

**BOARD OF EDUCATION
School District #33 (Chilliwack)**

**607.1
ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATION
Placement of Special Needs Students**

The objective is to provide the most appropriate education for each student in the least restrictive environment without infringing on the rights of other students to a profitable learning environment. The extent of integration follows a continuum which varies from full-time placement in a regular classroom to full-time placement in a separate facility. The degree of integration provided each student is based on a number of variables including:

- Specific student needs.
- Available resources including para-professional support.
- Parent expectations.
- Realistic and practical program options.
- The well-being of the child.
- The welfare of others in the classroom.
- Stress on the classroom teacher.
- Consultation with the Principal.

Parents are to be involved in both placement and program planning for the child.

SPECIAL PROGRAM PLACEMENT:

Some students require a more specialized educational program than the neighbourhood school can provide if their unique needs are to be met in a secure and non-threatening environment. These students benefit from placement in alternative educational settings, e.g. special classes, resource rooms, programs offered in separate facilities, Provincial resource programs.

The placement of students in special classes or in separate facilities will occur when:

- Necessary educational assessments have been completed.
- Student needs cannot adequately be addressed by the neighbourhood school.
- Alternate placement has been recommended by the District Screening and Placement Committee.
- Parents understand the purpose of the placement and the nature of the alternative education program.
- Parents consent to the alternative placement.

STUDENT RETENTION:

Normally students progress through the grades to school completion with their age cohort group. Only in exceptional circumstances students may be retained for an extra year in elementary and middle school grades. Retention would require the agreement of the school based team, including administration and parents as well as the Administrator of Student Services.

APPEAL PROCEDURE:

When there is disagreement with the recommended placement or concern related to the educational needs of their child, parents may further discuss these issues with school and/or District staff. If no resolution can be reached, referral will be made to the Superintendent of Schools. If the parents remain dissatisfied, the right of appeal to the Board may be exercised.

RETENTION OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

RATIONALE

Some students with significant special needs (low incidence) have, in the past and continue today, to be retained in grades and at schools long after their peers have moved on. These students usually have moderate to severe intellectual disabilities, sometimes accompanied by physical handicaps.

There are two issues related to retaining students. The first issue concerns students with significant special needs who are kept at elementary schools well beyond the typical expectation of seven years (kindergarten to grade 6). The second issue relates to special needs students who are retained in school programs - usually senior secondary – beyond age 19.

At the elementary level it is not unusual for parent of low incidence children to request that their child be retained in primary program or in grade 6. This relates to their anxiety about transitions in general, but also it is connected to their fears about services and programs at the next stage of the child's schooling. One of the issues is a cost factor – we provide proportionally more funding to elementary special needs students. They receive more teacher assistant time at elementary than they would at middle or secondary school even when grouped for instruction. Often parents like the idea of a personal full-time teacher assistant for their child - which is not readily available after elementary school.

Most school based teams can communicate with the parent and an effective transition is managed. Sometimes however, parental demands seem to overwhelm the school based team and the student is held back year after year. Occasionally, staff join with the parents in retaining a special needs student far beyond what would be expected.

The Ministry of Education defines inclusion and integration:

The principle of inclusion adopted in British Columbia schools supports equitable access to learning by all students and the opportunity to pursue their physical location and incorporates basic values that promote participation, friendship and interaction. Integration is one way to achieve inclusion . . . Integration involves placing students with special needs in classrooms with their age and grade peers and then providing them with the necessary support . . .

Chilliwack School District promotes integration in the elementary schools. One of the most defining elements of integration is that students with special needs are placed with same age and same grade peers. When students are kept at any

particular grade level significantly longer than their peers we are no longer practicing integration. If parents and the school based team collectively decide that an integrated setting (same age peers) no longer meets the needs of the special needs student, then the district would want to offer an alternative program such as the programs are A.D. Rundle Middle and Strathcona Elementary Schools.

The options for parents and schools would then be clearer. The student can continue with an integrated setting (involving a transition) or move to a more protected setting. It would not be an option for the special needs student to be placed with younger and younger students every year in regular classrooms. There could be some extraordinary circumstances where keeping a student in a grade well beyond typical age peers would be advisable. In those very unique cases district permission through the Administrator of Student Services, must be sought.

At what point would we say that the student is no longer in an integrated setting? It would be reasonable for a student to be a year older than the norm for that grade level. When a student begins to exceed even that level then we are entering a different arena.

In September a child could be 5, 6 or 7 years old in kindergarten or could be 7,8 or 9 in grade three, or 10, 11 or 12 in grade 6 and still be considered to be with the same age and same grade peers. The child could not, however, be 10 years old in September of grade 3 and still be in an integrated setting. This is deviating too far from the typical age.

The second concern around retention relates to students with special needs remaining in school (usually at the senior secondary level) beyond age 19. Parents and school personnel often feel that there are inadequate services for the special needs student in the community and therefore keeping the adult student in school is an acceptable option. Often their concerns for the future are justified - schools offer great programs, more social opportunities, a normalized setting and opportunities for integration - this is more than community agencies can often provide. This raises concerns related to resources and resource allocation within the school district.

Keeping special needs students longer than age 18 or 19 has implications for service delivery - in particular, teacher time and therapy support. The number of special needs students increases in our district because these students are not transitioning as anticipated. While we do add additional teacher assistant time, we do not add extra physiotherapy, occupational or speech and language therapists, nor do we increase special education teacher time. Consequently, we take services that are already stretched and try to spread them further. Also, students who are 19 years or older are not eligible for SET-BC services - in fact their equipment must be returned.

Ultimately our practice in this school district has been one of “normalizing” students’ lives by providing them with quality education in the least restrictive environment. When students are prepared for the community and as much independence as possible, they should transfer to the community.

What should be in place is adequate support to parents in planning for their child to leave school? Our intention is to support parents in building connections to other agencies and resources