

Le ^{petit} Magazine

Spring 2002

Complementary Educational Services Newsletter

Volume 3, Number 2



**Academic and
Vocational Guidance:**
Tools for Success for
Students with Handicaps,
Social Maladjustments or
Learning Difficulties

Éducation
Québec



Academic and vocational guidance: a basic educational need

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The education reform has meant a broader mission for our schools. While imparting knowledge and fostering the social development of our students remain fundamental objectives, increasing prominence is now being given to the need to qualify and prepare students for their future. Indeed, this new mission for our schools shows how important it is that students, as young adults in the making, prepare themselves to become independent, socially adjusted and competent individuals in their personal and working lives. Our students' success, therefore, necessarily includes both academic and career success. For students with physical handicaps, social or emotional maladjustments or learning difficulties, however, the challenge is much greater.

Accordingly our special education policy's basic orientation reads as follows:

To help students with handicaps or social maladjustments or learning disabilities succeed in terms of knowledge, social development and qualifications, by accepting that educational success has different meanings depending on the abilities and needs of different students, and by adopting methods that favour their success and provide recognition for it.¹

¹ Ministère de l'Éducation, *Adapting Our Schools to the Needs of All Students: A New Direction for Success, Policy on Special Education* (Québec: Ministère de l'Éducation, 1999), p. 15.

This orientation stresses the importance of providing special help for students with handicaps, social maladjustments or learning difficulties in order to provide equal opportunities for success in their studies and eventual careers. Schools must adopt the means to promote this success by supporting students in their educational and career paths and by organizing, among other things, academic and vocational information and guidance activities that relate to their abilities and needs. After all, academic and vocational guidance is something every student needs. In this issue of *Le Petit Magazine – Complementary Educational Services Newsletter* we offer our readers a few ideas and suggestions on this important theme.



A practical experience for students in individualized paths for learning

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People often think that students with learning difficulties, behavioural disorders or intellectual handicaps require constant input from their teachers to stimulate them to learn and become responsible adults. So, indeed, they do. However, these students also have aptitudes, gifts and talents we tend to overlook. In a school context that supports creative educational efforts, full recognition of every student's potential is something we must all believe in.

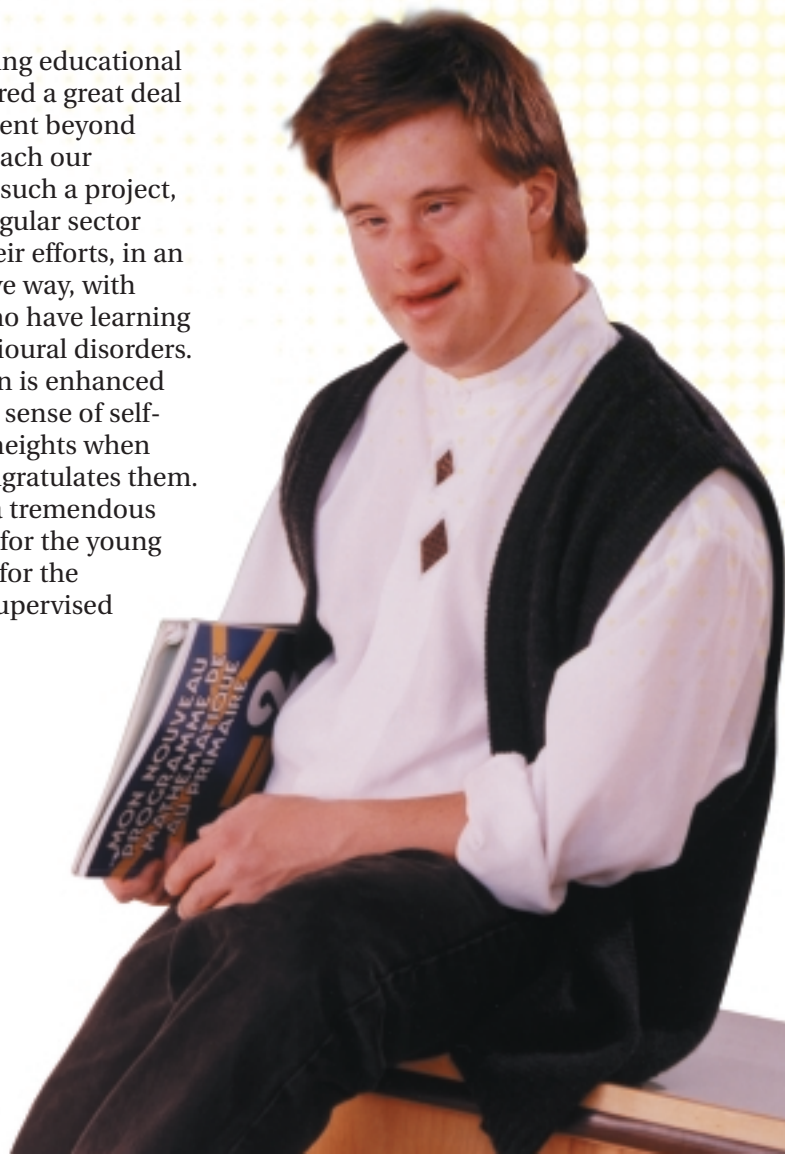
In this spirit, over the last few years, the École secondaire Cavelier-de-LaSalle (Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys) has developed special organizational methods, inspired by a life-and-work-skills education model for young people. Workshop areas and social interaction space were set up to better meet the needs of students with intellectual impairments. The students did job training programs both in the school and in certain workplaces in their community. Despite successes associated with all these projects, one goal remained: to integrate these young people into school life in a tangible way and help them discover their areas of real interest. The best way to achieve this goal was to have them take part in a regular school activity.

