

**Suggested Strategies to Assist Students, Parents
and Teachers at College Heights**

Dear Mr. Miller and Mr. Kellum:

Thank you very much for requesting our ideas that are geared toward changes in how instruction is put forward to the students at College Heights.

This document lays out the concerns that the Parent Council has put together over this past year not only in regards to how instructional information is given but to a number of other areas as well. Over the past year we have spoken with many people and have been able to observe the various procedures at the school and we do recognize that the issues are complex. Our suggestions focus solely toward the improvement of student success in as many areas as possible. Our intent, like yours is only to help the students. Please feel free to respond to us regarding any of these suggestions.

Thank you,

Ruth Gilmour (on behalf of the Parent Council)
Secretary

Suggestions about Index Pages and Worksheets

I really want to stipulate that we have used math as an example. These strategies will be beneficial in all classes. We are not specifically targeting the math program.

Index Pages

- As shown in the attached sample page, assignments need to be clearly laid out with a simple numbering system, the name of the page or assignment and a note showing whether this assignment will be marked.

Worksheets

- The pages following the index need to have both the corresponding number of the assignment and the description clearly appear on them. While this seems to be an obvious procedure, unfortunately many programs are not following it.
- Adequate space needs to be left on the pages for students to actually have enough room to work out their calculations or complete their work. Handouts in math create a real concern because they almost never leave room for the students to properly do the steps to complete the question. While it might seem obvious for them to get another sheet of paper and transfer the question over, the majority of them don't even think about this strategy, instead they try to fit it all in whatever space is allotted them.
- Very importantly, math questions need to show a progression of the degree of difficulty. Because LD students learn best through repetition, they require that opportunity to repeat the same type of problem before moving onto the next level of difficulty.
- Clearly defined areas showing examples of problems (because there are no textbooks).

It is for these reasons that photocopied handouts do not provide the best instruction for LD students. In lieu as a preferred workbooks, the worksheets need to be put together in a very methodical manner.

While we recognized that setting up this system is a lot of work, once done it would just require updating on a yearly basis. The goal is to see an improvement in student success so hopefully it will all be worth it.

Sample of Index Page (using Math)

Page	Description	Comments
1	Adding Mixed Number Practice	
2	Subtracting Mixed Number Practice	
3	Multiplying Mixed Numbers	
4	Similar Triangle Questions	To be marked
5	Reduction of Fractions	To be marked
6	Exercise 4.2	
7	Fraction Review	To be marked
8	Assignment on Simplifying Expressions	
9	Polynomials and Rational Expressions	
10	Slope of a Line	To be marked
11	Multiplying Binomials	
12	Test of Solving Equations	To be marked
13	Slope of a Line Segment	
14	Graphing Using the Slope (m) & (y) intercept	
15	Applying Similar Triangles - Questions	To be marked

***Any assignments that are going to be marked should be clearly identified as such.**

***Pages or assignments need to be numbered in an easily understood pattern.**

***These numbers need to be clearly visible on the top of the assignment page to make it possible for students to keep their books easily organized.**

Suggested Strategies to Assist Students, Parents and Teachers at College Heights

There are a number of specific problems that are common to students with various learning difficulties. The primary deficit that almost all students share is found in the area of organizational skills. This brings us to what we are convinced are the problems that so many students at College Heights struggle with and if corrected we believe can create a major shift in achievement for the students. They are:

Lack of textbooks / Poor quality notes and notebooks of students.

- No textbooks are given to the students to take home and there are often not enough textbooks for classroom use. This provides no back-up resources for students and/or parents who are trying to assist their kids with homework
- All worksheets and notes are in loose-leaf format. This is in direct conflict with the number one problem identified students have and that is poor organizational abilities and keeping good notes is very often impossible.
- Students who are not able to keep an organized binder due to poor organizational skills, learning issues, behaviour issues or problems at home, may find themselves without a binder or notebook within a month or two of the semester starting. Without a notebook and no textbook, how can that student be expected to carry on? We need a better mechanism.
- New legislation demands that students stay in school until the age of 18 therefore they must have the proper tools for learning and to keep these students engaged in learning or they will be disruptive to other students who are trying to learn.
- College Heights has at least 60% of its students identified with various disabilities and approximately 80 students with behavioral disabilities so proper written instruction is even more crucial to this school than other schools.

One improvement strategy: follow the lead of a teacher who keeps the students notes in folders and contained in the classroom and it seems to be a very successful strategy (with no extra costs involved to school or parents). The work must still be laid out in a format that is user-friendly to students with disabilities.

What we would like to see as an ideal long-term solution: The elimination of loose-leaf worksheets as substitute of textbook and the introduction of in-house workbooks. This is especially necessary in subjects such as math and some tech courses. When students with learning disabilities are given a page full of math questions photocopied from a book there is not enough space to answer the question properly. Also there needs to be more instructional information (samples of math questions) for students and parents to reference. These are often missing if there is no textbook.

These in-house workbooks would be considered 'custom designed' to correspond with the College Heights math, science, tech etc program. If need be, there could be 2, 3 or 4 workbooks for one subject per semester. After a student completes one, he/she can hand it in and then move onto the next. We recognize that this is not possible right now due to financial considerations. One solution would be for College Heights students to set up their own print room.

