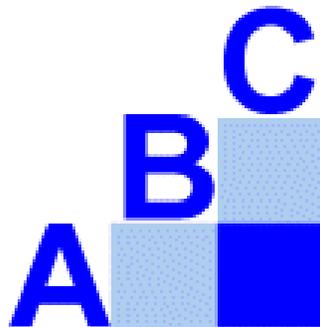


PARENTS AS PARTNERS
AN INVESTMENT IN TOMORROW



Association for Bright Children of Ontario
Policy Document

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Credit must be given to the Association for Bright Children of Ontario

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PARENTS AS PARTNERS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1990, a committee was established by the Ontario Association for Bright Children (ABC) to produce a document of the Association's education policies. This initiative was in response to a need for a common message about education from the Provincial Executive, Local Chapters and SEAC representatives.

This document was reviewed and updated in the spring of 2004 to reflect legislative changes; the policies themselves continue to accurately reflect ABC's positions and directions. The changes were approved at the October 23, 2004 Provincial Council meeting.

This document was developed from past statements, position papers and presentations. It represents the views of the Association for Bright Children and the association's interpretation of the Education Act (Ontario) and Regulations.

This document outlines the official position of ABC and should be used when expressing opinions or preparing presentations on behalf of ABC. This is the initial document and will be updated as required.

The committee included ABC Provincial Executive members and SEAC representatives. Special thanks to Terri Beaman, Kathy Girvin, Sharon Grossman, Estelle Payne, and Marg Walker and to the Provincial Executive for their help.

2.0 BELIEF STATEMENTS

THE ASSOCIATION FOR BRIGHT CHILDREN BELIEVES:

- That every child/youth is unique with individual special needs and that each child has the right to be accepted at home, at school and in the community;
- That every child/youth has the right to a holistic educational program that builds on abilities and helps the child reach his/her potential;
- That the learning environment should stimulate each child/youth to develop knowledge, skills and values;
- That educational decisions must be in the best interest of the individual child/youth;
- That educational decisions should be reached co-operatively and collaboratively, recognizing the roles of each partner (pupil, parent and professional);
- That children/youth who are bright or gifted must be recognized for their strengths and have these abilities nurtured;
- That children/youth who are gifted require special education programs and that these programs must provide a learning environment that will maximize their exceptionality; and
- That most children/youth who are gifted require opportunities to interact with both intellectual and chronological peers.

3.0 MISSION STATEMENT

The Association for Bright Children works to increase the understanding and acceptance of bright and gifted children/youth at home, at school and in the community; and encourages parents, educators and the community to nurture these children/youth to grow and reach their full potential, that they may become responsible, contributing members of society.

4.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR BRIGHT CHILDREN

- To be a resource to bright and gifted children and youth, to their families, to educators and to the community;
- To provide information, programs and materials pertaining to the social, emotional and intellectual development of bright and gifted children/youth;
- To provide support and guidance to parents and educators as they advocate for their bright and gifted children/youth;
- To act as a network for parents and educators by providing opportunities for the sharing of information and common concerns;
- To advocate for appropriate educational programs and services for bright and gifted children/youth; and
- To work cooperatively with:
 - all levels of government;
 - the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training;
 - educators and other professional groups;
 - local school boards; and
 - other parent associations.

5.0 Definitions

The Ontario Ministry of Education defines exceptional pupils in the Education Act of 1990, an explication of which is contained in Special Education: A Handbook for Educators (2001).

Giftedness is defined as:

an unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability that requires differentiated learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the regular school program to satisfy the level of educational potential indicated.

ABC believes that this definition should include pupils who may have a specific intellectual ability. This change would ensure that pupils with exceptional intellectual ability in one area can have these needs addressed.

ABC defines a ***bright child*** as:

one who has the potential for unusual accomplishment in any of several areas, including intellectual and creative ability, musical, artistic and athletic performance and social and leadership skills.

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6.1 PARENT/GUARDIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

Parents/guardians must be recognized as full, active and equal partners in the educational planning for their child.