A team of teachers and special education technicians managed to integrate 125 students of different educational levels and varying aptitudes into a single project. These students, 30 of whom had intellectual impairments, put on a professional-scale variety show, presenting numbers from *Notre-*

Dame-de-Paris (The Hunchback of Notre-Dame) (1999-2000), *Dance, Sing* (2000-2001) and *Une Foix 2002* (2001-2002). With committed adults on hand, the young people learned to accept their differences and respect and help each other. They prepared lip-sync numbers, did their own choreography, built sets and handled lighting. Audiences at the performances, including reviewers and figures from the arts world as well as the general public, were impressed by the quality of the show, the charisma the young entertainers communicated and the human warmth that bound them together, regardless of intellectual or personal differences.

This highly stimulating educational project, which required a great deal of time and effort, went beyond what we normally teach our students. Indeed, in such a project, students from the regular sector learn to combine their efforts, in an exceptionally positive way, with those of students who have learning disabilities or behavioural disorders. Academic motivation is enhanced and all the students' sense of self-worth reaches new heights when their peer group congratulates them. Emotionally, it was a tremendous experience not only for the young performers but also for the teaching staff who supervised the production and performances.

It is important to underscore the change in attitude among both students and the adults who supported these youngsters throughout their many advances and achievements— youngsters who have never before distinguished themselves. Even though these students did not share the same classes or aptitudes, they were able to exceed the expectations of others, and to measure up successfully to the challenge of "fitting in."



Building a dream

CLAUDETTE CLÉMENT

Guidance counsellor

École secondaire Saint-Henri

No school can carry out its mission successfully unless the students themselves succeed. This means that they must be helped to develop competencies related to their future careers. However, young people in our schools often differ widely in individual predispositions, social environments and life experiences both inside and outside of school. All young people have their dreams, yet not all have the same capacities and the same chances in life.

Our school, which is located in southwest Montréal, is among those targeted on the new school population map. It benefits from the Supporting Montréal Schools Program. Our student body is multiethnic. The school has ordinary classes and classes of students in individualized paths for learning (IPL). And some students do have obvious cognitive, affective, relational or motivational deficits.

An integral part of the educational project adopted by École secondaire Saint-Henri (CSDM) is the concept of a guidance-oriented approach. This is the result of a working partnership based on cooperation between elementary and secondary levels, staff expertise and commitment, and partners in the community.

Our school has sought to develop a process that integrates all educational activities, both inside and outside the classroom, to support each student's personal development.

Objectives

More specifically, these guidance-oriented activities are designed to give an up-close-and-personal significance to each student's presence in our school. Although this method matches our ultimate objectives of appropriate and personally satisfying social and career integration, some young people at any given time will respond more completely than others. In our approach, each educational level is considered a stage of life in which the student is personally, educationally and vocationally enriched, and in which we seek to turn their current strengths into hopeful prospects for the future.

Options

School staff has opted to:

- begin the exploratory process earlier (i.e. in elementary school)
- facilitate academic transitions (Elementary 6, Secondary III and V, Canadian Parents for French, Life Skills and Work Skills Education)
- personalize the process (students should feel they are getting personal attention)
- create multiple opportunities for guidance
- allow portfolio-based assessment

Content

Guidance objectives were established for each cycle, with suggested activities for each educational level:

- self-knowledge (self-evaluation, etc.)
- exploration (occupations vs. academic subjects, etc.)
- understanding training environments (on-the-job training, role playing, etc.)
- understanding work environments (buddy system, on-site visits, etc.)
- review exercises (assessment, PEP or ILP, portfolio, etc.)