Better Layout of Structure for Program Basics: Index Pages & Layout for Semester

No matter what educational facility a student attends whether it be high school, College or University a proper course outline showing expectations and timelines allows for better communication, reduces future problems and is an absolute necessity. In addition to this, Special Needs students function best when they see repetition. Sadly instructions for many assignments that need to be marked are given verbally which leads to disastrous but predictable results. This is a huge frustration to parents.

Suggested improvement strategy: the implementation of a standardized index format for all courses so students can recognize the pattern and be more aware of what is expected of them. List all assignments that will be due to be marked and whenever possible designation of homework assignments that are going to be marked as well. ***(See attached example)***

This way students and parents can easily stay on top of what work needs to be handed in and what assignments will be expected for that semester. These students need to recognize the pattern of how index sheets are laid-out not only to assist them in their own school years but as a life skill as well.

The goals behind these first two improvement strategies are to:

- assist students in organizing their work and help them with better learning
- assist parents and tutors when working with students in their assignments and homework
- assist teachers by providing uniform standard procedures

The Parent Council sees addressing these issues as a win for everyone. The students will have better learning tools and hopefully more will be engaged in school, parents will be given more resources to assist their kids and teachers will have less work and stress in trying to assist so many students in keeping up their books, constant photocopying and less time spent dealing with handouts everyday.

Bypassing of Parents as a support to their Child's Education

The Parent Council recognizes that parents must play a part in their child's education especially if their child has Special Needs. As mentioned the present system often does not give the parents enough information to assist their children. It is the Council's belief that many parents want to help their children and those parents and students must be called upon to be partners with the school. We acknowledge that not all parents will 'heed the call' but in the present system there sadly seems to be a wide spread belief by the staff that most parents do not want to be involved. An expectation of accountability is necessary. We believe that College Heights must put an expectation on parents when visiting the feeder schools, at open houses and reminders at parent/teacher interviews that their participation in helping their sons or daughters is a very necessary part of participating at College Heights. An interesting fact from the Fraser Institute Report was that the parents of College Heights ranked 4th highest out of the 11 high schools in Upper Grand for years of education. Let's all expect more.

Professional Development in the field of Special Education

The council is concerned that many teachers have never had professional development in the field of learning disabilities and other disabilities. One of the major 'selling' points that was a determining factor for many parents in sending their children to College Heights was the reassurance from the College Heights staff and from the various feeder schools that the staff and school had the qualifications to deal with the many aspects of special education.

The Parent Council is in overwhelming agreement that Special Education training is absolutely necessary to teaching students with varying degrees of learning disabilities and other challenges. We do understand that some very special individuals who have a natural gift in teaching challenged students are hired without this type of training. However common sense would dictate that these same individuals would also benefit and increase their skills by learning how to better serve their students disabilities.

We would like to see the Upper Grand District School Board consider making this course available to those currently teaching at College Heights perhaps by bringing the course into the school.

We would like to see a series of lectures and speakers throughout the year discussing some of the many issues that, while not unique to College Heights are certainly more prevalent than that of other schools. These include everything from learning issues and strategies to mental health issues such as fetal alcohol syndrome, anxiety, bipolar disorder, ADHD, depression, schizophrenia, social anxiety disorder and autism. Perhaps a partnership with the Homewood Health Centre or the

Community Access Centre could assist in accomplishing some of this. The Parent Council is going to do everything we can to assist in this.

Literacy

THE PARENT COUNCIL BELIEVES THAT ABSOLUTELY NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE STUDENTS OF COLLEGE HEIGHTS LEARNING LITERACY SKILLS THAT WILL SERVE THEM WELL THROUGHOUT THEIR ENTIRE LIFE

It is the opinion of the Parent Council that passing the Grade 10-literacy test is a good indicator that students demonstrate the necessary skills needed to carry them through high school and beyond. After reviewing samples of the literacy test, the Parent Council believes that the skills laid out by this government test are what we should be striving to have as many students as possible achieve. The Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario stand is that any LD student with the proper accommodations in place should be able to pass the Grade 10 Literacy test. While the council understands that there are varying degrees of special needs at College Heights, we do think that improvement is a reasonable expectation even in small degrees.

Suggested Improvement Strategy:

- Start teaching to the skills required to pass the Grade 10 literacy test at the beginning of Grade 9.
- Although it is appreciated that a class is available for students in Grade 12 to satisfy the requirements of the literacy test, the Parent Council believes that if more time and effort were put in at the Grade 9 and 10 level, many students would acquire the necessary skills earlier which of course would also benefit them in all their other courses and hopefully they would have a strong foundation to continue building their skills. While a course will still be necessary it would be hoped that many less students would have to participate.
- Read everyday 20 minutes similarly to Centennial. This is not only to work toward developing better reading skills but to also develop critical thinking skills as well.
- Since it is not unusual for students to come into College Heights from a feeder school reading at a Grade 5 level or less, we would like to see more Literacy Labs available in Grade 9 and 10. As well, feeder schools should be encouraged to test the reading skills of their identified students in Grade 6 and start working to improve their skills before these students enter high school.

Other Areas of Concern

1. Copying information from board.

Suggested Improvement Strategy:

Stop doing this. It is a waste of valuable time that could be better spent teaching. Students with LD do not copy from the board in the same way that students who are not LD do. LD students cannot process the information in the same way therefore they literally copy one word at a time without comprehension of what they are copying. A few sentences is reasonable but anything more is just frustrating to the student.