

# Considerations for program planning

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## Introduction

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02:23

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Ontario elementary and secondary schools strive to support high-quality learning and student well-being. Schools give individual students the opportunity to learn in ways that are best suited to their individual strengths and needs. At the secondary level,

students' ability to thrive academically and personally is also supported by their ability to choose courses and programs that best suit their skills, interests, and preferred postsecondary destinations.

Educators plan teaching and learning in every subject and discipline so that the various needs of all students are addressed and so that students can see themselves reflected in classroom resources and activities. This section highlights the key strategies and policies that educators and school leaders consider as they plan effective and inclusive programs for all students.

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## Roles and Responsibilities

### Students

Students' responsibilities with respect to their own learning develop gradually and increase over time as they mature and progress through elementary and secondary school. With experience and support, including culturally responsive and relevant instruction, students can:

- look for and act on new ideas and opportunities for learning, communicating with teachers and peers, expressing their voice, and developing their agency to become lifelong learners;
- reflect on their learning, then receive, provide, and respond to meaningful feedback, and set their own goals;
- take responsibility and organize themselves so that they can engage in learning both collaboratively with peers and independently.

Students may experience a variety of circumstances that can make school challenging. The attention, patience, and encouragement shown by teachers can be extremely important in supporting all students in their learning and progress.

Students with special education needs must have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). An IEP is a written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student, based on a thorough assessment of the strengths and needs that affect the student's ability to learn and to demonstrate

learning. It is expected (and required, if the student is sixteen years of age or older) that secondary students will be given the opportunity to provide input in the development of the IEP. However, any student for whom an IEP is being developed should be consulted to the degree possible.

## Parents

Parents<sup>[\*]</sup> play a vital role in education. Studies show that students perform better in school if their parents are involved in their education. Schools offer a variety of parent engagement opportunities, such as providing parents with information about how to support their children's learning at home and at school.

Throughout the Ontario curriculum, students are provided with opportunities for hands-on, experiential learning. To ensure students' health and safety as they learn, parents should inform teachers of any medical conditions that their children have, including allergies, and they should also encourage and remind their children to go to school prepared to participate safely in all activities.

Parents of students with special education needs have an important role to play in the promotion of their child's success at school. This includes participating in the Identification Placement Review Committee (IPRC) process, (if their child is being considered for an IPRC), parent-teacher conferences, and other relevant school activities, as well as participating in the development of their child's Individual Education Plan (IEP).

Further information on the role of parents in their children's education can be found in the following ministry documents [A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools, 2010](#) [\[1\]](#), [The Ontario Curriculum Review and Revision Guide](#), and other [parent resources](#).

## Teachers

Teachers are critical to the success of students. Teachers are responsible for planning and implementing learning and assessment activities that use appropriate, high-impact instructional strategies, including culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy, to support students in achieving the curriculum expectations. Teachers are responsible for understanding and addressing individual students' needs, strengths, and interests, and for ensuring equitable

learning opportunities for every student, including through the use of varied teaching, assessment, and evaluation strategies and approaches.

Teachers provide numerous hands-on opportunities for students to develop and refine their knowledge and skills. The learning activities they design should be relevant and authentic for all students, so that students can apply their learning to life beyond the school. Equitable opportunities to relate lived experiences, knowledge, and skills to wider contexts motivate students to learn in meaningful ways and to become lifelong learners.

To increase their comfort level and skill, and to ensure effective delivery of the curriculum, teachers should reflect on their own attitudes, biases, and values with respect to the topics they are teaching and seek out current resources, mentors, and professional development and training opportunities, as appropriate.

Teachers are responsible for ensuring the health and safety of every student and for encouraging and motivating students to be mindful of their own health and safety and that of others.

As part of effective teaching practice, teachers communicate with parents throughout the school year, using various methods that may be either formal or informal, to meet the diverse needs of families. Teachers discuss with parents what their children are learning at school, and work to better understand students' experiences outside of school. Ongoing reciprocal communication enables parents to work in partnership with the school, leading to stronger connections between the home and school that foster and support equitable student learning and achievement.

Teachers also have an important role in the success of students with special education needs, including reviewing and updating the IEP as well as implementing effective programs and/or services for students with special education needs.

## **Principals**

The principal works in partnership with teachers and parents to ensure that all students have equitable access to the best possible educational experience. The principal is also a community builder who creates an environment that is welcoming to all, and who ensures that every member of the school community is kept well informed. To support student learning, principals ensure that the

Ontario curriculum is being effectively implemented in every classroom using a variety of instructional approaches, and that appropriate resources are made available for teachers and students. To enhance teaching and student learning in all subjects, principals promote professional learning and work with staff to facilitate professional development activities that deepen teachers' knowledge of the curriculum.

Principals ensure the development, implementation, and review of a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP); ensure that parents are consulted in the development of their child's IEP and that they are provided with a copy of the IEP; and ensure that the program is delivered as set out in the IEP.

## **Community Partners**

Community partners are an important resource for schools and students, modelling how the knowledge and skills acquired through the curriculum relate to life beyond the school. As mentors supporting students' experiential learning, community partners can enrich their educational experience, as well as the life of the community.

Community groups can support educators in recruiting practising experts to provide in-class, virtual, or off-site learning experiences for students on topics, concepts, and skills in the curriculum. Schools and school boards can coordinate efforts with community partners and can involve community volunteers in supporting instruction and school and community engagement events held at the school (such as parent engagement nights, art and talent shows, athletic and other extra-curricular activities, science fairs, and technological skills competitions). School boards can collaborate with leaders of community programs, including programs offered through community centres, conservation authorities, libraries, cultural centres, youth-led organizations, and museums.