The guidance process allows a time for review. Each year, the students are encouraged to self-evaluate their achievements. The process also covers times for intensive review (end-of-cycle, change-of-sector, etc.). Special occasions (colloquiums, birthdays, etc.) are also opportunities to highlight each student's strengths and achievements, and give them an incentive to reach the next stage.

Teaching approach

Our staff favours a teaching approach that develops different skills (intellectual and methodological) and uses a variety of learning strategies (working individually, in groups, using computers, etc.).

The point of this method is that a guidance-oriented approach should be everyone's responsibility. In this spirit, we have developed tools for elementary and secondary levels (regular and individualized paths for learning), using the staff's combined expertise and partnerships such as the ones existing between the Ministère de l'Éducation and the Commission scolaire de Montréal.

Traditional tools such as group animation and activity guides are appropriate, as cycles and needs allow. For the same reasons, communications and ICT-based techniques (school intranet, interactive software) are sometimes more relevant.

The diversity and adaptation of methods and curriculum are intended to connect with students in their various ways of grasping everyday reality, and with the school personnel in their various approaches.

Everyone has a dream; this must always be considered. Research, exploration and information let students turn their dreams into realities—or if need be, change them. The compromises that are often necessary in guidance situations can be accepted and can spur students to action, given the right support, nurturing and ongoing help.

If you would like more information about our school's guidance-oriented approach, you can reach me at:

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Academic and vocational guidance for teenage mothers at École secondaire Rosalie-Jetté

GUY TESSIER

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École secondaire Rosalie-Jetté*

About our school

Rosalie-Jetté is a special secondary school for pregnant teenagers and young mothers 12 to 18 years of age. The school enrolls about 140 students a year from Montréal and surrounding areas. It offers a general curriculum from pre-secondary to Secondary V, in which learning is organized by modules, through individualized instruction and ongoing certification.

About our students

Most of the students at our school come from socially or economically disadvantaged environments and single-parent families. Students come from many different ethnic backgrounds. On arrival, the majority have a "dropout" profile, revealing academic deficits substantial enough to keep them from completing their secondary-level studies by age 18. Their profiles also include a high rate of absenteeism, school absences unrelated to pregnancy (for example, due to personal or family problems), individualized learning and poor academic motivation. In terms of their social needs, many cannot expect adequate family support. A fair number have had troubled family relationships, including conflicts with parents and family breakdown. Some have been placed in youth shelters. Others come from dysfunctional families (with alcoholism, drug use, and abuse in all its forms). In terms of personal development, our students have few tools or resources for facing their situation alone. They have low self-esteem and they have grown little in the way of self-affirmation and personal development.



Our guidance department

In keeping with our school's educational project, our guidance department sets up activities to encourage these young women's social, community, cultural and occupational skills. Bearing in mind the students' complex individual/environment dynamic and numerous individual variables of a cognitive or affective nature, the counsellor works out a set of activities, using a guidance-oriented approach, and writes these on a chalkboard. These activities develop a sense of responsibility, commitment and autonomy. They are also meant to build intrinsic motivation and give meaning to the school experience. For teen mothers, guidance begins in their quest for identity—because their identities are buffeted by major changes. These young women are preoccupied with their new reality as teenagers, students, mothers and family providers. They need a special approach that is adapted to their situation. This is why our school team developed two new programs: career exploration workshops and a career training course.

Career exploration workshops

Our career exploration workshops enable the student to get a clearer idea about herself and various occupations. She will learn about job market demands. She will optimize her employment potential by developing the competencies today's employers are looking for. And she will "tool up" to look for a job. Although these training activities respect the student's individual learning needs, they do require a degree of commitment and involvement that is increasingly demanding. Support and follow-up are provided by a teacher and the guidance counsellor. The roundtable allows students to exchange ideas, express and clarify their needs and experiment with new ways of living. Workshops end with participants each doing two job-shadowing sessions in relatively unskilled occupations that interest them.

