



Special Education Guiding Principles

Board Received: March 27, 2017 Review Date: April 2021

Policy Statement:

Grand Erie District School Board special education programs and services are delivered in safe and enabling environments in order to promote success for students with special education needs. An enabling environment is positive, inclusive and fosters student independence and well-being. Schools and special education support staff work collaboratively and respectfully with students, parents/guardians and other involved agencies, using all available information to develop an understanding of each child's unique strengths and needs, and to program in the most appropriate manner.

Accountability:

1. Frequency of Reports – As needed
2. Criteria for Success –
 - Access to educational opportunities for all students
 - Students receive program in most enabling environment
 - Partnerships to support student needs are developed and promoted, within the board and in the community (see SO108 – Community Service Providers and Schools Working Together)
 - Training and support for classroom teacher, early childhood educator, and other school support staff are apparent
 - Resources are allocated to meet the most urgent student safety and learning needs

Special education programs and services within the Grand Erie District School Board are guided by the following eight principles. See Appendix A for more description:

1. All students can succeed. Success looks different for different students.
2. Education is differentiated for students, and provided for students in the whole class, in groups, and very rarely on a one-to-one basis.
3. Students learn differently and have different educational goals. Educators respond to these differences when planning and delivering programs.
4. The goal for all schools is to create environments that consider and include the learning needs of all students.
5. Resources are provided to support students to become independent in reaching their educational goals.
6. The classroom teacher and early childhood educator are the primary support for all students in school. Human resource supports such as learning resource teachers, educational assistants and other support staff work as a support to the classroom teacher and early childhood educator to address the needs of the students.
7. Students are educated in their community schools if this is the more enabling environment for their learning. Self-contained classroom placements are available if regular class placement cannot meet the needs of students.
8. Fairness is not sameness. Students are provided with resources and supports that will assist them to become independent in reaching their educational goals.

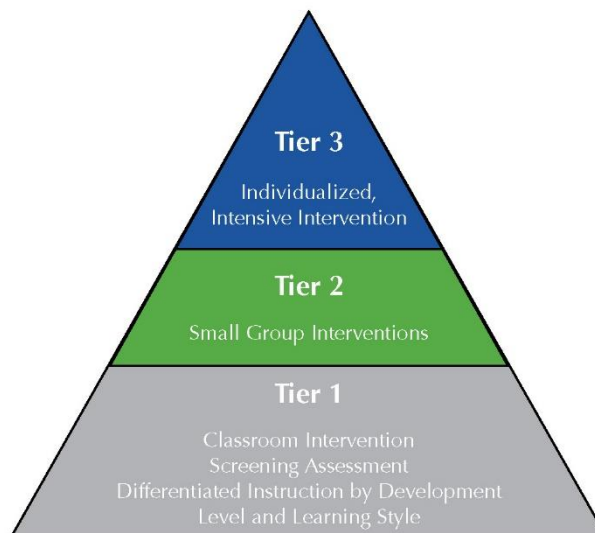
Guiding Principles in Special Education

1. **All students can succeed. Success looks different for different students.**

In Grand Erie we believe that all students can succeed when provided with high expectations for learning and achievement and the necessary accommodations and/or modifications in their individualized educational program. Programs are developed to challenge students to achieve at a greater level, while building in regular opportunities for success. Student success is measured by their achievement of the goals outlined in their Individual Education Plan (I.E.P.).

2. **Education is differentiated for students, and provided for students in the whole class, in groups, and very rarely on a one-to-one basis.**

Our mission is to nurture and develop the potential of all students by providing meaningful learning opportunities. Educational program delivery occurs within a group of peers to facilitate the development of the whole child. We believe that using a tiered approach to the identification of learning needs in the classrooms provides assessment and instruction that are responsive to student needs. Supports are organized and offered based on student need. In Tier 1 students meet their educational goals in a whole class setting, with supports provided. In Tier 2 students require small group support in order to meet their educational goals. In Tier 3, students may require an alternative setting or individualized support in order to meet with success. When individualized support is required, it is time-limited and every effort is made to support the student to move to small group or whole class instruction as soon as possible. Very few students require Tier 3 support. We believe that the education of every child is the collective responsibility of every adult within a school community.



3. **Students learn differently and have different educational goals. Educators respond to these differences when planning and delivering programs.**

Schools within the Grand Erie District School Board represent diverse communities. Programs are developed and implemented to meet local needs within the framework of provincial education requirements. This includes identifying and meeting individual student needs within the context of group learning.

