Accessing Professional Supports

Saskatchewan Guidelines for School Division Professional Services

2017

Government of Saskatchewan

Preface:

The Ministry of Education embraces a needs-based model for delivering services to students within an inclusive educational approach. The *Actualizing a Needs-Based Model* (2015) document provides information, philosophical ideals and guiding principles for identifying and providing supports for students. The key principles of the framework for the needs-based model include: inclusionary philosophy and beliefs, planning for instruction, interventions and supports and interprofessional collaboration.

Interprofessional collaboration is central to fostering student success within inclusive settings. Students, parents/guardians, school personnel, human services agencies and community organizations form collaborative teams that are committed to a shared vision of inclusion to support students in reaching their full potential (*Inclusive Education*, 2017).

> *"No one professional has all the knowledge and skills required to successfully meet the range of diverse student needs in today's classrooms."*
> (*Actualizing a Needs-Based Model*, 2015, p. 9)

The collaborative process provides the opportunity to merge unique skills, foster positive interdependence, develop creative problem solving and enhance accountability. Collaborative team members cooperate, clearly communicate and engage in joint decision-making towards a consensus for the creation of a plan to support and promote positive, inclusive and engaging educational experiences for learning.

> *"A needs-based approach involves a comprehensive evaluation of the holistic needs of individual students and their families, the identification of concerns and priorities, and the coordination of appropriate supports through an efficient use of resources."*
> (*Actualizing a Needs-Based Model,* 2015, p.6)

Professional supports can be accessed to provide specific information and skills to support planning and problem solving for students, classrooms, schools and school divisions. Information is gathered through responsive instruction, intervention, consultation, observations, informal and formal data collection and standardized assessments to identify student strengths and needs. The information is used to generate recommendations that contribute to collaborative decision-making for the implementation of plans to support students (*Inclusion and Intervention Plan Guidelines*, 2017).

This document offers guidelines to schools and school divisions to access and engage professionals who can provide services to support student success.

Accessing Professionals

Professional supports may include, but are not limited to speech-language pathologists, psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists. Professionals are required to maintain standing with their specific regulatory body and to adhere to professional practice guidelines and ethics for their profession's practice in Saskatchewan.

Please refer to the following table for website addresses to access more information regarding specific professional practice guidelines in Saskatchewan:

Speech-Language Pathologist	Saskatchewan Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists	www.saslpa.ca
Psychologist	Saskatchewan College of Psychologists	www.skcp.ca
Social Worker	Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers	www.sasw.ca
Occupational Therapist	Saskatchewan Society of Occupational Therapists	www.ssot.sk.ca

School divisions are encouraged to develop a process for accessing the services of professionals that aligns with the guidelines and policies of the regulatory body with which the professional is licensed. Services provided may involve prevention, intervention, assessment and follow-up activities. The following **general guidelines** have been developed to align with the various professionals' regulatory body guidelines as well as positive practices that support student needs.

Determining the Need for Individualized Student Support

The classroom teacher has an important role in identifying when a student may be experiencing difficulty, as well as determining how to address barriers to and needs for learning engagement. Student response to various instructional approaches, assessments and adaptations provides information about a student's strengths and needs. **School teams collaborate** to identify, implement and monitor interventions and supports. If a student does not demonstrate progress as expected, the team will determine if additional information or supports are needed. The team will consider if completing a referral to access a specific service from a professional is appropriate. This is often referred to as a **pre-referral process**.

The following diagram (adapted from Hutchison, 2017) outlines the classroom teacher's first steps in gathering information to support decision-making during the pre-referral process.

- Observe and document student characteristics, behaviours and needs relevant to concerns.
- Note strengths.
- Read student's school cumulative file.
- Review previous assessments and recommendations, adaptations and supports, progress reports and note attendance.
- Seek parent perspective, concerns and observations.
- Consult with the student support services teacher.

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- Share information gathered with student support services teacher, if agreed upon; create a collaborative plan to implement adaptations and supports.
- Keep a record of adaptations and supports, and the student's response.
- Allow time for adaptations and supports to be effective.
- Continue to work with the student support services teacher to analyze records, look for patterns, identify examples of strengths and needs, and effective adaptations and supports.

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- Does the student demonstrate progress as expected?
  - ➢ Yes – continue with adaptations and supports.
  - ➢ No – continue to problem solve and determine if there is a need for more information or further assessment?
    - o If yes, begin a referral process to access a specific service from a professional.

Information gathered during the pre-referral process provides quality information when determining what additional information or supports may be required. School divisions are encouraged to develop a pre-referral process to ensure available school-based interventions and supports have been utilized prior to accessing specific professional supports.

Obtaining Consent for Professional Involvement:

A licensed professional who provides services in educational settings is required to obtain parent/guardian consent for services to a minor in accordance with their regulatory body's ethics, policies, guidelines and procedures. Consent will vary depending on what type of service the school division needs to access.

School divisions can access a professional for broader services that involve professional development for education staff without the need for parent/guardian consent. School staff, administrators and teachers can consult with a professional for inquiries regarding a specific disorder/disability or for general questions that are not connected to specific students. **Parent/guardian consent is required for any professional who may be involved in specialized services such as consultation, assessment or intervention of specific students**.

