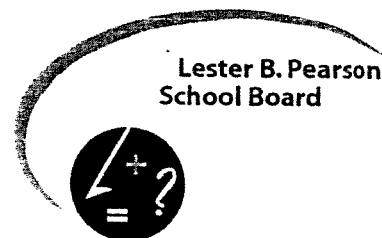


DIFFERENT ROADS  
TO LEARNING

Autism  
Spectrum  
Disorders



Lester B. Pearson  
School Board

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Autism Spectrum Disorder Newsletter  
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### From Elementary to High School: Planning Smooth Transitions

Moving from elementary school to high school is an exciting change for many students. High school is related to new social and academic challenges, increased autonomy and the development of goals for the future. By the same token, this significant change can be overwhelming, frightening and anxiety-provoking. These feelings of insecurity and stress are often exacerbated for students who have an autism spectrum disorder.

Just learning to navigate through crowded, noisy hallways between classes is quite a feat. Add to the mix that most high schools have a rotary schedule, many unfamiliar faces and numerous unsupervised doors leading to outdoor temptations, and it is easy to understand why problems can occur. Careful planning is essential in order to create a smooth transition from elementary school to high school. This is especially important given that a positive experience early on can influence future secondary school experiences.

Last year, a transitioning protocol was introduced in all elementary schools with a graduating student with an ASD, as well as

to all high schools. Its main purpose was to propose a format whereby the student with an ASD could gradually become familiarised with the high school environment. At the same time, information was shared between the elementary and high school resource teachers so that the high school could adequately plan to meet the new student's needs. Reports from parents and teachers revealed that this plan did help to significantly alleviate their own stress levels, as well as the stress level of the new high school student.

Learning to use a lock, a schedule, and vending machine and lunch money were some of the areas that were addressed by the elementary school. Mastering these skills in grade six enabled the students to begin high school feeling much more confident and being much more independent. In addition, monthly visits to the high school were proposed as a way for the students to begin to recognize the main parts of the school (eg. bathrooms, cafeteria, gym, resource room, and main office). Over time, students were even invited to participate in a highly motivating activity in their future high school. Many students chose to have lunch in the cafeteria, but others chose

to attend a gym class, a drama class or to bring work from their elementary school to complete in the high school resource room.

Regular contact was maintained between the resource teachers. The high school was presented with a student profile outlining the strengths and interests of the student who has an ASD, as well as strategies and interventions that have proven effective. Furthermore, a copy of the most recent IEP was made available to the high school resource teacher. At one point during the latter part of the year, the high school resource teacher was even invited to observe the student work in his/her elementary school classroom.

During the visits, pictures of various parts of the school were taken. Stories were written and photo albums were made so that the students could refer to these often, especially during the summer months. Parents were encouraged to talk often about the high school with their child and even to drive by the school during the summer.

Given the success of this program in the past, educators are encouraged to take the steps necessary to promote a smooth transition into high school. The better informed and prepared that the student who has an ASD is, the more likely that the student himself, his family and the school team will have a positive experience. Happy transitioning!

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## Occupational therapy Corner

A lot of children with autism are under or over responsive to sensory input. As mentioned in our previous issue, individuals with autism/PDD may have difficulty with registration and interpretation of sensory information.

Hypersensitivity to touch is commonly observed. The tactile system includes light touch, pressure, vibration, temperature and pain receptor cells. Students who tend to OVER-REACT TO TACTILE input may respond emotionally or aggressively to touch. They can be recognized through their need to be in control of touching interactions, as well as their avoidance of physical contact and tasks that are wet/messy (gluing & pasting, finger painting, sand play, etc.). They tend to hold objects by fingertips, are often picky eaters, have rigid rituals for hygiene activities, and resist dressing/undressing. When interacting with them, it is helpful to approach them from the front, let them know when you will touch them, use firm touch, provide deep pressure contact during play (e.g. bear hugs from the back), and avoid light touch/caressing superficially (especially facial area, soles and chest) and tickling. In addition, you can allow them to stand first or at the end of the line, arrange classroom seating to minimize the risk of being bumped by peers, place locker at end of

row, modify arts and crafts activities by providing the opportunity to use tools to reduce direct contact with messy materials (cookie cutters with play dough, paint brush, etc.). Let the student be in control of activities involving lots of tactile input. Give them the opportunity to look first, without touching. In case of sensory overload, allow them to calm down in a "quiet corner" in the classroom, where they can have access to a blanket to roll up in, a bean bag pillow, etc

## Library

We have been accumulating many new books. The following are new ones that are available to you by contacting one of the ASD Team members.

- 1) *My Brother Matthew*
- 2) *The Out of Sync Child has Fun.*
- 3) *Autism with Severe Learning Disabilities.*
- 4) *Social Skills Activities for Special Children.*

## Speech and Language Tip of the Month

Children on the Autism Spectrum often exhibit "echolalic speech" before they develop meaningful speech. These students will repeat what they just heard (immediate echolalia) or use phrases that they have heard before (delayed echolalia). Here are some ideas to take advantage of this "strength."

- Create routines and model words and phrases that are appropriate for the routine. Wait for the student to repeat your model. By pairing the *same* words with the *same* routine the words will develop meaning for the student.

- Repetition is critical.
- Fade your verbal model once the student is familiar with the routine and wait for the student to verbalize ( you may have to provide a prompt such as the first word).
- Interpret the communication function that the delayed echolalia is serving. (Is the student requesting something? Is the student commenting?) Model more appropriate language for the situation.
- Remember: do not assume that the student understands what he is saying. Just because he can repeat it does not mean he understands it.
- As language comprehension improves, echolalia will decrease.

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Questions or requests to the Center of Excellence from other school boards should be directed to Karen Zey.

We would like to invite everyone to send in drawings and creative writing pieces done by our students with an ASD to either Jade Lawsane or Holly Barlow for our Autism day in April.