Community partners are especially relevant for students with special education needs as they frequently bring knowledge and experience from outside the school day and experience. They can support parents and share information and observations about the student's behaviour and learning in a variety of settings and help the school team to develop a common understanding of the student's strengths and needs as they affect the student's ability to learn and demonstrate learning. In addition, members of a cultural community may hold important knowledge and skills related to culturally responsive and relevant teaching and



learning. Educators are encouraged to consult with the members of their diverse community to ensure that material and content are culturally responsive and relevant. As an example, schools can contact their board's Indigenous education lead to learn more about representation from various local First Nations, Métis, and Inuit community groups and service delivery organizations in their learning programs.

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## 08:52

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Promoting the healthy development of all students, as well as enabling all students to reach their full potential, is a priority for educators across Ontario. Students' health and well-being contribute to their ability to learn in all disciplines, and that learning in turn

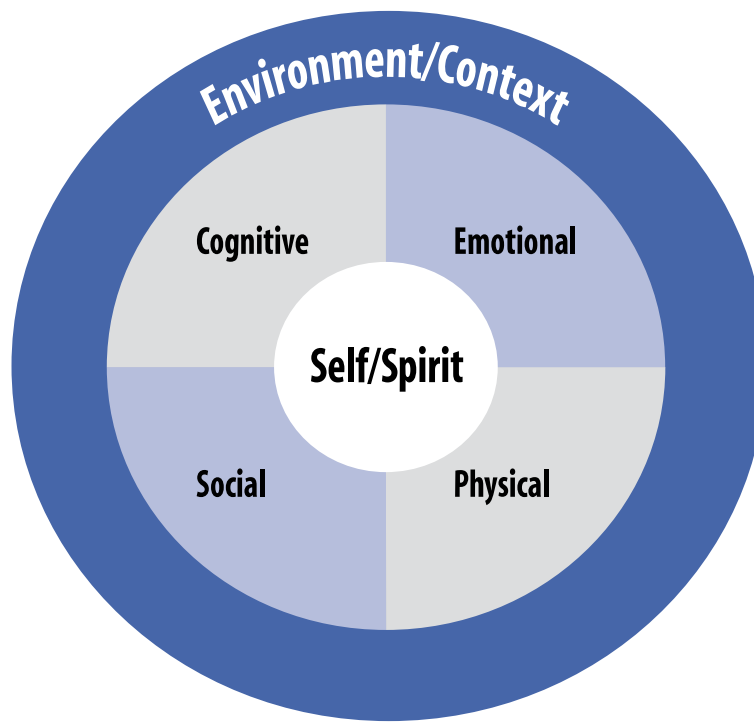
contributes to their overall well-being. A well-rounded educational experience prioritizes well-being and academic success for all students by promoting physical and mental health, social-emotional learning, and inclusion. Parents, community partners, and educators all play critical roles in creating this educational experience.

Educators support the well-being of children and youth by creating, fostering, and sustaining a learning environment that is healthy, caring, safe, inclusive, and accepting. A learning environment of this kind supports not only students' cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development but also their sense of self and/or spirit, their mental health, their resilience, and their overall state of well-being. All this will help them achieve their full potential in school and in life.

A variety of factors, known as “determinants of health”, have been shown to affect a person's overall state of well-being. Some of these are income, education and literacy, gender and culture, physical and social environment, personal health practices and coping skills, and availability of health services. Together, these factors influence not only whether individuals are physically healthy but also the extent to which they will have the physical, social, and personal resources needed to cope and to identify and achieve personal aspirations. These factors also have an impact on student learning, and it is important to be aware of them as factors contributing to a student's performance and well-being.

An educator's awareness of and responsiveness to students' cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development, and to their sense of self and/or spirit, is critical to their success in school. A number of research-based frameworks, including those described in *Early Learning for Every Child Today: A Framework for Ontario Early Childhood Settings, 2007*, *On My Way: A Guide to Support Middle Years Childhood Development, 2017* [\[4\]](#), and *Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development, 2012* [\[5\]](#), identify developmental stages that are common to the majority of students from Kindergarten to Grade 12. At the same time, these frameworks recognize that individual differences, as well as differences in life experiences and exposure to opportunities, can affect development, and that developmental events are not specifically age dependent.

The framework described in *Stepping Stones* is based on a model that illustrates the complexity of human development. Its components – the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social domains – are interrelated and interdependent, and all are subject to the influence of a person's environment or context. At the centre is an “enduring (yet changing) core” – a sense of self, and/or spirit – that connects the different aspects of development and experience (p. 17).



Source: *Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development*, p. 17

Educators who have an awareness of a student's development are taking all of the components into account. They focus on the following elements of each component:

- **cognitive development** – brain development, processing and reasoning skills, use of strategies for learning
- **emotional development** – emotional regulation, empathy, motivation
- **social development** – self-development (self-concept, self-efficacy, self-esteem); identity formation (gender identity, social group identity, spiritual identity); relationships (peer, family, romantic)
- **physical development** – physical activity, sleep patterns, changes that come with puberty, body image, nutritional requirements

## The Role of Mental Health and Well-Being

Mental health and well-being touch all components of development. Mental health is much more than the absence of mental illness. Well-being depends not only on the absence of problems and risks but also on the presence of factors that contribute to healthy growth and development. By nurturing and supporting students' strengths and assets, educators help promote positive mental health and well-being in the classroom. At the same time, they can identify students who need additional support and connect them with the appropriate supports and services.

What happens at school can have a significant influence on a student's overall well-being. With a broader awareness of mental health, educators can plan instructional strategies that contribute to a supportive classroom climate for learning in all subject areas, build awareness of mental health, and reduce stigma associated with mental illness. Taking students' well-being, including their mental health, into account when planning instructional approaches helps establish a strong foundation for learning and sets students up for success.

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## Instructional Approaches

08:03

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*Effective instruction is key to student success.* To provide effective instruction, teachers need to consider what they want students to learn, how they will know whether

students have learned it, how they will design instruction to promote the learning, and how they will respond to students who are not making progress.