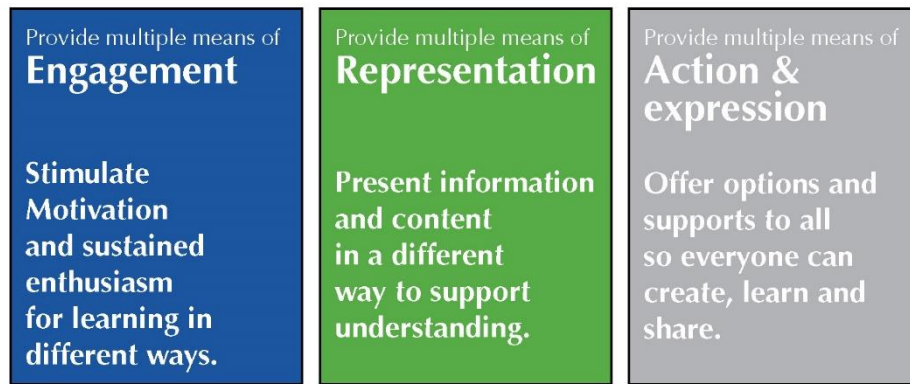
Universal design and differentiated instruction are an effective means of meeting the learning needs of any group of students. We believe that all classrooms include students with a range of talents and abilities and that our classroom learning environments must be accessible to all.

Classroom physical and learning environments can be made accessible to all learners by applying the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL encourages educators to reflect on the unique nature of each learner and to accommodate for differences, thereby creating learning experiences that suit individual learners and maximize their ability to progress in the context of group learning.

We know that our students differ significantly in their strengths, interests, learning styles and readiness to learn, therefore we believe it is necessary to adapt, or differentiate, instruction and assessment in order to suit these differing characteristics.

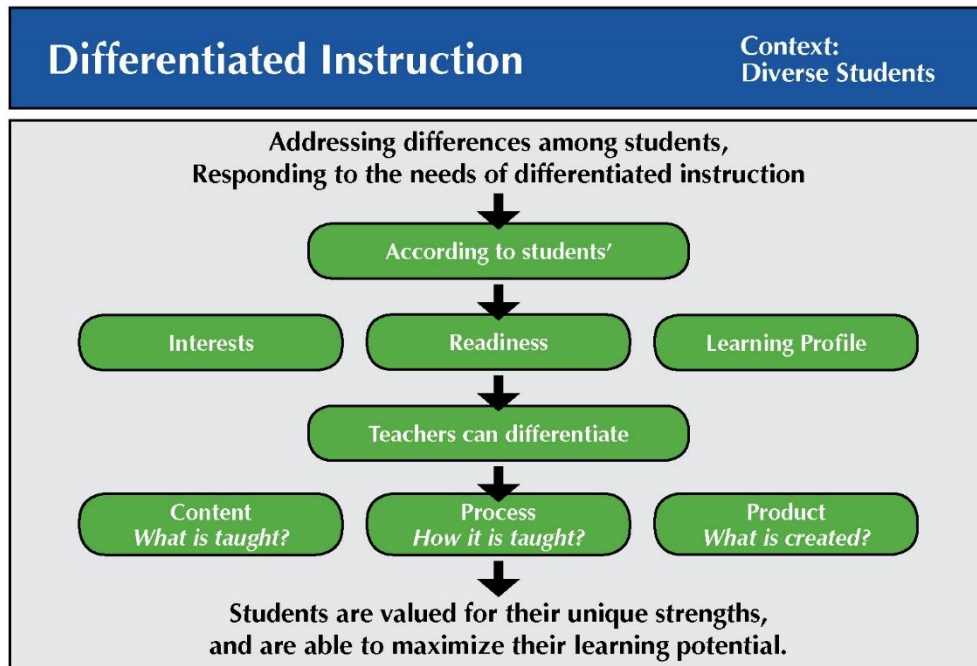
For students who require intense support to achieve learning goals, schools have access to a variety of specialized supports to identify, understand and meet these special needs with a view to expanding the range of special needs that can be met within each community school.

Universal Design for Learning



Universal Design for Learning: 3 principles

Differentiated Instruction



4. **The goal for all schools is to create environments that consider and include the learning needs of all students.**

The culture of the school is essential in fostering an attitude of inclusion and the school principal takes the lead in building an inclusive school culture. An inclusive culture celebrates diversity by creating an infrastructure that balances group and individual needs. It supports school staff in the development of new skills and invites students and their parents to actively participate in the educational process.