Career training course

This course was developed by the school team to help the students form a clear and coherent identity. It is a personal and vocational development program comprising four parts: seeking direction—intrinsic motivation; life, attitudes and the "real me"; the culture of careers, business, the job market and helping institutions; and the development of competencies. The approaches are dynamic and the learning methods are highly varied and include "reality theory" exercises, roundtables, a personal development group, workshops, lectures and visits. The girls develop competencies and become aware of the variables inherent in their guidance process.

Conclusion

Our school seeks to offer a sound guidance process for teen mothers. Currently, however, limited human and physical resources affect the quality of the services we offer. Despite this, our school's number-one challenge is to work out a personalized guidance program for each student that is stimulating, coherent, realistic and adapted to her personal dynamics. Our second challenge is to establish a real guidance culture that involves the entire school staff as well as the student's friends and family, and community partners. By combining the strengths of the network of caregivers supporting these students in their personal lives and career planning, we can make it easier for them to find a place in our society.

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ACSQ/MEQ Province-wide study days:

workshop on academic and vocational guidance for students with handicaps, social maladjustments or learning difficulties

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In October 2001, two province-wide study days were held. Their theme was "Une vision commune... source de réussite" ("A shared vision... the wellspring of success"). These study days were organized by the Association des cadres scolaires du Québec (ACSQ), the provincial association of school board executives, in cooperation with the Direction de l'adaptation scolaire et des services complémentaires (DASSC), the special education and complementary services branch of the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec (MEQ). They dealt with various matters of interest in the field of special education and complementary services. School board executives from across Québec were invited to take part, along with MEQ special education and complementary services coordinators.

One of the workshops dealt with academic and vocational guidance and information for students with handicaps, social maladjustments or learning difficulties. It was led by Brigitte Sirois, regional special education resource person, and Yvan D'Amours, complementary services coordinator at the Ministère de l'Éducation.

The following table shows the main issues raised by workshop participants:

In academic and vocational guidance, students with handicaps, social maladjustments or learning difficulties have particular needs. These include the need:

- to feel valued
- to have their aptitudes and strengths recognized
- to be in close contact with adults who believe in them
- to be motivated to give their studies meaning
- to explore career choices
- to have dreams
- to have adults around who will talk with them and advise them
- to be in contact with resource people who really know the job market

Obstacles these students will likely encounter:

- poor self-esteem
- difficult transitions from elementary to secondary school, where student-teacher interaction is more impersonal
- isolation in secondary school
- limited exit profile
- no success plan
- demands of work environments
- employers' prejudice
- pessimism among the adults close to them
- the values conveyed by their parents
- lack of trust on the part of their teachers

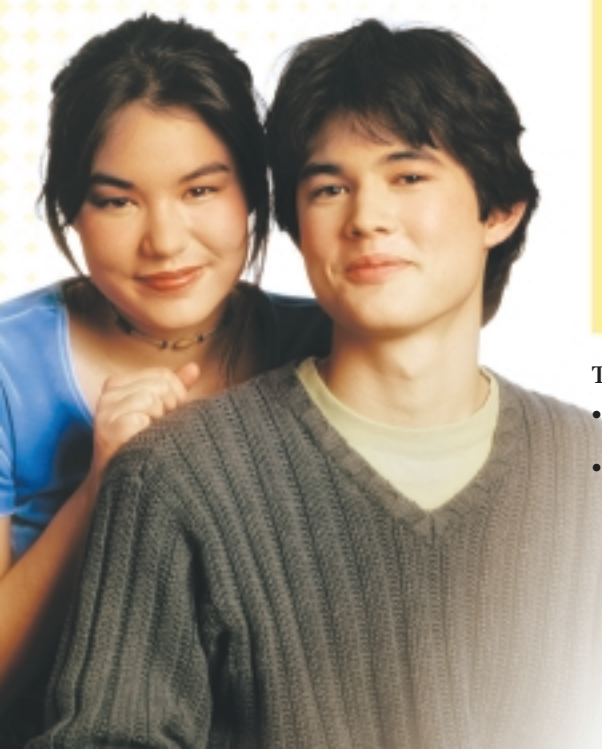
Ways they can be helped:

- Establish an action plan.
- Introduce a guidance-oriented approach in which the school team takes action earlier.
- Make the most of the student's cross-curricular competencies in order to build their confidence.
- Adopt a prevention approach.
- Implement the new pedagogical approaches available at the secondary level (project-based learning, co-operative learning, etc.).
- Recognize the individualized education plan and success plan as effective tools for success.
- Allow students access to activities, projects, special options (sports, arts, music, etc.).
- Make the school more open to the community.
- Apply scientific knowledge, e.g. the "multiple intelligences" model.
- Recognize the young person's full range of competencies.
- Provide more tools for teachers.