When planning what students will learn, teachers identify the main concepts and skills described in the curriculum expectations, consider the contexts in which students will apply the learning, and determine students' learning goals.

Instructional approaches should be informed by evidence from current research about instructional practices that are effective in the classroom. For example, research has provided compelling evidence about the benefits of explicitly teaching strategies that can help students develop a deeper understanding of concepts. Strategies such as "compare and contrast" (e.g., through Venn diagrams and comparison matrices) and the use of analogy enable students to examine concepts in ways that help them see what the concepts *are* and what they *are not*. Although such strategies are simple to use, teaching them explicitly is important in order to ensure that all students use them effectively.

A well-planned instructional program should always be at the student's level, but it should also push the student towards their optimal level of challenge for learning, while providing support and anticipating and directly teaching skills that are required for success.


## **A Differentiated Approach to Teaching and Learning**

A differentiated approach to teaching and learning is an important part of a framework for effective classroom practice. It involves adapting instruction and assessment to suit individual students' interests, learning preferences, and readiness in order to promote learning.

An understanding of students' strengths and needs, as well as of their backgrounds, life experiences, and possible emotional vulnerabilities, can help teachers identify and address the diverse strengths and needs of their students. Teachers continually build their awareness of students' learning strengths and needs by observing and assessing their readiness to learn, their interests, and their learning styles and preferences. As teachers develop and deepen their understanding of individual students, they can respond more effectively to each student's needs by differentiating instructional approaches – for example, by adjusting the method or pace of instruction, using different types of resources, allowing a wider choice of topics, or even adjusting the learning environment, if appropriate, to suit the way the student learns and how the student is best able to demonstrate learning. Differentiation is planned as part of the

overall learning design, but it also includes making adaptations during the teaching and learning process based on “assessment for learning”. Common classroom strategies that support differentiated instruction include cooperative learning, project-based approaches, problem-based approaches, and explicit instruction. Unless students have an Individual Education Plan with modified expectations, *what* they learn continues to be guided by the curriculum expectations and is the same for all students.

## **Lesson Design**

Effective lesson design involves several important elements. Teachers engage students in a lesson by activating their prior learning and experiences, clarifying the purpose for learning, and making connections to contexts that will help them see the relevance and usefulness of what they are learning. Teachers select instructional strategies to effectively introduce concepts, and consider how they will scaffold instruction in ways that will best meet the needs of their students. At the same time, they consider when and how to check students’ understanding and to assess their progress towards achieving their learning goals. Teachers provide multiple opportunities for students to apply their knowledge and skills and to consolidate and reflect on their learning. A three-part lesson design (e.g., “Minds On, Action, and Consolidation”) is often used to structure these elements. Effective lesson design also incorporates culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (CRRP), which recognizes that all students learn in ways that are connected to background, language, family structure, and social or cultural identity. CRRP is discussed more fully in the section [Equity and Inclusive Education](#) .



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# Planning for Students with Special Education Needs

13:45

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Classroom teachers are the key educators of students with special education needs. They have a responsibility to help *all* students learn, and they work collaboratively with

special education teachers and educational assistants, where appropriate, to achieve this goal. Classroom teachers commit to assisting every student to prepare for living with the highest degree of independence possible.

*Learning for All: A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students, Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2013* [\[link\]](#) describes a set of beliefs, based in research, that should guide program planning for students with special education needs. Teachers planning programs or courses in all disciplines need to pay particular attention to these beliefs, which are as follows:

- All students can succeed.
- Each student has their own unique patterns of learning.
- Successful instructional practices are founded on evidence-based research, tempered by experience.
- Universal design<sup>[\*]</sup> and differentiated instruction<sup>[\*]</sup> are effective and interconnected means of meeting the learning or productivity needs of any group of students.
- Classroom teachers are the key educators for a student's literacy and numeracy development.
- Classroom teachers need the support of the larger community to create a learning environment that supports students with special education needs.
- Fairness is not sameness.

In any given classroom, students may demonstrate a wide range of strengths and needs. Teachers plan programs that are attuned to this diversity and use an integrated process of assessment and instruction that responds to the unique strengths and needs of each student. An approach that combines principles of universal design and differentiated instruction enables educators to provide personalized, precise teaching and learning experiences for all students.

In planning programs or courses for students with special education needs, teachers should begin by examining both the curriculum expectations in the grade or course appropriate for the individual student and the student's particular strengths and learning needs to determine which of the following options is appropriate for the student:

- no accommodations<sup>[\*]</sup> or modified expectations; or

- accommodations only; or
- modified expectations, with the possibility of accommodations; or
- alternative expectations, which are not derived from the curriculum expectations for the grade or course and which constitute alternative programs and/or courses.

If the student requires either accommodations or modified expectations, or both, the relevant information, as described in the following paragraphs, must be recorded in their Individual Education Plan (IEP). More detailed information about planning programs for students with special education needs, including students who require alternative programs<sup>[\*]</sup> and/or courses, can be found in [Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide, 2017 \(Draft\)](#) [\[1\]](#) (referred to hereafter as *Special Education in Ontario, 2017*). For a detailed discussion of the ministry's requirements for IEPs, see Part E of *Special Education in Ontario*.

## **Students Requiring Accommodations Only**

Some students with special education needs are able, with certain “accommodations”, to participate in the regular grade or course curriculum and to demonstrate learning independently. Accommodations allow the student with special education needs to access the curriculum without changes to the regular expectations. Any accommodations that are required to facilitate the student's learning must be identified in the student's IEP ([Special Education in Ontario, 2017, p. E38](#) [\[2\]](#)). A student's IEP is likely to reflect the same required accommodations for many, or all, subjects or courses.

Providing accommodations to students with special education needs should be the first option considered in program planning. Instruction based on principles of universal design and differentiated instruction focuses on providing accommodations to meet the diverse needs of learners.

