



Commission scolaire English-Montréal

English Montreal School Board

Resource Team Reference Guide

Elementary and Secondary Levels

A Collaborative Approach
To
Problem-Solving
In Schools

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Foreword

This guide can be a valuable tool in your school as you develop and support the building of an effective problem-solving team. The first few pages focus on particular aspects of the roles individuals play in an *inclusive* school setting, followed by information on the way collaborative problem-solving team meetings can operate for the best chance of success. Page 4 provides a definition of *inclusion* and you will find a model for team meetings on pages 12 and 13. Some individuals may not truly understand the vital role an effective problem-solving team has within your school. Hopefully, this book will become a valuable reference tool for all individuals participating in and/or collaborating with an effective problem-solving team.

Sincerely,

Edith Clarke, Assistant Director, Student Services
Joanne Assaly, Consultant, Region 3
Michelle Aubin, Consultant, Region 2
Marylène Perron, Consultant, Region 1

Linda Aubé, Resource, Roslyn
Marlene Collacci, Resource, Gerald McShane
Joy Wagen, Resource, LaurenHill Academy

In collaboration with the ALDI INITIATIVE (ACES-LEARN-DEEN Initiative)

Mission Statement of the English Montreal School Board

The mission of the English Montreal School Board is to support its schools and centres in their efforts to educate students within a caring, safe and inclusive learning community.

- Recognize and value the diversity of its community;
- Provide all students with the opportunity to develop their talents and achieve their personal best;
- Recognize the skills and competencies of its employees and support their continuous professional development;
- Encourage collaboration among the various educational partners;
- Use resources effectively and innovatively to help schools and centres focus on the mission of instruction, socialization, and qualification;
- Encourage lifelong learning and critical thinking.

The EMSB mission fosters the development of educated and responsible persons who will assume their position as active members of a democratic society.

Inclusion*

Foreword: *ACES believes that the term “integration” used in the MELS policy on Special Education is synonymous with the term “inclusion” which is defined by ACES in the following paragraphs. However, the ACES table was in agreement that the two terms cannot be used interchangeably in English. The following is a clarification on what is meant by inclusion.*

“Everyone belongs” is the philosophy which determines the true spirit of inclusion. Inclusion is a vision that all children belong and can learn in the regular school and community. Instead of the student going to the service, the service is brought to the student.

The student is a member of the regular class with program adaptation and/or support within the classroom or resource setting. Inclusion is the foundation for pedagogical practices: the student has a balanced day of regular, adapted, parallel or individual curriculum. The role of peers extends beyond social models. Learning with and from peers is key to the student’s progress across domains.

The inclusive school:

- Has leadership which promotes this philosophy and encourages high standards;
- Maintains standards based on the same educational outcomes with a recognition that the level at which these outcomes are achieved will vary;
- Pursues excellence without sacrificing equity;
- Demonstrates a sense of community with active collaboration and co-operation;
- Engages in partnerships with parents and outside agencies;
- Has flexible learning environments to meet a wide range of student needs;
- Makes age-appropriate student placements;
- Endorses a team problem-solving approach ;
- Fosters interdependence among all stakeholders supporting the student.

Successful inclusion requires that:

- Differences be valued
- Differentiation/adaptation be imbedded in pedagogical practices
- Delivery models be child focused

***ACES thanks SNNAP for their definition of Inclusion which has been adapted for use by ACES.**

What is a School Resource Team?

A resource team is a multi-disciplinary, problem-solving school team, which helps teachers develop strategies for students experiencing difficulties.

Three of its primary goals are:

Prevention of failure
Identification of needs
Intervention for success

Resource team members support the classroom teachers to develop a better understanding of the student and the influences that are affecting behaviour and/or academic progress, as well as recommending strategies for adaptation/modification.

