



**SickKids**

The Hospital for Sick Children  
Toronto, Canada

# Teaching Kids with Epilepsy: Advocacy and System Navigation



**Miriam Riches, MA**

*Special Education Teacher: TDSB & Epilepsy Classroom*

# Education Overview

- “Education for all” assumes that every student, regardless of their learning, behavioural, or social-emotional needs, has the right to receive the most appropriate education to reach their potential
- Most children with Epilepsy have the potential to learn and accomplished all things that other children can and attend regular classes



# System Navigation

*Accessing the educational service system to the fullest extent*

- Is a collaborative process
  - ✓ develop professional and positive relationships with those involved in your child's education
  - ✓ a team approach lends itself well to problem-solving
- Takes time & consideration
- Requires you to be a strong advocate

# Being an Advocate

- Use effective communication in meetings
  - ✓ Describe your ideas, be specific, & be clear about your goals
  - ✓ Ask questions when you don't understand
  - ✓ Try to understand school's perspective
  - ✓ Do not feel pressured to make decisions
    - ✓ take time to assess the pros and cons
  
- Be an active consumer
  - ✓ Know what resources your board offers  
<http://www.tdsb.on.ca/site/ViewItem.asp?siteid=10428&menuid=23539&pageid=20406>
  
- Be Informed
  - ✓ Epilepsy
  - ✓ Your child's strengths and needs
  - ✓ Your and your child's rights

# Epilepsy & Learning

- Many children with Epilepsy have typical intelligence
- Research supports the association of Epilepsy with academic underachievement
- Prevalence of academic difficulty is reported to be as high as 50% (e.g., McCarthy et al., 1995; Austin et al., 1999)
- Those with intractable Epilepsy are at increased risk for learning difficulties & academic delay (Aldenkamp et al., 1999, Chaix et al., 2006)

*No Epilepsy-specific learning profile*

# Special Education Programs

## Purpose

Are designed to meet the special needs of children with various disabilities by supplementing or adapting the regular curriculum

## Methods

- IEP
- EA support in a regular class
- Resource Support
- Alternative class placement for part or all of the day
- Additional supports (eg., OT, PT, Speech)

Supports fall on a continuum

The variety of programs offered reflect the mandate of “least restrictive” environment

## IEP: a report describing:

- your child's present level of achievement
- short-term & annual educational goals
- class placement
- specific programs your child will receive
- how the student will be evaluated
- modifications/ accommodations

### *Advocating Hints:*

- (1) you can take someone with you for support*
- (2) take time to assess the pros and cons*
- (3) unless you request specific services such as PT, OT, speech etc, these needs may be overlooked*

## IPRC: the role is to

- determine whether or not your child should be identified as exceptional, and what the exceptionality is
- determine appropriate type of placement
- placement and identification will be reviewed annually

# Effective Programs

- Research shows that academic gains are related to explicit instruction in those academic areas (Fletcher et al 2007)
- Structured, instructional programs that provide opportunities for guided practise & cumulative learning are effective for students with special educational needs (Fletcher et al 2007)
- Direct Instruction has been proven to be effective in assisting students with cognitive impairments to learn (Carnine, 1999; Humphries et al 2005, Lovett et al 2006, Fletcher et al 2007, Iseman and Naglieri 2011, Kerr et al. 2011; Maor et al 2011)
  - Evidence for the effectiveness for:
    - reading
    - math
    - general learning issues
    - Intractable Epilepsy (Humphries et al., 2005; Kerr et al. 2011, Kerr & Riches, In Press)



## Summary:

- Most educators have a poor understanding of the complex academic needs of students with Epilepsy who have associated cognitive difficulties
- How the learning & psychosocial challenges of students are supported & addressed can foster or impede academic achievement & experience
- Knowing the school system and how to advocate can help to obtain supports necessary for school success