There are three types of accommodations:

- *Instructional accommodations* are changes in teaching strategies, including styles of presentation, methods of organization, or use of technology and multimedia. Some examples include the use of graphic organizers, photocopied notes, adaptive equipment, or assistive software.
- *Environmental accommodations* are changes that the student may require in the classroom and/or school environment, such as preferential seating or special

lighting.

- *Assessment accommodations* are changes in assessment procedures that enable the student to demonstrate their learning, such as allowing additional time to complete tests or assignments or permitting oral responses to test questions.

(For more examples, see page E39 of *Special Education in Ontario, 2017*.)

If a student requires “accommodations only”, assessment and evaluation of their achievement will be based on the regular grade or course curriculum expectations and the achievement levels outlined for the particular curriculum. The IEP box on the student’s Provincial Report Card will not be checked, and no information on the provision of accommodations will be included.

## **Students Requiring Modified Expectations**

Modified expectations for most students with special education needs will be based on the regular grade or course expectations, with changes in the number and/or complexity of the expectations. Modified expectations must represent specific, realistic, observable, and measurable goals, and must describe specific knowledge and/or skills that the student can demonstrate independently, given the appropriate assessment accommodations.

It is important to monitor, and to reflect clearly in the student’s IEP, the extent to which expectations have been modified. At the secondary level, the principal will determine whether achievement of the modified expectations constitutes successful completion of the course, and will decide whether the student is eligible to receive a credit for the course. This decision must be communicated to the parents and the student.

Modified expectations must indicate the knowledge and/or skills that the student is expected to demonstrate and that will be assessed in each reporting period (*Special Education in Ontario, 2017*, p. E27). Modified expectations should be expressed in such a way that the student and parents can understand not only exactly what the student is expected to know or be able to demonstrate independently, but also the basis on which the student’s performance will be evaluated, resulting in a grade or mark that is recorded on the Provincial Report Card. The student’s learning expectations must be reviewed in relation to the student’s progress at least once every reporting period, and must be updated as necessary (*Special Education in Ontario, 2017*, p. E28).

If a student requires modified expectations, assessment and evaluation of their achievement will be based on the learning expectations identified in the IEP and on the

achievement levels outlined under [Levels of Achievement](#) in the “Assessment and Evaluation” section.

**Elementary:** The IEP box on the Elementary Progress Report Card and the Elementary Provincial Report Card must be checked for any subject in which the student requires modified expectations, and, on the Elementary Provincial Report Card, the appropriate statement from *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools, First Edition, Covering Grades 1 to 12, 2010*, page 61, must be inserted.

**Secondary:** If some of the student’s learning expectations for a course are modified but the student is working towards a credit for the course, it is sufficient simply to check the IEP box on the Provincial Report Card, Grades 9–12. If, however, the student’s learning expectations are modified to such an extent that the principal deems that a credit will not be granted for the course, the IEP box must be checked and the appropriate statement from *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools, First Edition, Covering Grades 1 to 12, 2010*, pages 62–63, must be inserted.

In both the elementary and secondary panels, the teacher’s comments should include relevant information on the student’s demonstrated learning of the modified expectations, as well as next steps for the student’s learning in the subject or course.

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# Planning for English Language Learners

12:31

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Ontario schools have some of the most multilingual student populations in the world. The first language of approximately 28 per cent of the students in Ontario's English-language schools is a language other than English. In addition, some students use varieties of English – sometimes referred to as dialects – that differ significantly from the English required for success in Ontario schools. Many English language learners were born in Canada and have been raised in families and communities in which languages other than English, or varieties of English that differ from the language used in the classroom, are spoken. Other English language learners arrive in Ontario as newcomers from other countries; they may have experience of highly sophisticated educational systems, or they may have come from regions where access to formal schooling was limited.

When they start school in Ontario, many of these students are entering a new linguistic and cultural environment. All teachers share in the responsibility for these students' English-language development.

As students who are learning English as a second or additional language in English-language schools, English language learners bring a rich diversity of background knowledge and experience to the classroom. These students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds not only support their learning in their new environment but also become a cultural asset in the classroom community. Effective teachers find positive ways to incorporate this diversity into their instructional programs and into the classroom environment.

Most English language learners in Ontario schools have age-appropriate proficiency in their first language, as well as age-appropriate literacy skills. Although they need frequent opportunities to use English at school, they also derive important educational and social benefits from continuing to develop their first language while they are learning English. Teachers should encourage parents to continue to use their own language at home, both to preserve the language as part of their children's heritage and identity and to provide a foundation for their language and literacy development in English. It is also important for teachers to find opportunities to bring students' languages into the classroom, using parents and community members as a resource.

## **English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development Programs**

During their first few years in Ontario schools, English language learners may receive support through one of two distinct programs designed to meet their language-learning needs:



*English as a Second Language (ESL)* programs are for students born in Canada or newcomers whose first language is a language other than English, or is a variety of English significantly different from that used for instruction in Ontario schools. Students in these programs have had educational opportunities to develop age-appropriate first-language literacy skills.

*English Literacy Development (ELD)* programs are primarily for newcomers whose first language is a language other than English, or is a variety of English significantly different from that used for instruction in Ontario schools, and who arrive with significant gaps in their education. These students generally come from countries where access to education is limited or where there are limited opportunities to develop language and literacy skills in any language. Schooling in their countries of origin may have been inconsistent, disrupted, or even completely unavailable throughout the years that these children would otherwise have been in school.