An attitude of inclusion recognizes and values the tiered approach to the provision of special education programs and services. While consultation with specialized personnel may help the regular classroom teacher and early childhood educator deliver an appropriate program for some students, others require more intensive supports which may include placement in a self-contained program. Deciding when a self-contained placement may be appropriate is a consultative process which honours the voices of parents, school staff, system special education support staff and the student, as appropriate. In most cases it must be demonstrated that the student has had adequate opportunity to access program in a regular classroom setting and that the regular classroom is not meeting the individual needs of the student before a self-contained classroom placement is considered.

An attitude of inclusion ensures that students in self-contained classes are welcomed and integrated into their school communities. Inclusion can occur during both instructional and non-instructional time and is based on providing the optimum experience for the student to meet with success in the integrated setting.

5. **Resources are provided to support students to become independent in reaching their educational goals.**

While education supports the special learning needs of students, it does not treat children for medical, mental health and social disorders or disease. Wherever possible, we seek to work co-operatively with community agencies to develop the most beneficial pathway to treatment for students, if this is required. In the school setting, supports to promote student well-being are implemented.

6. **The classroom teacher and early childhood educator are the primary supports for all students in school. Human resource supports such as learning resource teachers, educational assistants and other support staff work as a support to the classroom teacher and early childhood educator to address the needs of the students.**

Human resource supports are organized to support the classroom teacher and early childhood educator, so that students can remain in their community schools for as long as it is in their best educational interests.

School resources, including the expertise of the Learning Resource Teacher, Principal and regular classroom teacher and early childhood educator, are the primary means by which special education needs are identified and addressed. The regular classroom teacher and early childhood educator play a central role in the process of identifying special needs, co-ordinating the additional supports to build a better understanding of an individual student and developing an Individual Education Plan (I.E.P.) to address these needs. Our respect for the regular classroom teacher and early childhood educator is reflected in the allocation of resources to develop their skills on an on-going basis. Effective special educational programming requires a knowledge of specific exceptionalities, provincial curriculum standards and teaching, learning and assessment methods. The development of this broad range of skills for all teachers and early childhood educators, must be supported by in-service, coaching materials and planning resources that target these areas.

At the school level, special education support for the classroom teacher and early childhood educator will be provided by the Learning Resource Teacher. To the greatest extent possible, this support should be delivered within the classroom setting.

In some situations, the support of an Educational Assistant is required to meet the medical and/or safety needs of students at school. Educational Assistants are valued members of the student’s support team, providing shared support to students. This means that the Educational Assistant is not allocated solely to one child and the movement of Educational Assistants at regular intervals is encouraged. It is in this way that schools work to minimize the dependency that can be created by an over-reliance on one individual staff member or one level of service.

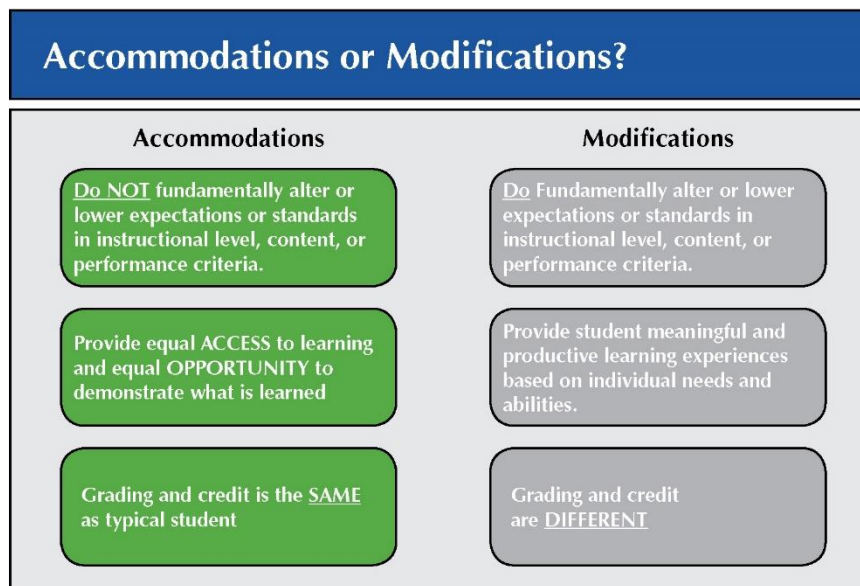
System special education support staff build the capacity of schools to meet the broad range of student special education needs. Specialized supports within the Grand Erie District School Board, including the services of the Learning Resource Teacher, Teacher Consultants – Special Education, System Learning Resource Teachers and system non-teaching staff - Attendance Counsellors, Behaviour Counsellors, Child and Youth Workers, Psychological Services, Social Work and Speech Language Counsellors, Communicative Disorders Assistants and Lead Educational Assistants - are accessed through the School Resource Team.