Classroom teachers are key participants in the resource team process. In addition, resource teams may include:

- School administrator
- Teacher in a resource role (typically the resource team coordinator)
- Student Services professionals such as a psychologist, consultant, speech-language pathologist, guidance counselor, occupational therapist
- Support staff such as paraprofessionals
- Professionals from the community
- Parent(s) and/or student (when appropriate)

The purpose of the resource team is to brainstorm strategies that will **support the teacher within the regular classroom**, so that s/he is more successful in meeting the needs of the student. It involves a collaborative approach to problem-solving and improves communication amongst teachers, administrators, and involved professionals. Strategies, adaptations, modifications, and interventions are developed and implemented in an action plan. For maximum effect as a problem-solving team, it is recommended that resource teams meet on a regular basis.

The resource team builds on the classroom teacher's preventative measures and helps to develop strategic interventions.

For more information on supporting students with special needs, please refer to the English Montreal School Board's *Policy Governing the Organization of Educational Services for Students with Handicaps, Social Maladjustments or Learning Disabilities*.

How Can a School Resource Team Help Your School?

- supports classroom teachers
- provides regular time for team members to meet
- develops a collaborative approach to problem-solving within the school
- develops a plan that increases the possibility of student success (Action Plan)
- supports the creation and implementation of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP)
- improves liaison and communication with parents and outside resources
- encourages parental cooperation
- shares the responsibility of dealing with students with serious challenges
- encourages long-term planning which improves chances of decreasing/avoiding short-term crises
- identifies student needs
- maximizes school resources
- avoids duplication of services
- clarifies lines of communication
- clarifies roles of individual team members
- improves record-keeping
- documents interventions for future referral
- increases focus on prevention and intervention rather than referral for formal assessment

Teachers in a Resource Role

According to Gordon Porter*, the resource teacher is "...primarily responsible for providing direct and effective support to classroom teachers, with the goal of enabling all students to be meaningfully included in learning activities in regular classrooms" and has "... a secondary responsibility to exceptional students who require individualized supports and services to participate in and benefit from regular classroom instruction."

This role may be broken down into the following areas:

Knowledge

- knowledge of the Québec Education Program (QEP)
- base knowledge of exceptional learners
- core knowledge of exceptionalities and appropriate instructional practices
- global knowledge of psycho-social development and appropriate intervention strategies

Understanding

- how to work in collaboration with all members of a school team, particularly classroom teachers
- how to develop and support effective Individualized Education Plans (IEPs); the language to use, smart goal writing
- how to deliver information clearly and sensitively to parents regarding their child with special needs

Qualities

- strong interpersonal skills (diplomacy and advocacy)
- flexibility
- resourcefulness
- creativity
- motivation to further professional development
- empathy
- willingness to collaborate with others

Abilities

- learn as you go
- participate in and build a team; real team player
- demonstrate effective organizational skills
- exhibit pedagogical leadership skills
- display effective time management skills
- provide effective classroom support
- be adept in conflict resolution skills
- possess strong class (group) management skills

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The Supporting Role of an Administrator in an Inclusive School

The school administration:

- Is key in successful inclusion – encouraging as many learning opportunities as possible in an inclusive model
- Is responsible to build school communities where all students belong by fostering a culture of belonging that will move students to act in an inclusive way, change behaviour, go out of their way for others, and appreciate others for who they are.
- Is able to overcome fears and change attitudes about students who have special needs in order to help staff to overcome fears and prejudices and influence how students accept and appreciate the differences and the diversities among all.
- Is able to establish and support directives for behaviour and policies and procedures to maintain order among students which may be reflected in the school code of conduct (for example, respect for all).
- Is able to support the inclusion of students with exceptionalities into the regular classroom: s/he should allow for adequate transitional planning for the classroom teacher, make her/himself available to meet with teachers, and enhance teacher expectations and attitudes by including the staff in planning and goal setting for children with special needs.
- Facilitates collaboration among the staff and participates in school processes for identifying the needs of students who are at risk for effective learning.
- Is able to establish collaborative school-based teams to share experiences and solve problems, and support a collaborative problem-solving approach in handling school situations.