- Abilities and needs of pupils should be identified in consultation with parents/guardians. Program modifications should be initiated in the classroom, prior to formal identification.
- If program modifications are deemed to be insufficient by the parent/guardian or teacher, formal identification of a pupil as exceptional will be necessary and special education programs and services must be provided.
- The Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) process - Ontario Regulation 198/98 clearly outlines the IPRC process and clearly mandates involvement of the parents/guardians.
- Local school boards must inform parents/guardians of their rights in the IPRC process. The local school board's Parent Guide to Special Education must be available to all parents/guardians and must be given to parents/guardians prior to the IPRC.
- Parents/guardians may request an IPRC. If the parent/guardian believes the identification process has not been initiated by the school or will not be initiated by the school, a request in writing to the principal must begin the process.
- Parents/guardians must be invited to the IPRC and the annual Review and should participate since they can contribute valuable information about the pupil.
- The IPRC decision should clearly provide a statement of strengths and needs. The Placement decision should be made after thorough discussion of the available options.
- Involvement of parents/guardians in the development of the special education program plan allows for a clear understanding of the objectives of the program and the strategies to be used to reach those objectives.
- Parents/guardians should monitor the effectiveness of the program so they know if it is working for their child.
- Parents should maintain a file of dated correspondence and personal summaries of communications with teachers and others at the school regarding programming for their child.

6.2 ABC DEFINITIONS

A GIFTED PUPIL IS ONE WHO HAS

an unusually advanced degree of general and/or specific intellectual ability that requires differentiated learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the regular school program to satisfy the level of educational potential indicated.

A BRIGHT PUPIL IS ONE WHO HAS

the potential for unusual accomplishment in any of several areas, the including intellectual and creative ability, musical, artistic and athletic performance and social and leadership skills.

-
- ABC believes that the Ontario Ministry of Education definition of a gifted pupil should include pupils who may have a specific intellectual ability. This change would ensure that pupils with exceptional intellectual ability in one area can have these needs addressed.
 - ABC supports the development of programs for musically, artistically and athletically talented pupils.
 - ABC supports the development of programs to enhance the social and leadership skills of pupils.

6.3 GIFTED PUPILS

Gifted pupils require and have the legal right to an educational program which meets their intellectual, social and emotional needs.

- Gifted pupils may be identified at any age from Junior Kindergarten to OAC and differentiated programming initiated.
- Gifted pupils are not always easily identified.
- Achievement and task commitment are not always evident in gifted pupils in a regular class.
- The criteria for identification of gifted pupils must be multi-faceted and identification procedures should include where appropriate:
 - standardized tests;
 - parent/guardian nomination and input;
 - teacher nomination and input;
 - peer nomination; and
 - self nomination.
- Pupils with additional exceptionalities, such as learning disabilities or visual, hearing or physical impairment, or behaviour difficulties should be identified and the identification should include the categories. (e.g. Gifted-Learning Disabled) The programs developed must address the needs of the whole child.
- Factors, such as gender, culture and socio-economic status must not be used to disadvantage or exclude pupils.
- It is the experience of ABC, that pupils who have had programs which have met their intellectual, social and emotional needs are better able to accept their abilities, strengths and weaknesses and those of others. This helps them to realize that they have a place in the larger world and to develop the skills to be part of the "real world."
- It is inappropriate to allow the "tutoring" of other pupils to become the substitute for an appropriate gifted program or to interfere with the teaching and learning of pupils who are gifted.
- Pupils who are gifted require opportunities to interact with both intellectual and chronological peers.

6.4 EARLY AND ONGOING IDENTIFICATION

Early and Ongoing Identification procedures must include recognition of pupils who may be bright or gifted.

There must be formal and/or informal identification of gifted pupils in the primary grades and the provision of appropriate programs for them.

- Parent/guardian involvement in the identification process will effect an earlier and more comprehensive identification.
- Child-centred education in the primary grades must respect and accommodate the pupil's abilities, interests, acquired knowledge and skills.
- Kindergarten and primary teachers should be knowledgeable about the traits and characteristics of young pupils who are gifted.
- Program modifications and intervention strategies can be used to ensure appropriate program differentiation as early as possible in a pupil's school experience prior to formal identification.
- Tools used for Early Identification of Children's Learning Needs (PM 11) should include items that would indicate advanced intellectual ability and that would trigger intervention.
- Differentiated curriculum should be used whenever there is evidence of advanced intellectual capacity, regardless of whether the child is identified.

6.5 IDENTIFICATION OF GIFTED PUPILS

Exceptional pupils must be identified and this identification should occur when the need for a special education program is evident whether a specific placement is available or not.

