

## Introduction

All parents are important members of their children's learning teams. As parents, you know your child best. You know your child's strengths, abilities, developmental capacities and challenges, and as a result you can be your child's greatest supporters.

Your ongoing involvement and support in the school environment can make a positive and meaningful difference in your child's success. It is important that you participate in decisions that affect your child's education. You can contribute information that is critical to planning, putting programs into action, and adjusting the programming to best meet your child's changing needs.

As parents, you can also enrich your child's learning experiences through involvement with the community. This involvement could occur through local organizations and programs, such as parent groups or children's activities. It could also occur informally, through interactions with extended family, volunteers, friends, neighbours and the community-at-large.

Children learn in different ways and at different rates. This handbook emphasizes the diverse and changing learning needs of children with special needs. As well as offering support and encouragement to parents, the handbook describes services and activities that might be used to meet these needs at school, and suggests ways you can enhance and enrich your child's learning at home. The handbook also includes practical information and strategies for helping your child make successful transitions, for voicing your concerns and for staying informed. Each chapter ends with a Parent Notebook. These pages offer ideas for information you might want to think about, as well as sample questions you might wish to discuss with your child or your child's teachers.

For more information on standards and funding guidelines for special education see:

[www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k\\_12/specialneeds/SpecialEd\\_std2003.pdf](http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/specialneeds/SpecialEd_std2003.pdf)

[www.learning.gov.ab.ca/funding/Funding Manual](http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/funding/FundingManual)

[www.learning.gov.ab.ca/educationguide/default.asp](http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/educationguide/default.asp)

For more information see:

*Shaping the Future for Students with Special Needs: A Review of Special Education in Alberta—Final Report, November 2000*

[www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k\\_12/special/SpecialEdReview/SpEdReport.pdf](http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/special/SpecialEdReview/SpEdReport.pdf)

This handbook is an informal resource for parents and is not intended to be a legal document. Information is aligned with current legislation, Alberta Learning policies and the *Standards for Special Education* (2003), but for ease of reading the information is often stated in less formal language than the official sources. Key terms that are bolded the first time they appear in the text are defined in the glossary on pages 102–104. For more detailed information on topics in this handbook, refer to the Web site addresses and document titles listed in the margin.

*The Learning Team* is a revision and expansion of the resource *Partners During Changing Times* (1996), a parent handbook developed by Alberta Learning and the College of Alberta School Superintendents. Recommendation 29, Short Term 3 of *Shaping the Future for Students with Special Needs: A Review of Special Education in Alberta—Final Report* (2000) recommended a revision of this resource that would highlight information for parents on working together with the school and other service providers.

As a part of the revision process, the Special Programs Branch conducted a series of community consultations in the fall of 2001, talking with parents across the province. Parents were asked what would help them to better support the education of their children with special needs. They indicated that they wanted opportunities to participate in all facets of their children’s schooling, to be part of the decision-making process, and have access to information and ideas on a continuous, as-needed basis. Most of all, they want to be contributing members of their children’s learning teams. This handbook offers information and strategies for doing just that.