

**Webinar Transcript: Establishing and Maintaining the Parent-Home Connection to Best Support our Students Living with Learning Disabilities**  
**Anne Brown, Resource Consultant at Sagonaska Demonstration School**

**[SLIDE – WEBINAR: Establishing and Maintaining the Parent-Home Connection to Best Support our Students Living with Learning Disabilities]**

[Text on slide: For technical assistance, please call Mercia at 416-929-4311 ext. 31

Presented by:

Anne Brown, Resource Services, Sagonaska School

Image of LD@home logo

[www.LDatHome.ca](http://www.LDatHome.ca)

Image of twitter logo

@LDhome1 Tweet us LIVE!]

**Computer-generated voice:** All attendees are in listen-only mode.

**Moderator:** Good evening everyone and welcome to LD@home's first ever webinar. My name is Lawrence Barns and I'm the CEO and President of the LDAO and it's my pleasure to welcome you this evening to our first ever LD@home webinar. Just some housekeeping initially – if you're having any technical issues, you will see on the slide there's a number there you can call and our staff will be happy to assist you. Secondly, you'll also see in the bottom corner of the slide, if you are on twitter and want to tweet as we go through tonight, we're @LDhome1 and the hashtag LDwebinar will be live and active so there is an opportunity to connect with other people in the community there as well.

**[SLIDE – Ontario Trillium Foundation]**

[Text on slide: Ontario Trillium Foundation

Image of Ontario Trillium Foundation logo

Fondation Trillium de l'Ontario

An agency of the Government of Ontario.

Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario.

Funding for the production of this webinar was provided by the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

Please note that the views expressed in this webinar are the views of the presenters and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ontario Trillium Foundation or the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario.]

**Moderator:** Funding for the production of this webinar this evening was provided by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, and we are very grateful for their support, but please note the views expressed in this webinar are the views of the presenter and do not necessarily reflect those of OTF or the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario.

**[SLIDE – What We Will be Sending You]**

[Text on slide: 1. Power Point Slides

2. PDF with Links to Webinar Resources

3. Webinar Evaluation Survey

4. Link to Access the Webinar Recording]

**Moderator:** After the webinar, we'll be sending out the presentation slides, a PDF that contains links to all of the resources you'll see presented in the webinar, as well as the link to a survey so that you can provide us with your feedback on the event. In approximately three weeks, a fully accessible version of the webinar recording will be available on the website and we will send that link out to you when it's available as well, and you're obviously welcome to share that with family or friends, other parents, and spread the word about this resource.

**[SLIDE - WEBINAR: Establishing and Maintaining the Parent-Home Connection to Best Support our Students Living with LDs]**

[Text on slide: Image of LD@home logo

[www.LDatHome.ca](http://www.LDatHome.ca)

Image of twitter logo @LDhome1]

**Moderator:** The LD@home team is very pleased to welcome our guest speaker, Anne Brown, whose presentation tonight, you can see the title there in front of you on the slide. For your information, all webinar participants, with the exception of the presenters, have now been muted for the remainder of the presentation. Once Anne is finished her presentation, we're actually going to open up for questions and answers. Over the course of the presentation, if you would like to ask any of our team a question, you can enter that in the box at the bottom of the control panel and choose to send it to the staff from the dropdown menu underneath. We'll also be tweeting, as we already said; our handle is @LDhome1, and there is the hashtag LDwebinar as well.

**[SLIDE – WELCOME]**

[Text on slide: Image of Anne Brown

Anne Brown

Resource Services

Sagonaska School]

**Moderator:** This takes care of our housekeeping, so let's get started. It's now my pleasure to introduce our speaker, Anne Brown. Anne has been a teacher since 2001 with a junior-intermediate background. She has her Reading, Special Education, Health and Physical Education Specialists, and has had experience as a classroom teacher, literacy partner, in-school resource teacher, as well as an instructional facilitator for York University's Reading Special AQ Course. Anne is currently in her fifth year at Sagonaska Demonstration School in the role of Resource Consultant. She is seconded from the Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board and completed her undergraduate degree at Western, majoring in English and Film and completed her education degree at Brock University. As a special education teacher working with students with severe learning disabilities, Anne believes in the need for targeted interventions based on the student's individual profile and helping students to understand themselves as learners so they can better advocate for themselves and demonstrate their knowledge using the areas of their strength.

It's my absolute pleasure to welcome Anne to the cyberfloor tonight and Anne, I'm going to hand the reins to you.

**Anne:** Great, thank you Lawrence.

**[SLIDE – Establishing and Maintaining the Parent-Home Connection to Best Support Our Students Living with Learning Disabilities]**

*[Text on slide: Anne Brown, Resource Consultant at Sagonaska Demonstration School]*

**Anne:** One moment here. Thank you Lawrence for that introduction, and thank you to the LD@home team for asking me to present this evening. I'm very excited to spend some time with everyone, so thank you again as well to all the participants for coming out on this beautiful evening. I hope I'm able to share some information with all of you tonight that will help to support you, your child and your school team.

**[SLIDE – Sagonaska]**

*[Text on slide:*

- One of four Demonstration Schools mandated to work with students with severe learning disabilities in the area of reading
- Residential setting
- Direct instruction in decoding skills
- 40 students, Grades 5 to 11
- One year program
- Goals: Reading, Technology Use, Self-Advocacy

*Image of Sagonaska Demonstration School]*

**Anne:** So for those of you who aren't familiar with Sagonaska and the other Provincial Schools, I thought I would start by briefly explaining what a Demonstration School is and share a little about my role as Resource Consultant.