The above table makes clear two pertinent facts:

- Potential solutions outnumber obstacles.
- Regarding academic and vocational guidance, most of the obstacles that students with handicaps, social maladjustments or learning difficulties encounter and their ways of overcoming them are similar to what we observe in the overall student population.

All told, in terms of academic and vocational guidance, there is good reason to believe that students with handicaps, social maladjustments or learning disabilities differ little from other students. This factor must be kept in mind; but above all we must never forget that despite their disabilities these students all have needs and dreams—and a certain insecurity about their future.



What science tells us: a short review of the literature on academic and vocational information and guidance for students with handicaps, social maladjustments or learning difficulties

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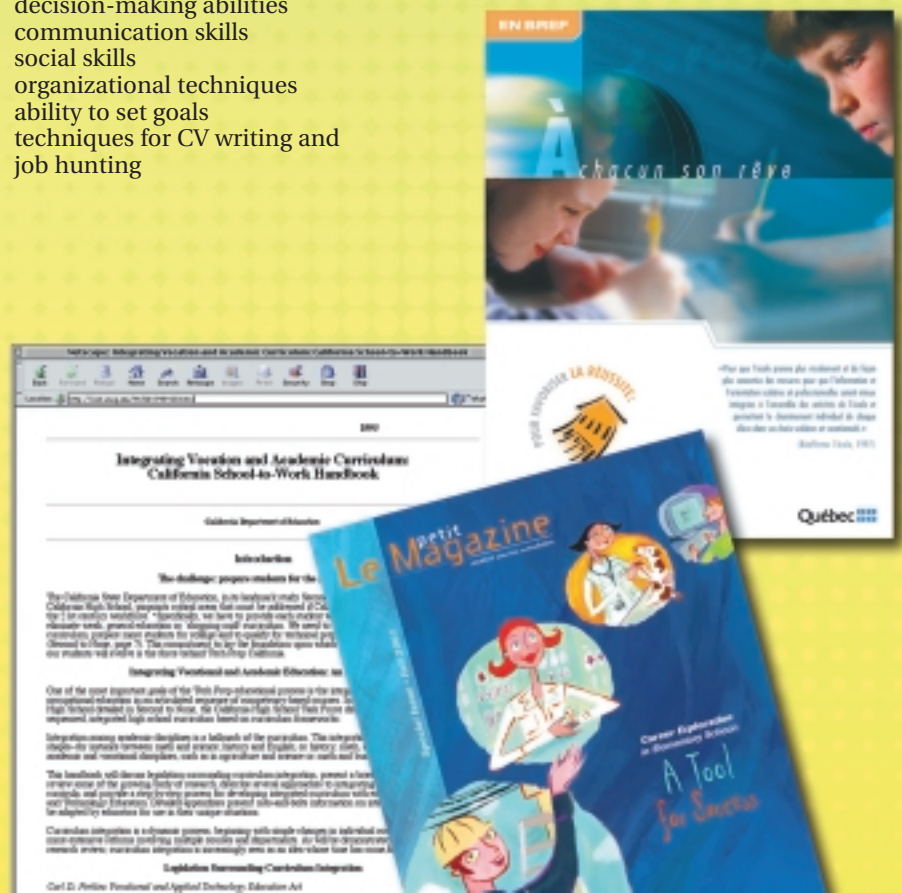
For further details on these findings drawn from the scientific literature concerning care and programs for these students, readers are invited to consult the publications listed in the bibliography. These works can be easily accessed on the Web.

Obstacles encountered by students with special needs

- People frequently attempt to steer these youngsters toward forms of education or careers traditionally reserved for people with disabilities—for example, computing. Instead, we should be taking an approach similar to the one taken to promote women's entry into traditionally masculine trades or occupations.
- All too often, it is taken for granted that these students have limited abilities. Sometimes too much emphasis is placed on the numerous problems associated with their career choices, and not enough emphasis on their possibilities.
- Sometimes too much is done to make things easy for them; this keeps them from experimenting with unfamiliar situations and developing their autonomy and decision-making abilities.
- Many students with special needs have never had a part-time job (such as babysitting or delivering newspapers) during their school years. By the same token, many never join or are asked to take part in sports, cultural, artistic or social events or other extracurricular activities. Given their limited social contacts, they tend to experiment less with roles than other youngsters, and find themselves given fewer responsibilities.
- The chief obstacle students with special needs face in entering various occupations may be not their disability itself but rather the prejudices of employers, teachers and even some guidance counsellors regarding their potential.