## **Supportive Learning Environments**

In planning programs for students with linguistic backgrounds other than English, teachers need to recognize the importance of the orientation process, understanding that every learner needs to adjust to the new social environment and language in a unique way and at an individual pace. For example, students who are in an early stage of English-language acquisition may go through a “silent period” during which they closely observe the interactions and physical surroundings of their new learning environment. They may use body language rather than speech or they may use their first language until they have gained enough proficiency in English to feel confident of their interpretations and responses. Students thrive in a safe, supportive, and welcoming environment that nurtures their self-confidence while they are receiving focused literacy instruction. When they are ready to participate, in paired, small-group, or whole-class activities, some students will begin by using a single word or phrase to communicate a thought, while others will speak quite fluently.

In a supportive learning environment, most students will develop oral language proficiency quite quickly. Teachers can sometimes be misled by the high degree of oral proficiency demonstrated by many English language learners in their use of everyday English and may mistakenly conclude that these students are equally proficient in their use of academic English. Most English language learners who have developed oral proficiency in everyday English will still require instructional scaffolding to meet curriculum expectations. Research has shown that it takes five to seven years for most English language learners to catch up to their English-speaking peers in their ability to use English for academic purposes.



## Program Adaptations

Responsibility for students' English-language development is shared by all teachers, including the ESL/ELD teacher (where available), and other school staff. Volunteers and peers may also be helpful in supporting English language learners in the classroom. By adapting the instructional program, teachers facilitate these students' learning. Appropriate adaptations include modifications and accommodations, as follows:

- modification of some or all of the grade or course expectations so that they are challenging but attainable for the learners at their current level of English proficiency, with the necessary support from the teacher;
- use of a variety of instructional strategies;<sup>[\*]</sup>
- use of a variety of learning resources;<sup>[\*]</sup>
- use of assessment accommodations that support students in demonstrating the full range of their learning.<sup>[\*]</sup>

Teachers need to adapt the program for English language learners as they acquire English proficiency. For English language learners at the early stages of English language acquisition, teachers are required to modify curriculum expectations as needed. Most English language learners require accommodations for an extended period, long after they have achieved proficiency in everyday English.

## Assessment and Evaluation

When curriculum expectations are modified in order to meet the language-learning needs of English language learners, assessment and evaluation will be based on the documented modified expectations. Teachers will check the ESL/ELD box on the Provincial Report Card only when modifications have been made to curriculum expectations to address the language needs of English language learners (the box should *not* be checked to indicate simply that they are participating in ESL/ELD programs or if they are only receiving accommodations). There is no requirement for a statement to be added to the "Comments" section of the report cards when the ESL/ELD box is checked.

Although the degree of program adaptation required will decrease over time, students who are no longer receiving ESL or ELD support may still need some program adaptations to be successful.

## Related Policy and Resource Documents

For further information on supporting English language learners, refer to the following documents:

- *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools, First Edition, Covering Grades 1 to 12, 2010* [↗](#)
- *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9–12: English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development, 2007*
- *English Language Learners – ESL and ELD Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2007* [↗](#)
- *Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling: A Practical Guide for Ontario Educators, Grades 3 to 12, 2008* [↗](#)
- *Supporting English Language Learners: A Practical Guide for Ontario Educators, Grades 1 to 8, 2008* [↗](#)
- *Many Roots, Many Voices: Supporting English Language Learners in Every Classroom, 2005.* [↗](#)

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## Healthy Relationships

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05:53

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Every student is entitled to learn in a safe, caring environment, free from discrimination, violence, and harassment. Research has shown that students learn and achieve better in such environments. A safe and supportive social environment in a

school is founded on healthy relationships – the relationships between students, between students and adults, and between adults. Healthy relationships are based on respect, caring, empathy, trust, and dignity, and thrive in an environment in which diversity is honoured and accepted. Healthy relationships do not tolerate abusive, controlling, violent, bullying/harassing, or other inappropriate behaviours. To experience themselves as valued and connected members of an inclusive social environment, students need to be involved in healthy relationships with their peers, educators, and other members of the school community.

Several provincial policies, programs, and initiatives, including [Foundations for a Healthy School](#), the [Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy](#), and [Safe Schools](#), are designed to foster caring and safe learning environments in the context of healthy and inclusive schools. These policies and initiatives promote positive learning and teaching environments that support the development of healthy relationships, encourage academic achievement, and help all students reach their full potential.

In its 2008 report, *[Shaping a Culture of Respect in Our Schools: Promoting Safe and Healthy Relationships](#)*, the Safe Schools Action Team confirmed “that the most effective way to enable all students to learn about healthy and respectful relationships is through the school curriculum” (p. 11). Educators can promote this learning in a variety of ways. For example, by giving students opportunities to apply critical thinking and problem-solving strategies and to address issues through group discussions, role play, case study analysis, and other means, they can help them develop and practise the skills they need for building healthy relationships. Co-curricular activities such as clubs and intramural and interschool sports provide additional opportunities for the kind of interaction that helps students build healthy relationships. Educators can also have a positive influence on students by modelling the behaviours, values, and skills that are needed to develop and sustain healthy relationships, and by taking advantage of “teachable moments” to address immediate relationship issues that may arise among students.

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## Human Rights, Equity, and Inclusive Education

13:07

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A positive, inclusive, equitable, and non-discriminatory elementary and secondary school experience is vitally important to a student's personal, social, and academic

development, to their future economic security, and to a realization of their full potential. Human rights principles recognize the importance of creating a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of each person, so that each person can contribute fully to the development and well-being of their community. Indeed, human rights law guarantees a person's right to equal treatment in education. It requires educators and school leaders to prevent and respond appropriately to discrimination and harassment, to create an inclusive environment, to remove barriers that limit the ability of students, and to provide accommodations, where necessary.

Ontario's education system, at all levels, must respect diversity, promote inclusive education, and work towards identifying and eliminating barriers to equal treatment in education that limit the ability of students to learn, grow, and contribute to society. Discriminatory biases, harassment, non-inclusive environments, lack of accommodation, systemic barriers, power dynamics, societal poverty, and racism make it difficult for students to acquire the skills they need to be successful, competitive, and productive members of society. Ontario schools aim to improve the academic outcomes and experiences of students who have traditionally not benefited from the promise of public education.