Implied Consent:

At times, whole school or classroom services may be requested to implement new interventions or supports that will benefit all students. These types of services can be communicated to parents/guardians through a letter, brochure or newsletter prior to the commencement of services. The information correspondence should include the opportunity

for the parent/guardian to have their child not participate in the service. Following are the types of services that could be covered by **implied consent:**

- **A speech-language pathologist may provide classroom-based universal language strategies or engage in whole classroom screening.**
- **A psychologist may provide whole school or classroom information on learning styles or positive behaviour supports.**
- **A social worker may provide information or interventions regarding social skills development through strategies used with the whole school or classroom.**
- **An occupational therapist may provide information regarding routines, environmental modifications, inclusive practices or equipment needs for a whole classroom or school.**

In the examples above, the professional is a **member of the school-based education team and is providing information or support for the whole school or classroom**.

<u>**Written Informed Consent:**</u>

When specific services are required to meet the needs of an **individual student**, **written informed consent** is required. This generally begins by having the parents/guardians complete and sign a referral form as part of the process. It also involves providing the parent/guardian and student with the following information for informed consent:

> *Informed consent is not solely a form including a signature or informative materials; rather it ensures that parent/guardian and student (client) have an understanding and specific details of the intervention or assessment; including with whom and how information will be shared and stored.*
> *(Canadian Psychological Association, 2007; Saskatchewan Society of Occupational Therapists, 2010)*

- **the purpose and nature of the service;**
- **other options for services;**
- **benefits and risks of the service being proposed and the benefits and risks of not receiving the service;**
- **the option to refuse or withdraw at any time and how to do this;**
- **confidentiality protections and limitations, including who will have access to what types of information and what information will or can be shared;**
- **where and how information will be stored; and,**
- **to what period of time the consent applies.**

One exception to obtaining informed consent occurs when a student presents as an **immediate risk for harm to self or others**. In this case, immediate assessment and/or intervention would proceed and consent from parents/guardians would be sought as soon as possible.

Determining the Type of Service Needed

Once **consent has been obtained**, the professional can provide consultation and become part of the collaborative team that supports the individual student. Information gathered during the pre-referral process is shared with the professional as collaboration begins to establish what types of services are needed. Once the professional is part of the school team, and is providing services to the student, the professional can now have access to the student school cumulative file, which provides additional information regarding school history and previous assessments.

At this point a professional may implement services or recommend additional adaptations such as changes to the environment or access to equipment, interventions or supports. Services may include a referral to human services agencies or community organizations for specialized services and/or the development of a safety plan or a behaviour plan. The service may result in ongoing direct contact or intervention with the student. Continued collaborative team engagement is required to track student progress as follow-up to the implementation of new adaptations, interventions or supports.

Student success and engagement in learning will determine if additional individualized formal assessments are needed to inform further adaptations, interventions or supports. At the secondary level, this may include consideration of academic course or program changes. If the collaborative team determines that more information is needed, the reason for the referral should be revisited and clarified to begin the formal assessment process.

Formal Assessment Process

The professional will guide the formal assessment process relevant to their area of specialty while continuing to work closely with the student's support team. A formal assessment process may involve the following:

- **Contact the parent/guardian to obtain informed consent (refer to Written Informed Consent, p. 5).**
- **Gather background information from the parent/guardian regarding family history, prenatal and birth history, developmental history, applicable medical history, social history, as well as current interests, strengths, challenges, and emotional and behavioural functioning.**
- **Gather information about the student by reviewing the student's school cumulative file, previous assessments and student work samples, and by interviewing relevant school staff involved with the student.**
- **Observe the student in various environments, such as the classroom, playground, hallways, home or community environments (e.g., job placements).**
- **Interact with the student prior to the formal assessment to establish rapport.**
- **Determine the appropriate and relevant assessment tool(s).**

- **Work with the principal and/or student support services teacher to arrange a time and confidential space for the assessment to take place.**
- **Complete the assessment and provide a written report that includes recommendations to support student success.**
- **Share or debrief the results, interpretations and recommendations contained in the written report with the parent/guardian, student if appropriate and other applicable team members.**

Information presented during the debriefing (or sharing) of the assessment results will be used to create an action plan to meet the student's needs. The action plan will outline what changes will be made to support the student, such as deciding how to implement the recommendations. The recommendations will provide information regarding different adaptations, specific interventions or a change in academic courses or programming. The school team, including the classroom teacher, will implement recommendations that support student engagement and success.

The professional should continue to provide follow-up services to ensure the recommendations are creating positive change for the student. The team will monitor the student's response to implemented changes in instructional approaches, adaptations and/or specific interventions identified through the assessment process. At times there may be a need to generate new recommendations, complete further assessments or initiate referrals to other professionals, agencies or organizations. Additional referrals will require revisiting the informed consent process (refer to Written Informed Consent, p. 5).

Summary

Professionals can be accessed to provide prevention, intervention and follow-up services for students, parents/guardians, classrooms, schools and school divisions. These guidelines offer an understanding of the processes involved when a decision is made to access consultation, assessment, intervention and other professional supports. Accessing professionals offers an opportunity to create expanded collaborative teams for supporting student learning and success in inclusive educational experiences in Saskatchewan.

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