Identification and placement in a program may occur at any time and should not be restricted to specific entry points or age.

- Since gifted pupils are not always easily recognized and identified, a multi-faceted approach should be used. (See Policy 6.3.)
- Identification ensures the right of the pupil to a special education program and services and the right of the parents/guardians to be heard and to be involved in educational decisions.
- Formal identification ensures the transfer of information in subsequent years and a written record in the pupil's school file (Ontario Student Record).

6.6 IDENTIFICATION PLACEMENT & REVIEW COMMITTEES

Identification Placement and Review Committees (IPRC) are an essential component in placing the exceptional pupil to ensure the delivery of appropriate special education programs and services.

The association supports the process as described in Ontario Regulation 181/98 but believes that programs should be considered as well as placement.

- The IPRC procedures should ensure that the concept and reality of partnership are present.
- All information and assessment reports should be shared with a parent/guardian before the IPRC meeting. The sharing of information beforehand can enable parents to participate more effectively.
- Parents/guardians must know the available placement options and have the opportunity to visit and assess the available programs.
- The IPRC must identify strengths and needs of the pupil, consider the placement options available. The IPRC can then, in consultation with the parent/guardian, select the best program to meet the individual learning needs of the pupil.
- A written decision of an IPRC must include the appropriate category of exceptionality. If a dual exceptionality is determined then both should be stipulated in the determination (e.g. intellectual - gifted/learning disabled). The specific designation gives a clearer indication of the pupil's traits and subsequent needs.
- The Review process should determine whether a placement is still appropriate for the delivery of a special education program. This process must take place annually in consultation with the parent/guardian.
- A parent/guardian can request a Review after three (3) months if there is cause for concern regarding the placement decision.
- IPRC procedures will need to be reviewed and evaluated periodically to ensure that the process remains effective. Parents/guardians, teachers and SEAC should be involved in the review of these procedures.

6.7 APPEAL PROCESS

Identification and Placement are the means to deliver a Special Education Program. Identification and/or Placement may be appealed.

The Program must meet the needs of the pupil, and therefore the adequacy of the Program should be appealable.

- The Education Act (Ontario) (Regulation 181/98) ensures the involvement and rights of parents/guardians and pupils in the IPRC process, including the Special Education Appeal Board and Mediation/ Special Education Tribunal.
- If parents/guardians do not agree with the IPRC decision about identification and/or placement, the decision may be appealed. The Appeal procedure is outlined in Ontario Regulation 181/98, subsections 26-31.
- If the parent/guardian have exhausted all rights of appeal and are still dissatisfied with the decision of the Appeal Board, they may apply to the Secretary of the Special Education Tribunal for a hearing. The Tribunal process is outlined in Regulation 181/98, subsections 57 and 31.
- At this time, program cannot be appealed.

6.8 PLACEMENT

A full continuum of Placement Options for pupils who are exceptional is the policy of the Ontario Ministry of Education, and is supported by ABC.

- The placement for each pupil must provide the most enabling learning environment.
- The placement for each pupil must be in concurrence with the parent/guardian.
- The full continuum of placement options includes:
 - regular classroom placement with differentiated curriculum and with support for the teacher and/or the student;
 - part-time withdrawal from a regular class to a resource centre with intellectual peers;
 - self-contained centre¹ with a full or part-time program; and
 - Provincial schools.
- The placement option should ensure that:
 - the appropriate special education program can be designed to meet the intellectual, emotional and social needs of the pupil who is gifted;
 - there are opportunities for the pupil who is gifted to interact with his/her intellectual peers.
- Local school boards should purchase services from an adjacent board, if the appropriate placement is not available.

¹ ABC uses the terminology "congregated," rather than segregated to describe self-contained settings, since this suggests a "bringing together of peers" rather than isolation from peers.

6.9 ACCELERATION

Grade acceleration or subject acceleration may be one option in addressing the needs of pupils who are gifted. It must be considered on an individual basis.

- When a student is accelerated, it is necessary to recognize that there may be gaps in concept acquisition and that these must be addressed.
- The physical, social and emotional maturity of the pupil must be considered along with intellectual development.
- Acceleration should be considered in the context of long-term strategies for meeting the on-going needs of the pupil.
- While acceleration may meet the immediate needs of the child, additional modifications may be required in the long term; the child who is grade accelerated should be formally identified.