Further proactive approaches include:

- Forging a relationship with and supporting teachers in a resource role
- Monitoring paraprofessionals and student schedules
- Overseeing the writing and implementation of IEPs that will guide each student's learning based on realistic goals
- Maintaining accurate and complete student records as required by law, policies, and administrative regulations
- Supporting teaching staff in acquiring specialized didactic materials, resources, and technological tools geared to the needs of all students

Elements of “Best Practices” for School Resource Teams in an Effective Problem-Solving Approach

An effective resource team brings to bear the best a school has to offer in order to deal with the most challenging cases. The successful model develops a collaborative approach to problem-solving within the school that involves many different minds. The responsibility of dealing with these most challenging cases shifts from the individual to a team of professionals. Invariably, the solutions that spring from this kind of collaboration are more complete and also more likely to succeed.

What elements go into creating this team of problem-solvers? The schools that have run successful resource teams share the following key ingredients:

Perhaps the single most important part of the process is involving the **right participants** from the school and getting them **involved in the process**.

- **Classroom teachers** provide key information about the student and then leave with an action plan to help the student in need.
- **Administrators** bring a unique perspective of school resources and disciplinary measures available. Not to mention, they are the final authority on any school decisions.
- **Teachers in a resource role** will often coordinate and facilitate these meetings and then provide the necessary follow-up on individual cases.
- **School board professionals** provide very specific and useful information on each case.
- **Paraprofessionals** provide an understanding of social, emotional, behavioural, and academic needs of the child.
- **Professionals from the community** may bring the important home situation piece to the puzzle and have access to outside services and resources. This is often crucial in any long-term solution.

A **properly structured meeting** allows for maximum effect in minimum time. Each meeting needs the following:

- It should go without saying, but **priority should go to the most urgent** cases. Some flexibility must be maintained to ensure that the situations that need immediate care are dealt with in a timely manner.
- **Meetings need to be regular and relatively often**. Weekly or bi-monthly gatherings ensure that all needs are dealt with in a reasonable time frame.
- A **proper agenda**, outlining the details of each case and setting time limits, allows the meeting to run smoothly. Of course, someone needs to take ownership of the agenda and make sure it is adhered to.
- **Minutes** of each meeting need to be taken to record action items and decisions made. This allows the case to be followed beyond the meeting. Minutes should be placed in a secure area.

Overview of a Problem-Solving Meeting

Participants may include:

In-School

- Administrator
- Teacher(s) in a resource role
- Classroom teacher(s)
- Guidance counselor
- Paraprofessional(s)
- Spiritual animator

School Board Professionals

- Consultant
- Psychologist
- Speech-language pathologist
- Occupational therapist

Professionals from the Community

- Social workers (CSSS and/or Batshaw)
- Nurse
- Readaptation Centres
- MOSD/MAB/Mackay

Problem-Solving Meeting Format

- Usually chaired by teacher in a resource role
- School-based request form completed by classroom teacher
- Requests are prioritized, with specific cases and/or issues given priority
- Agenda is prepared
- Weekly/bi-monthly meetings
- Brainstorming of strategies and interventions
- Recommendations for in-school services as described in the action plan
- Minutes/notes on action plans and specific responsibilities of participants are taken
- Procedures for follow-up outlined

School Problem-Solving Meeting Process

Getting Started:

- Classroom teacher(s) submit student name to team coordinator
- Teacher(s) list adaptations, modifications and interventions already in place and/or attempted
- Coordinator uses provided information to prioritize new cases and create agenda

Brainstorming Process:

- Teacher identifies problem
- Teacher presents student's strengths, areas of concern, existing resources and interventions attempted
- Team brainstorms strategies and interventions
- A plan of action is developed, including who is doing what
- A timeline is created in order to review and/or modify the plan

Follow-up:

- Is both on-going and built into future meetings
- Team agrees on and notes specific responsibilities or tasks
- Detailed notes or minutes of meetings are kept to ensure regular follow-up
- Action plans are reviewed and/or modified as needed
- Requests for ad hoc, IEP creation and changes, assessment, etc. may be part of follow-up, after preventative adaptations, modifications and/or interventions have been implemented over a period of time