In an environment based on the principles of inclusive education, all students, parents, caregivers, and other members of the school community – regardless of ancestry, culture, ethnicity, sex, disability, race, colour, religion, age, marital or family status, creed, gender identity/expression, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or other factors – are welcomed, included, treated fairly, and respected. Diversity is valued when all members of the school community feel safe, welcomed, and accepted. Every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning.

Research has shown that students who do not see themselves reflected in what they are learning, in their classrooms, and in their schools become disengaged and do not experience as great a sense of well-being or as high a level of academic achievement as those who do.

## **Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy (CRRP)**

In an inclusive education system, students must see themselves reflected in the curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, so that they can feel engaged in and empowered by their learning experiences. Students need to experience teaching and learning that reflect their needs and who they are. To ensure

that this happens, educators in Ontario schools embrace *culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy* (CRRP), which recognizes that all students learn in ways that are connected to background, language, family structure, and social or cultural identity.

CRRP provides a framework for building positive environments, improving student responsibility and success, encouraging parent-school relationships, and building strong community connections. It also emphasizes that it is important for educators and school leaders to examine their own biases and to analyse how their own identities and experiences affect how they view, understand, and interact with all students. This can help to prevent discrimination, harassment, and the creation of poisoned environments. Educators are responsible for meaningful teaching and learning that recognizes and responds to *who is in the classroom and the school*.

By knowing “who our students are”, educators and leaders can tailor policies, programs, and practices to better meet the needs of their diverse student populations, to provide accommodation of the needs specified by human rights law, and to ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed. CRRP involves recognizing that “culture” encompasses various aspects of social and personal identity. It also means acknowledging students’ multiple social and personal identities and the social issues that arise where identities intersect. The CRRP approach is designed to spark conversation and support educators and school leaders as they seek to implement effective equity strategies and policies. Educators are encouraged to engage in meaningful inquiry, in collaboration with colleagues, to address equity issues and the particular needs of the students they serve.

## **Implementing Principles of Inclusive Education**

The implementation of inclusive education principles in education influences all aspects of school life. It promotes a school climate that encourages all students to work to high levels of achievement, affirms the worth of all students, and helps students strengthen their sense of identity and develop a positive self-image. It encourages staff and students alike to value and show respect for diversity in the school and the broader society. Inclusive education promotes equity, healthy relationships, and active, responsible citizenship. The absence of inclusive approaches to education can create discriminatory environments, in which certain individuals or groups cannot expect to receive fair treatment or an equitable experience based on aspects of their identity.

Teachers can give students a variety of opportunities to learn about diversity and diverse perspectives. By drawing attention to the contributions and perspectives of historically marginalized groups, and by creating opportunities for their experiences to

be affirmed and valued, teachers can enable students from a wide range of backgrounds to see themselves reflected in the curriculum. It is essential that learning activities and materials used to support the curriculum reflect the diversity of Ontario society. In addition, teachers should differentiate instruction and assessment strategies to take into account the background and experiences, as well as the interests, aptitudes, and learning needs, of all students.

Interactions between the school and the community should reflect the diversity of both the local community and the broader society. A variety of strategies can be used to communicate with and engage parents and members of diverse communities, and to encourage their participation in and support for school activities, programs, and events. Family and community members should be invited to take part in teacher interviews, the school council, and the parent involvement committee, and to attend and support activities such as plays, concerts, co-curricular activities and events, and various special events at the school. Schools need to be prepared and ready to welcome families and community members. Schools may consider offering assistance with child care or making alternative scheduling arrangements in order to help caregivers participate. Special outreach strategies and encouragement may be needed to draw in the parents of English language learners and First Nations, Métis, or Inuit students, and to make them feel more welcomed in their interactions with the school.



# Considerations for program planning

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## The Role of the School Library

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03:42

[Show transcript](#) ▾

The school library program can help build and transform students' knowledge in order to support lifelong learning in our information- and knowledge-based society. The school library program supports student success across the curriculum by encouraging

students to read widely, teaching them to examine and read many forms of text for understanding and enjoyment, and helping them improve their research skills and effectively use information gathered through research.

The school library program enables students to:

- develop a love of reading for learning and for pleasure;
- develop literacy skills using fiction and non-fiction materials;
- develop the skills to become independent, thoughtful, and critical researchers;
- obtain access to programs, resources, and integrated technologies that support all curriculum areas;
- understand and value the role of public library systems as a resource for lifelong learning.

The school library program plays a key role in the development of information literacy and research skills. Teacher-librarians, where available, collaborate with classroom or content-area teachers to design, teach, and provide students with authentic information and research tasks that foster learning, including the ability to:

- access, select, gather, process, critically evaluate, create, and communicate information;
- use the information obtained to explore and investigate issues, solve problems, make decisions, build knowledge, create personal meaning, and enrich their lives;
- communicate their findings to different audiences, using a variety of formats and technologies;
- use information and research with understanding, responsibility, and imagination.

In addition, teacher-librarians can work with content-area teachers to help students:

- develop digital literacy in using non-print forms, such as the Internet, social media, and blogs, and knowing the best ways to access relevant and reliable information;
- design inquiry questions for research projects;
- create and produce single-medium or multimedia presentations.

Teachers need to discuss with students the concept of ownership of work and the importance of copyright in all forms of media.

# Considerations for program planning

Last revised in June 2024

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## The Role of Information and Communications Technology

00:56

[Show transcript](#) ▾

The variety and range of information and communications technology (ICT) tools available to educators today enables them to significantly extend and enrich their

instructional approaches and to create opportunities for students to learn in ways that best suit their interests and strengths. Technology has also enhanced the ability to connect with communities outside the school, making it possible to engage a diversity of community partners in student learning.