6.10 INTEGRATION / MAINSTREAMING

ABC supports the placement of exceptional pupils in a regular class if this provides the most enabling learning environment and when this is one option within the continuum of placement options available.

ABC does not support MAINSTREAMING if this means full-time placement of all exceptional pupils in the regular classroom in the neighbourhood school with age appropriate peers.

- A philosophical rationale which denies options for placement of exceptional pupils is in opposition to Ontario Ministry policy and is not appropriate.
- The integration of exceptional pupils in the regular classroom for all or part of the school day must be determined by considering social, emotional, physical, intellectual and cultural needs of the pupil. The extent to which a regular class placement will provide the most enabling learning environment will depend upon:
 - the severity (degree) of the needs of the pupil (emotional, social, intellectual and physical);
 - agreement of parents/guardians and teacher;
 - additional support available to deliver the special educational program; and
 - an atmosphere that allows pupils to feel that they belong and are valued and that stimulates each pupil to reach toward their academic potential.
- The intellectual development of gifted pupils may be several years ahead of their chronological peers. In a regular class placement it is unusual for a gifted pupil to have an intellectual chronological peer. Therefore grouping of gifted pupils, either part-time or full-time is necessary.

6.11 SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

A special education program for pupils who are gifted must be based on strengths and needs identified at the IPRC.

The program must specify in specific terms

- **what is to be accomplished;**
 - **the mechanisms and way in which these will be accomplished;**
 - **evidence of pupil learning outcome.**
-
- *“special education program” means, in respect of an exceptional pupil, an educational program that is based on and modified by the results of continuous assessment and evaluation and that includes a plan containing specific objectives and an outline of educational services that meets the needs of the exceptional pupil. Education Act (Ontario) (Sec. 1(1)(63))*
 - Programming requires differentiation of curriculum in the areas of content, process, product and evaluation which is beyond those normally provided in the regular classroom in kind, breadth, depth and pace (Programming for the Gifted. 1985. Ontario Ministry of Education. Differentiation matrix: p. 31-34)
 - The program must include affective and cognitive components.
 - In a part-time withdrawal delivery model there must be program modifications occurring in both settings as a pupil is not “gifted part-time.”
 - The program should concentrate on the reduction or elimination of obstacles affecting the process of learning and should enable each individual to reach towards their potential.
 - The on-going evaluation of the success of the program must always consider the growth of the pupil - intellectually, physically, socially and emotionally.
 - Program should be appealable at the Review, Appeal Board and Tribunal.
 - Special Education programs may be delivered in any one of the placement options described in Policy Statement 6.8.
 - The Special Education program should be articulated as outlined in the plan described in Policy Statement 6.12.

6.12 INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN

An Individual Education Plan is an essential component of a special education program for pupils who are gifted.

- An Individual Education Plan should specify how the curriculum for a gifted student will be modified while indicating how the student will be graded on the next report card with respect to those modified subjects.
- Within 30 school days of a student being formally identified as gifted, an Individual Education Plan must be prepared for the student. Such a plan may also be prepared before formal identification.
- The plan should be developed collaboratively so that those responsible for implementation have ownership.
- Children over the age of 16 and parents/guardians must be consulted in developing the plan. The potential contributions of a young gifted child to the development of a plan should not be underrated.
- The plan should show how the curriculum is to be modified to meet the needs described at the IPRC. Because the learning expectations relate to how the student will be graded on the next report card, the IEP must be reviewed and updated after each report card.
- For a student whose sole exceptionality is giftedness, the plan should contain:
 - student’s strengths and needs as recorded on the statement of decision at the IPRC.
 - relevant formal assessment data;
 - student’s current level of educational achievement in each program area; and
 - learning expectations (changes to the grade–level expectations in the Ontario curriculum) for the next evaluation period; these changes should relate to meeting the stated needs. These learning expectations should indicate on what basis the student will be graded.

6.13 SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

Services to support the implementation, development and maintenance of appropriate programs for gifted pupils must be provided.

- *“special education services” means facilities and resources, including support personnel and equipment necessary for developing and implementing a special education program. Education Act (Ontario) Sec. 1(1).*
- Transportation of gifted pupils to programs should be provided in the same manner as transportation for all other exceptional pupils.
- Curriculum documents should include activities and references to enhance the core curriculum for bright and gifted pupils.
- There is a continuing need for qualified leadership positions, such as Consultants or Coordinators in each board to support both teachers and pupils.
- Guidance services and counsellors trained to work with gifted pupils are necessary support personnel.