Problem-Solving Process: Gordon Porter Model

Gordon I. Porter, Mary Wilson, Brian Kelly, and Jeff den Otter* have developed and refined a collaborative problem-solving meeting process in which **teachers helping other teachers** is the fundamental principle. This is often referred to as the Porter Model. This model features:

Collaborative Partnership

- team members solve problems in a trusting, open, and cooperative manner
- team members make contributions based on their expertise and varying responsibilities

Preventative Function

- potential to support teachers control the factors that cause and maintain the problem and provide a mechanism to deal with immediate problems
- creates opportunities for interactions

Participants

- should have between 5 and 7 members, minimally a facilitator and several teachers and professionals

Addressing the System

- look beyond the immediate situation to prevention
- look at the connection between the difficulty a student is having and system variables that may be preventing a solution (educators cannot assume the challenges are only internal to the student)
- look beyond individual factors and include school-related factors such as pedagogical practices, organization and functioning of class and school, interpersonal relationships, physical environment, class and school climate

Empowerment

- empowerment of the classroom teacher is central
- teacher clarifies needs, locates resources and is available to constructively resolve his/her own problems with the collaboration and support of peers rather than “experts”

Enhancement of Student Well-Being and Performance

- it is possible to see the entire school benefit even though the focus is initially one student’s difficulties at the problem-solving meeting

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A Model for the Problem-Solving Process*

This process lasts no longer than 30 minutes and has 7 distinct stages.

Fact Finding

5 to 8
minutes

Stage 1: EXPLANATION OF PROBLEM AND PROCESS

Facilitator states reason for meeting and clarifies process to be followed. Facilitator keeps the group on task, positively focused, and on track in each stage.

Stage 2: VALIDATION OF INFORMATION

Referring teacher summarizes the problem in a brief oral statement.

Stage 3: CLARIFICATION OF PROBLEM

Team members ask questions of the referring teacher to further clarify uncertainties regarding the problem and the circumstances.

Brain- storming

17 to 20
minutes

Stage 4: ROUND-TABLE BRAINSTORMING

Facilitator uses round-table brainstorming approach to generate suggestions for the teacher's consideration. Brief statements are encouraged. No judgments are made. Thinking out-of-the box is welcomed. All ideas are directed to the facilitator. The teacher does not interact during this stage.

Selection of Suggestions

5 to 8
minutes

Stage 5: EVALUATION AND SELECTION OF STRATEGIES

Facilitator reviews suggestions and strategies with the referring teacher, prioritizing based on a rating of 1, 2 or 3 (i.e., 1 = idea or strategy to try immediately; 2 = merited but for future consideration; 3 = not seen as immediately practical or has been tried previously). Facilitator assists the teacher in the selection of several that seem most helpful.

Stage 6: FOLLOW-UP PLANNING

Facilitator follows up by establishing a plan of action which usually includes more in-depth planning, dates for follow-up evaluation, and a written outline.

Stage 7: CLOSURE

Facilitator thanks team members and ensures that all leave feeling positive about the process.

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Potential Roadblocks to Effective Problem-Solving

- Submitting a long list of names
 - Impedes the development of effective plans
- Lack of planned agenda
 - Poor pacing and organization, complaints or one individual dominating the meeting
- Long discussion or summary of the problem without brainstorming
 - Team used only to share information, few strategies are developed
- Failure to maintain minutes or keep notes
 - No written records, responsibilities forgotten, poor follow-up
- One individual doing everything
 - Participants' individual strengths and expertise unused resulting in lack of shared responsibility
- Expecting one individual to come up with solutions
 - No team-building, losing out on a multi-disciplinary approach to problem-solving
- Lack of classroom teacher participation
 - Classroom connection missing, problem ownership not recognized
- Approving requests without brainstorming with the school resource team
 - Focus shifts away from a collaborative problem-solving approach to working in isolation
- Lack of understanding of brainstorming process
 - Passing judgments, not thinking out-of-the box
- Not holding meeting due to missing members
 - Creativity and support is still possible with a smaller team
- Expecting brainstorming sessions to be solely student-oriented
 - Any contentious issues regarding inclusion can be brainstormed