Rich opportunities can be tapped to support students in developing [digital literacy](#) , an essential transferable skill.

# Considerations for program planning

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## Education and Career/Life Planning

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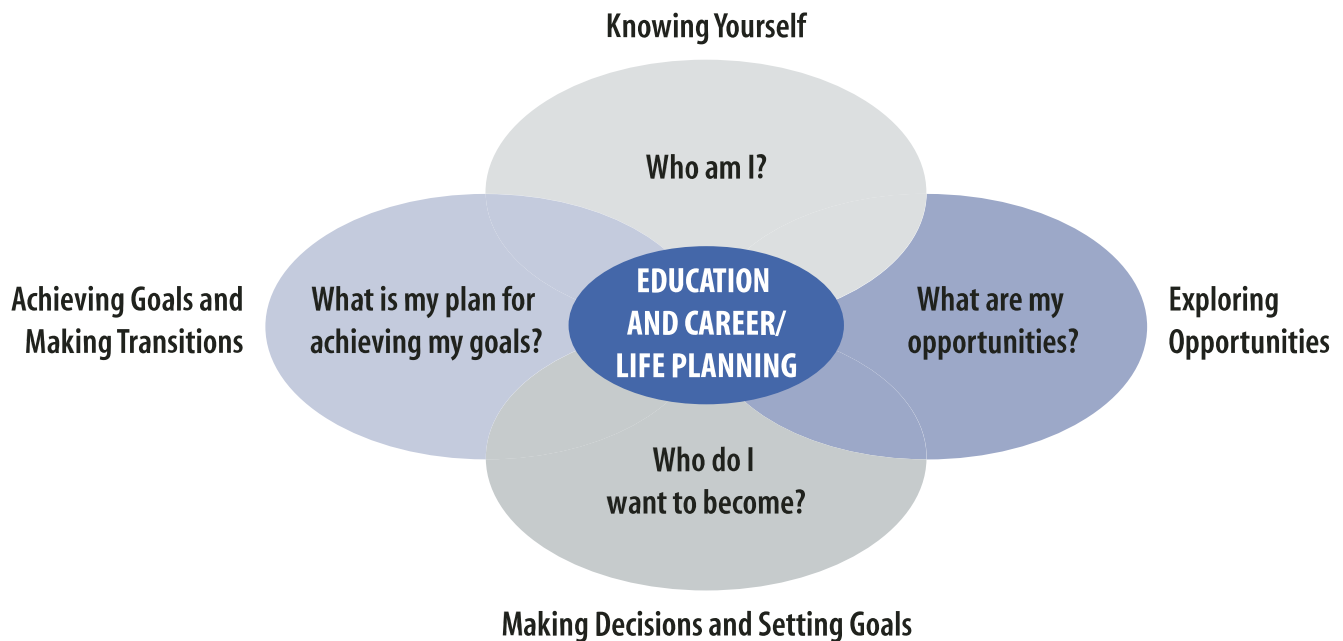
04:33

[Show transcript](#) ▾

The goals of the Kindergarten to Grade 12 education and career/life planning program are to:

- ensure that all students develop the knowledge and skills they need to make informed education and career/life choices;
- provide classroom and school-wide opportunities for this learning; and
- engage parents and the broader community in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the program, to support students in their learning.

The framework of the program is a four-step inquiry process based on four questions linked to four areas of learning: (1) Knowing Yourself – Who am I?; (2) Exploring Opportunities – What are my opportunities?; (3) Making Decisions and Setting Goals – Who do I want to become?; and (4) Achieving Goals and Making Transitions – What is my plan for achieving my goals?



The curriculum expectations in most subjects and disciplines of the Ontario curriculum provide opportunities to relate classroom learning to the education and career/life planning program as outlined in *Creating Pathways to Success: An Education and Career/Life Planning Program for Ontario Schools – Policy and Program Requirements, Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2013* [\[link\]](#). All classroom teachers support students in education and career/life planning by providing them with learning opportunities, filtered through the lens of the four inquiry questions, that allow them to reflect on and apply subject-specific knowledge and skills; explore subject-related education and career/life options; and become competent, self-directed planners who will be prepared for success in

school, life, and work. Education and career/life planning will support students in their transition from secondary school to their initial postsecondary destination, whether it be in apprenticeship training, college, community living, university, or the workplace. For more information on postsecondary pathway choices, see the [Education and Training](#) and [Skilled Trades](#) pages on the Ontario government website.



# Considerations for program planning

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## Experiential Learning

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04:52

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Experiential learning is hands-on learning that occurs in person or virtually and provides developmentally appropriate opportunities for students of all ages to:

- **participate** in rich experiences connected to the world outside the school;
- **reflect** on the experiences to derive meaning; and
- **apply** the learning to their decisions and actions.

Adapted from David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Education, 2015)

Planned learning experiences in the community may include outdoor education, project/program-based learning, job shadowing and job twinning, field trips, field studies, work experience, and cooperative education. These experiences provide opportunities for students to see the relevance of their classroom learning and its connection to the broader world. They also help them develop transferable and interpersonal skills and work habits that prepare them for their future, and enable them to explore careers of interest as they plan their pathway through school to their postsecondary destination, whether in apprenticeship training, college, community living, university, or the workplace.

Experiential learning opportunities associated with various aspects of the curriculum help broaden students' knowledge of themselves and of a range of career opportunities – two areas of learning outlined in [Creating Pathways to Success: An Education and Career/Life Planning Program for Ontario Schools – Policy and Program Requirements, Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2013](#). [↗](#) The key to providing successful experiential learning opportunities is to ensure that the experiential learning cycle (participate, reflect, apply) is a planned part of the experience.