It is recognized that the success of special education programs depends on the quality of the staff delivering the program. Selection of suitable, qualified personnel is as important as on-going training.

7. **Students are educated in their community schools if this is the more enabling environment for their learning. Self-contained classroom placements are available if regular class placement cannot meet the needs of students.**

Early identification of learning needs - and programming to address them - is part of classroom planning for all students. Where significant academic challenges persist, special education services, including access to self-contained placements, may be appropriate.

If a student’s needs can be met in a regular classroom with *accommodations* and *modifications*, placement should be in a regular classroom in the home school.



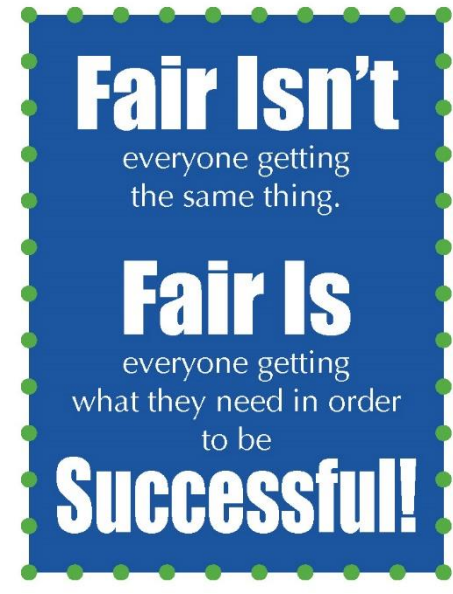
Self-contained class placements are a more defined environment within the education system. The individual needs of some students with specific exceptionalities are such that placement within a self-contained class can also be the most enabling. Programs in self-contained settings will be *alternative* to a regular class program. Alternative programming addresses various aspects of student need that are not specifically represented in the Ontario curriculum. These may include social skills, self-help skills, life skills, self-advocacy skills, self-regulation skills and the learning of new behaviours. Alternative curriculum expectations must be related to the student's exceptionality and individualized according to the student's needs.

Self-contained placements are offered within the Grand Erie District School Board recognizing that learning needs and long-term educational outcomes vary based on student exceptionality. For some exceptionalities, placements offer time-limited but intensive support in order to address specific, identified needs that will enable students to achieve educational goals within their home school. For example, a student with a learning disability learns how to use technology to bypass written language difficulties, or a student with behavioural needs develops the self-regulation skills required for success in a regular classroom.

When a student's capacity to manage the demands of a regular classroom will likely decrease from grade to grade due to their developmental needs, placement in a self-contained program should be delayed until the student's needs are such that an alternative to regular program is in their best interests. For example, a student with a developmental disability then continues to learn in the context of a life skills program that is an alternative to the Ontario curriculum. Similarly, gifted students who are identified formally as a result of the blanket testing of grade 3 students will receive effective programming within the regular classroom, but could choose at some point to access enrichment or gifted-class opportunities. Access to any alternative programs must be based on assessment data and supported by the School and Resource Team.

Educational implications of participation in self-contained programs should be discussed with the parents and students through the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (I.P.R.C.) planning process, as well as part of Individual Educational Plan (I.E.P.) development, Annual Goal setting and Transition Planning. If the long-term goal for a student is the completion of an Ontario Secondary School Diploma or Ontario Secondary School Certificate of Achievement, self-contained class placement must be time limited to enable the development of the non-academic skills required for success in regular classes (i.e. independent work completion and goal setting, time management, organization, peer relationships, planning etc.). If the long-term goal for a student is the completion of a Certificate of Accomplishment, then opportunity for continued placement until June the year the student turns the age of 21 must be ensured.

8. Fairness is not sameness. Students are provided with resources and supports that will assist them to become independent in reaching their educational goals.



We believe that students need to be provided with programs and supports in an equitable manner. Equitable does not mean equal treatment for all students. Students will receive programs and support based on assessment data that will help them to meet with success in their individualized programs. There are many ways that program supports and services are provided to students that vary from student to student but decrease the barriers faced by those students in meeting with success.

For example, some students may require technology use in a whole class setting, other students may require the support of an Educational Assistant working in a small group setting, and others may require placement in a self-contained classroom with a smaller number of students and a focus on alternative learning goals. Other students may require changes to the content, delivery and assessment of their programs as outlined by their classroom teachers in their Individual Education Plans.