Needs

While the integration of students with special needs is the guiding principle, the Board recognizes that full integration is not always possible. As a result, the Board may choose to provide the student with educational services in a setting other than in a regular class or secondary program pathway. The Board will determine the need and criteria for establishing central special education classes within its territory, and oversee board-wide special education placements as per the OG IHBA.

In establishing both regular and special education class groupings, weighting provisions for students with special needs will be applied in accordance with the teachers' collective agreement.

The placement of a student with special needs in a grouping other than a regular class or program takes place only after a comprehensive assessment has been completed. Grouping may include partial, gradual, or full integration, an enclosed special class referred to as a Learning Centre, temporary home tutoring, and alternative programs. Collaboration with parents/guardians on intervention planning and special placement for their child is a critical condition for individual student success. Placement in a Learning Centre special education class requires the written consent of the parents/guardians.

The Board determines student placement in a Learning Centre or outside placement through a case conference meeting chaired by the Director of Educational Services or his/her delegate. The meeting will include the parents and a school administrator. Other expertise may be called upon as required: teachers, Complementary Services professionals, pedagogical support staff, or outside professionals.

The Board will attempt to organize services as near to the student's place of residence as possible. The type of grouping will be determined by a formal assessment of the student's abilities and needs, in accordance with MELS provisions and the applicable collective agreements. Whenever possible, the Board will inform parents of placement decisions prior to the beginning of the school year.

If the Board cannot provide the appropriate services within the schools of its territory, it may enter into an agreement with another school board or institution for the services to be provided, following consultation with the parents/guardians and the student who is aged fourteen or over.

Among the options the Board may have to use is education at home. This is an interim measure to be used when the student cannot be immediately accommodated in his/her recommended placement. Under these circumstances, the Board will provide home tutoring for five hours a week.

8. The Educational Community

This policy will be made available to all parents of students with special needs and the community at large through the Board's web site. The implementation of the policy will also be supported by an Organizational Guide IHBA, which provides details as to procedures, protocols, and required special needs forms. Both the Policy IHBA on Services to Students with Special Needs and the complementary OG IHBA will be available electronically to all Board staff on the New Frontiers School Board portal.

Parents of children with special needs, the parent advisory committee for special needs, the Board-teacher parity committee, school level special needs committees, school governing boards, local health and social services networks, and Board personnel – all are important partners in the provision of support services to students with special needs. The Board will seek working partnerships at all levels to ensure optimal consultation and foster collaboration.

To provide information to all stakeholders, an annual report on needs and services to students with special needs will be provided to the Educational Services Department by the principal of each school, in consultation with the staff concerned. The final reports will be deposited with the Council of Commissioners, and then forwarded to both the Special Needs Advisory Committee (SNAC) and the Parity Committee (CSNC) for discussion and recommendations to the Board.

Organization of Educational Services for Students with Handicaps, Social Maladjustments or Learning Disabilities

Appendix

Non-exhaustive List of Support Personnel and Services

- Psychologists/Counselors in Re-education
- Speech and Language Pathologists
- Consultant for Special Needs and Literacy Intervention
- Guidance Professionals (secondary)
- Curriculum Consultants (differentiation, literacy for at risk learners)
- Educational Consultant in Measurement and Evaluation (adapted evaluation)
- Professional supports through MELS-MSSS ententes: Drug Counselor, Nurse, Social Worker, Psycho-educator, Doctor, etc. (determined by CSSS)
- Resource and Supporting Teachers
- Special Education Teachers
- Special Education Technicians
- Attendants
- Social Work Technicians
- American Sign Language (ASL) and Oral Interpreters
- Itinerant Montreal Association for the Blind (MAB) Teaching Specialist
- Itinerant Montreal Oral School for the Deaf (MOSD) Teaching Specialist
- Literacy intervention initiatives or programs, e.g. S.T.A.R.T Program (Elementary) and L.E.A P. Program (Secondary)
- NANS intervention initiatives, developed locally by schools indexed as disadvantaged
- Native Grant intervention initiatives, developed locally by schools with eligible native students
- Homework Assistance programs, developed locally (At risk prevention)
- Wellness initiatives, developed locally (At risk prevention)
- Extra supervision at lunch or daycare for students with special needs
- Adaptive equipment and technology for eligible students with MELS special needs identification (e.g. laptops, FM amplification systems, specialized autism software programs, e.g. Boardmaker, etc.)
- Home tutoring
- Professional development, both central and on-site
- IEP training and support
- Particular support of a school or Board administrator
- Sensitization materials and support
- Crisis intervention protocols
- ALDI projects (professional development, mentoring projects, other resource teacher support)
- Print and media resources on special needs
- Bank of time, e.g. teacher release for consultation, IEP development, meetings, training, etc.
- Allocation of remedial periods
- Provisions of support for adapted evaluation
- Special education material allocation for Learning Centres
- Special clerical or technical support (photocopying, laminating of special pedagogical materials, technical support for use of adaptive equipment, etc.)
- Specialized transportation services
- Adaptation of physical facilities