In secondary school, pathways programs that incorporate experiential learning are available to students. They include the following courses and programs:

- cooperative education courses, outlined in [The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 11–12: Cooperative Education, 2018](#) [↗](#)
- Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) (see [“Prepare for Apprenticeship”](#) [↗](#) on the Ontario government website)
- [Specialist High Skills Major \(SHSM\)](#) [↗](#) program
- [Dual credit](#) [↗](#) programs

# Considerations for program planning

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## Pathways to a Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM)

01:39

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The [Specialist High Skills Major \(SHSM\)](#) [↗](#) is a specialized, ministry-approved program that allows students in Grades 11 and 12 to focus their learning on a specific economic

sector while meeting the requirements of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).

The SHSM program assists students in their transition from secondary school to apprenticeship training, college, university, or the workplace.

This program enables students to gain sector-specific skills and knowledge in engaging, career-related learning environments and to prepare in a focused way for graduation and postsecondary education, training, or employment.

Course offerings and program planning should support students who are pursuing specialized programs, including the SHSM program. Bundles of credits provide students with knowledge and skills that are connected with the specific sector of their SHSM program and that are required for success in their chosen destination.

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## Health and Safety

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06:12

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In Ontario, various laws, including the [Education Act](#), the [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#) (OHSA), [Ryan's Law \(Ensuring Asthma Friendly Schools\), 2015](#), and [Sabrina's Law, 2005](#), collectively ensure that school boards provide a safe and

productive learning and work environment for both students and employees. Under the Education Act, teachers are required to ensure that all reasonable safety procedures are carried out in courses and activities for which they are responsible. Teachers should model safe practices at all times; communicate safety requirements to students in accordance with school board policies, Ministry of Education policies, and any applicable laws; and encourage students to assume responsibility for their own safety and the safety of others.

Concern for safety should be an integral part of instructional planning and implementation. Teachers are encouraged to review:

- their responsibilities under the [Education Act](#) .
- their rights and responsibilities under the [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#) .
- their school board's health and safety policy for employees;
- their school board's policies and procedures on student health and safety (e.g., on concussions; on medical conditions such as asthma; with respect to outdoor education excursions);
- relevant provincial subject association guidelines and standards for student health and safety, such as Ophea's [Ontario Physical Activity Safety Standards in Education](#)  (formerly the Ontario Physical Education Safety Guidelines);
- any additional mandatory requirements, particularly for higher-risk activities (e.g., field trips that involve water-based activities), including requirements for approvals (e.g., from the Supervisory Officer), permissions (e.g., from parents/guardians), and/or qualifications (e.g., proof of students' successful completion of a swim test).

Wherever possible, potential risks should be identified and procedures developed to prevent or minimize, and respond to, incidents and injuries. School boards provide and maintain safe facilities and equipment, as well as qualified instruction. In safe learning environments, teachers will:

- be aware of up-to-date safety information;
- plan activities with safety as a primary consideration;
- inform students and parents of risks involved in activities;
- observe students to ensure that safe practices are being followed;

- have a plan in case of emergency;
- show foresight;
- act quickly.

Students should be made aware that health and safety is everyone's responsibility – at home, at school, and in the community. Teachers should ensure that students have the knowledge and skills needed for safe participation in all learning activities. Students must be able to demonstrate knowledge of the equipment being used and the procedures necessary for its safe use. Health and safety resource guides for [Kindergarten to Grade 8](#) and for [Grades 9 to 12](#) provide the scope and sequence of Ontario curriculum expectations to assist teachers in bringing health and safety education into the classroom in every subject area. The guides identify expectations in the Ontario curriculum that can help students develop knowledge and skills related to health and safety (injury prevention and health protection), safe behaviours, and safe practices.

Learning outside the classroom, such as on field trips or during field studies, can provide a meaningful and authentic dimension to students' learning experiences, but they also take the teacher and students out of the predictable classroom environment and into unfamiliar settings. Teachers must plan these activities carefully in accordance with their school board's relevant policies and procedures and in collaboration with other school board staff (e.g., the principal, outdoor education lead, Supervisory Officer) to ensure students' health and safety.

The information provided in this section is not exhaustive. Teachers are expected to follow school board health and safety policies and procedures.

# Considerations for program planning

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## Ethics

03:46

[Show transcript](#) ▾

The Ontario curriculum provides varied opportunities for students to learn about ethical issues and to explore the role of ethics in both public and personal decision making. Students may make ethical judgements when evaluating evidence and



positions on various issues, and when drawing their own conclusions about issues, developments, and events. Teachers may need to help students determine which factors they should consider when making such judgements. It is crucial that teachers provide support and supervision to students throughout the research and inquiry process, ensuring that students engaged in an inquiry are aware of potential ethical concerns and that they address such concerns in acceptable ways. Teachers may supervise students' use of surveys and/or interviews, for example, to confirm that their planned activities will respect the dignity, privacy, and confidentiality of their participants. When students' activities involve Indigenous communities and/or individuals, teachers need to ensure the appropriate use and protection of Indigenous knowledge. Teachers also supervise the choice of the research topics to protect students from exposure to information and/or perspectives for which they may not be emotionally or intellectually prepared (for example, where a student's investigation might involve personal interviews that could lead to the disclosure of abuse or other sensitive topics).

Teachers must thoroughly address the issues of plagiarism and cultural appropriation with students. In a digital world that provides quick access to abundant information, it is easy to copy the words, music, or images of others and present them as one's own. Even at the secondary level, students need to be reminded of the ethical issues related to plagiarism and appropriation. Before starting an inquiry, students should have an understanding of the range of forms of plagiarism and appropriation, from blatant to nuanced, as well as of their consequences. Students often struggle to find a balance between creating works in their own voice or style and acknowledging the work of others. It is not enough to tell them not to plagiarize or appropriate others' work, and to admonish those who do. Teachers need to explicitly teach all students how to use their own voice or style while appropriately acknowledging the work of others, using accepted forms of documentation.