6.14 TEACHERS

Teachers are the KEY to the success of a program.

Teachers of exceptional pupils require additional training to understand the needs of the pupils, the resulting educational implications and the methodology to teach them.

- Teachers of the gifted need:
 - to want to teach gifted pupils;
 - to be sensitive to and understand the diversity of gifted pupils;
 - to have the knowledge and skills to address the academic, social and emotional needs of gifted pupils;
 - to be flexible;
 - to have a sense of humour;
 - to act as a facilitator; and
 - support from administrative staff and parents.
- Teacher training at all levels, pre-service, in-service and professional development must address the teaching of gifted pupils.

6.15 SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEES

The Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) is a valuable and essential resource to each local school board. ABC endorses the concept of an advisory committee composed of parent/guardian representation as described in the Education Act (Ontario) (Sec. 182)

- The role of the SEAC is advisory. (Education Act (Ontario) Subsection 57.1, Regulation 464/97. Members can provide valuable information to trustees and staff about the needs of children/youth who are exceptional.
- SEAC makes recommendations to the local school board about any matter concerning special education or affecting exceptional pupils from Junior Kindergarten to OAC.
- Effective SEACs are supportive while assertive.
- If effective:
 - SEAC will give good advice;
 - SEAC can be a good public relations vehicle for school boards;
 - SEAC can provide assistance to parents/guardians and teachers;
 - SEAC can provide updates, information and research material regarding exceptionalities; and
 - SEAC can share information on programs and services that are in place and successful in other parts of the Province.
- Support to ABC SEAC representatives is given through workshops, newsletters and networking to assist them to become more effective.

OTHER ADVISORY BODIES

The Ontario Ministry of Education Advisory Council on Special Education is a valuable resource to the Ministry. ABC endorses the continuation of this Council and recognizes the importance of parent/guardian association participation on Council.

The Provincial Parent Association Advisory Committee on SEAC (PAAC) has provided a valuable forum for sharing parent association concerns regarding SEACs and providing in-service and material to help SEACs to become more effective.

6.16 SEAC REPRESENTATIVES

SEAC representatives play a vital role and can impact greatly on the quality of programs and services for pupils who are exceptional.

- Representatives should be active participants on their SEAC and represent the views of the association at all times.
- Representatives should respond to the needs of all exceptional pupils.
- Representatives must be knowledgeable of the positions and policies of the association and be able to communicate these.
- Representatives should be active members of their local chapter and report to the chapter. Where there is no local chapter, they must be a member of the Provincial Association and in contact with the SEAC coordinator.
- ABC SEAC representatives are expected to bring the concerns of ABC to SEAC, to consult with and request input from the local chapter and/or provincial executive and report on decisions which will affect the provision of programs and services within the board.
- SEAC representatives should be involved in ongoing in-service with both their association and the local school board.
- Representatives may also:
 - act as a resource to parents/guardians on procedures for IPRC and Appeal process;
 - be available to assist parents/guardians with IPRCs;
 - be a resource to schools and the community;
 - submit written briefs in response to invitation or need;
 - participate on other committees of the board and attend workshops; and
 - be available to give workshops about ABC and the needs of gifted pupils.

6.17 FRENCH FIRST LANGUAGE EDUCATION

All ABC policies apply to French First Language education.

6.18 FRENCH IMMERSION

French Immersion programs are not gifted programs.

Pupils who are identified as gifted and who attend French Immersion programs will require special education programs and services.

- French Immersion programs are optional programs that provide important and valuable French language instruction.
- Because French Immersion programs are optional, boards do not always provide special education services and parents/guardians and pupils may be required to make a choice.
- Some boards provide French Immersion Gifted programs or access to English special education services while enrolled in the Immersion program.

6.19 FUNDING

Gifted education is special education and therefore must receive recognition in the deployment of special education funds.

Designation of funds for special education by both the Ministry of Education and school boards is essential in order to maintain the commitment to special education.

- The General Legislative Grants (GLG) to School Boards should clearly identify special education grants based of total pupil enrolment.
- Transportation policies for special education pupils must view gifted pupils in the same way as other exceptional pupils.
- Local School Boards must be accountable for special education grants to ensure that grant monies go toward special education programs and services.

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