

# **Unlocking Potential: Key Components of Programming for Students with Learning Disabilities**

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For further information contact:

Learning and Teaching Resources Branch  
 5th Floor, West Devonian Bldg.  
 11160 Jasper Ave.  
 Edmonton, AB T5K 0L2  
 Telephone: 780-427-2984 in Edmonton or  
 toll-free in Alberta by dialing 310-0000  
 Fax: 780-422-0576

Special Programs Branch  
 10th Floor, East Devonian Bldg.  
 11160 Jasper Ave.  
 Edmonton, AB T5K 0L2  
 Telephone: 780-422-6326 in Edmonton or  
 toll-free in Alberta by dialing 310-0000  
 Fax: 780-422-2039

This document is intended for:

Students	
Teachers	✓
Administrators	✓
Counsellors	✓
Parents	
General Public	

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### Principal writer

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### Alberta Learning staff

Rick Hayes	Director, Special Programs Branch
Gina Vivone-Vernon	Director, Learning and Teaching Resources Branch
Greg Bishop	Team Leader, Learning and Teaching Resources Branch
Catherine Walker	Resource Manager
Sandra Mukai	Copyright

### Editor

Marilyn Tungland

### Graphic design

Shane Chen

### Special Education Advisory Committee members, representing:

Alberta Association for Community Living  
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# Introduction

## Purpose

This resource provides concise information to assist in developing and monitoring programming for students with learning disabilities. Students with learning disabilities have the potential to be successful in school and in life. Success is highly dependent upon identifying and understanding an individual's strengths and needs, and providing appropriate support during the school years. The key components of programming described in this resource are based on research and best practices in the education of students with learning disabilities. Sample outcomes are provided for each key component. Outcomes are the results expected from implementing the suggested strategies, activities and practices.

The information presented is not intended to be exhaustive. Key issues and strategies are highlighted. Connections to other Alberta Learning resources are provided to facilitate access to more in-depth information. The bibliography includes additional resources and the appendices provide complementary checklists and teaching tools. The strategies, approaches and outcomes are targets to strive for and will be influenced by the availability of resources and practical constraints.

Programming for students with learning disabilities requires a team effort. The audience for this resource includes classroom teachers, resource personnel and administrators.

**Students with learning disabilities** have diverse, complex and interrelated difficulties, often hidden or subtle, that affect their learning across the lifespan. While there is great variability among students with learning disabilities, they are generally described as individuals of at least average intelligence who have difficulties processing information and who experience unexpected difficulties in academic areas. These difficulties cannot be explained on the basis of other handicapping conditions or environmental influences. These students exhibit strength and success in other learning and processing areas. Learning disabilities are lifelong and may be affected by the demands of the environment, so that their impact varies across the lifespan.

## Guiding Principles

- Programming must be based on an individual student's needs.
- Programming is an active process, which is continuously monitored and adjusted to meet a student's needs.
- Students with learning disabilities need to participate in the regular curriculum to the fullest extent possible.
- Many practices used to support students with learning disabilities will benefit all students.
- The key components of programming are not discrete; they are processes that work together.
- Programming:
  - involves a problem-solving process, and is dynamic, interactive and changing
  - requires consistency across settings and grades
  - requires teamwork and collaboration (student, parent, school personnel)
  - requires ongoing communication
  - requires an organizational structure and school culture that support the ongoing implementation of the components.

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## Key Components of programming for students with learning disabilities

These components are not discrete. All are important to programming and work together.

- 1 **Collaboration** involves working together with collaborative problem solving at the heart. There are several levels of collaboration to support students with learning disabilities. It is important for parents to have meaningful involvement in the education of their children. Student involvement in all aspects of their programs enhances success and self-advocacy skills. Collaboration among school personnel, parents and students is important for identifying students with learning disabilities; providing ongoing assessment and monitoring; developing

and implementing individualized program plans (IPPs); and planning for transitions, instruction and accommodations.

- 2 Meaningful Parent Involvement** in a child's education enhances the child's achievement and the parents' satisfaction with the educational programming being provided for the child. It is important to facilitate a collaborative relationship between home and school. Parents have much to offer to the identification and assessment processes. They are key stakeholders in the IPP process and in transition planning.
- 3 Identification and Assessment** of students with learning disabilities is essential to ensure that appropriate educational supports are put in place. The optimal approach is early identification and assistance. However, learning disabilities are lifelong and systems for identification and assessment are needed throughout the school years. Collaboration between home and school facilitates the detection and identification of learning disabilities. A team approach to the assessment process provides multiple sources of information that contribute to the diagnosis of learning disabilities and the development of individualized program plans.
- 4 Ongoing Assessment** is important for program planning and monitoring. Assessment does not end after the identification and diagnosis of learning disabilities. It is essential to all aspects of the IPP process. Ongoing frequent monitoring of student performance is important in order to gather information to use to demonstrate and communicate progress, and adjust teaching approaches to enhance success. Student involvement in the assessment process contributes to the development of self-advocacy skills.
- 5 Individualized Program Plans (IPPs)** provide the framework for developing programs to address the needs of individual students. All components of programming come together in the development, implementation and monitoring of students' IPPs. IPPs require a collaborative team effort involving the student, parent, regular education teachers and resource personnel. Student involvement facilitates self-advocacy skills. Information gathered during the identification process contributes to understanding student strengths and needs, and suggests directions for instruction and accommodations. The IPP process involves opportunities for collaborative problem solving. Planning for transitions across

programs, grades and schools is also an important part of the process. The ongoing monitoring of student progress is recorded on the IPP. The effectiveness of accommodations is tracked and instructional changes are made as needed.

- 6 Transition Planning** is important for students with learning disabilities. These students often have difficulty managing transitions in their lives, such as the changes involved in transitions across grades, programs and schools. Effective transitions are planned, collaborative and comprehensive.
- 7 Self-advocacy** refers to taking action on one's own behalf. Successful adults with learning disabilities have identified the ability to self-advocate as an important factor contributing to success. Programming for students with learning disabilities must support the development of self-advocacy skills.
- 8 Accommodations** can address many of the challenges faced by students with learning disabilities. An accommodation is a change or alteration to the regular way a student is expected to learn, complete assignments or participate in the classroom. Accommodations need to be balanced with other instructional considerations and be included in the IPP process. Accommodations are based on an understanding of student strengths and needs. They are best determined through a collaborative process and need to be monitored for effectiveness.
- 9 Instruction** to facilitate learning is essential for programming for students with learning disabilities. Students will need explicit, intensive and extensive instruction that will vary with the severity and nature of the learning problems. Combining direct instruction, strategy instruction and strategic teaching is appropriate across all grade levels. Instruction is guided by IPPs and builds on individual strengths and needs. Planning, implementing, and monitoring instruction are facilitated by collaboration.