Ways to help these students

- Students with special needs require positive role models with whom they can identify. Let them know about young working people who have succeeded despite their handicaps or disabilities.
- Guidance and support programs should be based on building self-confidence. Without it, making career choices is simply not possible. Students with special needs must be helped to realize that they are able to work.
- Most of these students have exactly the same academic and vocational guidance and information needs as 90 per cent of other youngsters. For the 10 per cent of their needs that really are special, however, guidance is crucially important for their identities, career paths and successful entry into the job market.
- Self-esteem should be a goal in all guidance activities and projects, so that these young people have a chance to take real pride in their own success.
- Students with severe handicaps should receive special help in developing:
 - decision-making abilities
 - communication skills
 - social skills
 - organizational techniques
 - ability to set goals
 - techniques for CV writing and job hunting
- Students with special needs have to develop punctuality, the ability to complete a task, decision-making, planning and organizing tasks, and other skills they will need both socially and on the job. They must also learn how to present themselves to an employer and sell their skills—and if need be, assert their rights.
- Guidance personnel must realize that students with special needs are often not as ready as their peers are to commit themselves to a career path or planning process. Some students with reading disabilities, for instance, do not easily absorb information in writing or print, or instructions on computer screens (e.g. on Web sites) in order to perform tasks.
- They may be interested in different occupational fields from those other students might choose. Guidance counsellors should support them in exploring careers that match their areas of real interest.



What science tells us... (cont.)

- Students with special skills benefit especially from taking part in student life activities of their choice. This lets them fit in more easily with regular students, assume responsibilities, learn to negotiate with others, and so on.
- Guidance counsellors should help these students choose careers that will use their strengths yet make few demands in the areas where they have weaknesses.
- Students with special needs must also learn to control their anger, listen to others, negotiate and make compromises, and work as part of a team. These are essential skills in modern work environments.
- They will benefit from voluntarily setting and achieving certain goals.

Educators should show them clearly what a specific task involves and how to complete it. These students must gain a firm grasp of the suggested learning activity, and the task itself should allow for interaction.

- Partnership between teachers, special educators and guidance professionals is essential for identifying these students' special needs and working with them in a cohesive, synergistic manner throughout their schooling.
- The use of portfolios can make it easier to follow up students with special needs from one school year (or school) to the next. This can help the teacher assist students who may already be thinking about their situation to continue their personal development and pursue their career paths.

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NEW FROM THE MEQ

MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION DU QUÉBEC.
Making Dreams Come True - Achieving Success Through the Guidance-Oriented Approach (2002).

This document for education providers describes how a guidance-oriented approach can promote students' personal success when combined with the learning exercises provided under the complementary services educational program as described in the basic school regulation.

MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION DU QUÉBEC.
In Brief - Making Dreams Come True (2002).

A two-page flyer for educators, outlining the above-mentioned document.

MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION DU QUÉBEC.
Making Dreams Come True - The Guidance-Oriented Approach (Guide for Parents) (2002).

This brochure for parents explains the guidance-oriented approach and suggests activities for helping their child in the academic and vocational guidance process.

MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION DU QUÉBEC.
"Career Exploration in Elementary School: A Tool for Success." Special issue of *Petit Magazine des services complémentaires* (English version), Fall 2001.

Intended primarily for elementary school administrators and teachers, this publication describes how to introduce a guidance-oriented approach at the elementary school level. Suggested career exploration activities include learning situations that aid the growth of subject-specific and cross-curricular competencies as provided in the Québec Education Program.

TO OBTAIN COPIES

MEQ publications listed above were distributed to all schools and school boards in Québec. Printed copies are still available while stocks last. To obtain copies, please e-mail your request to: <annie.tardif@meq.gouv.qc.ca>

These publications are also available online at:
<<http://www.meq.gouv.qc.ca/dassc/>>

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This issue of **Le Petit Magazine – Complementary Educational Services Newsletter** is published by:

Direction de l'adaptation scolaire
et des services complémentaires
Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec
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Translation:

Services à la communauté anglophone
Direction de la production en langue
anglaise

Intended for:

Administrative, professional and technical staff working in complementary educational services in school boards and schools, principals of elementary and secondary schools and members of the teaching staff.

Graphic design

Caron, Paré associés

ISSN 1481-6555-A (printed version)

ISSN 1496-0540-A (on-line version)

19-7034-A