Sagonaska is located in Belleville, Ontario and is one of four demonstration schools in the province that are mandated to work with students with severe learning disabilities in the area of reading. Our students are often described as the hardest to serve in the area of reading in the province. By the time they come to us, our students have received interventions and remediations in their home schools and home boards, but for whatever reason, they are not seeing the gains that they would have hoped to have seen in the traditional classroom setting. So, it's determined through a lengthy application process and interview process that these students would be better met in our residential program.

So, yes, that means our students come and live with us. They arrive every Sunday evening and return home every Friday night. When we say they're in need of a residential program, what that really means is they're in need of a more intensive comprehensive program that we're able to offer here because of the team of experts and programs available to our students.

They receive about 200 minutes of literacy instruction a day between the school and residence, and explicit instruction in social skills, executive functioning skills, advocacy skills and technology skills. Again, that's through both the res and the school programming.

The direct instruction program that we use at school to address these incredible deficits is called the Empower program, and it was developed at SickKids. It's basically a phonological strategy training program that takes our kids back to the very basics of reading: learning their letter sounds again, learning how to blend sounds, that kind of thing.

We have a maximum of 40 students, and our populations range from grade five to eleven, however they are reading at around a kindergarten to a grade three level when they come to us. We keep our students for one year before transitioning them back to their regular schools and we can usually see a gain of anywhere from between two to five grade levels in one year, depending where the student is when they start.

So, the goals of Sagonaska are, there are three of them. Most importantly, there's reading. We focus also on teaching kids how to use their technology to demonstrate their learning, and teaching them how to advocate for themselves. They're able to do this well because we teach them about their learning disability during their time with us and they understand what their strengths are and how they can best show what they know.

So, what does my role as a Resource Consultant look like at Sagonaska? I have a few different responsibilities. I work as a liaison between home and school. I get to travel around the province to meet with school teams and families that are interested in an application. I share information about the school, our program's criteria and admission process with all parties. I work with the school team and family on an application and act as the key contact to answer any questions and offer support throughout the application process. I am also available, however, through the consultation process, to share strategies and tools that can be put in place for any student with a learning disability in their home school. That goes for students who are awaiting an application and also for families that are not interested in applying.

#### **[SLIDE – Objectives]**

*[Text on slide:*

- Discuss the benefits of parental involvement in education
- Working together with the school after initial diagnosis
- Tips for maintaining a positive relationship with the school/teacher
- Conflict resolution tips
- Resources available for further support

Image of three arrows surrounding the word Connect; blue arrow with text Parent, red arrow with text Teacher, green arrow with text Student]

**Anne:** So back to our presentation. Over the next 30 minutes or so, I hope to accomplish the following: I'll begin by describing some of the benefits of parental involvement in education, not just for students with special needs, but for all learners. Next I'll go over what happens after the initial diagnosis, what you can expect from the school and how you can be involved. Then we'll talk about some tips for maintaining a positive relationship with the school and teacher, and some effective communication tips. I'm going to try to use examples from my own experience to back this up. Conflicts are inevitable in some situations, especially when everyone is so emotionally invested, so I will share a few tips and

resources to assist you in the case that a conflict or misunderstanding does arise. And finally, I'll finish with my contact information and provide some online links for resources that can help you throughout your child's education, although I know that Amy from LD@home has worked on a PDF file that will be available for you that has these online links as well.

### **[SLIDE - Parents as Partners]**

*[Text on slide: "Parents play a vital role in education. When parents are engaged and involved, everyone - students, parents and families, teachers, schools and communities - benefits, and our schools become increasingly rich and positive places to teach, learn, and grow."*

Parents in Partnerships: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools.

Image of Parents in Partnership document]

**Anne:** So let's get started. I'll give you a second to read over this slide because we know that the best outcomes are possible when teachers and parents work together as a team to combine their respective expertise and knowledge.

The document on the right was released in 2010 and it's called Parent Engagement: Policy for Ontario Schools. This policy formally recognizes and supports the vision of our schools as places of partnership and respect, where every parent feels included. I wanted to share this document because it's important for you to know that your role in the school is valued and appreciated by the school community.

### **[SLIDE - What Does Parent Involvement Look Like?]**

*[Text on slide:*

- Volunteering in the classroom
- School Council
- Helping out at breakfast club
- Supervising on school trips, athletic events or Fun Fairs
- Attending parent-teacher conferences or Meet the Teacher nights
- Asking your child about his or her day
- Checking out the school website or classroom blog
- JUST GET INVOLVED!]

**Anne:** So what does parent involvement look like? Parent engagement and involvement can vary depending on a number of factors, but there are many ways a parent can make a difference in their child's success at school. Everyone's lives are very hectic, with different commitments and responsibilities, so parent involvement doesn't necessarily mean you have to be in the classroom volunteering every day, although it is definitely appreciated, coming from a teacher's perspective. It could be something else, something like serving on the school council, once a month even, or volunteering at the breakfast club. It may include going on school trips or helping out at events at the school. It could also mean committing to attending parent-teacher conferences or meet the teacher nights, or just simply setting time aside each evening to ask your child about his or her day; you could look at their homework together or even make time to check out the classroom blog or website. As long as you are involved, your child will see that you value their education and they will benefit because of it.

## [SLIDE - Benefits of Parental Involvement in Education]

[Text on slide:

- Fewer behaviour problems
- Better academic performances
- Reduced absenteeism
- More likely to complete high school
- Increased confidence among parents in their children's schooling
- Image of two children holding a flag that says We need you!]

**Anne:** The benefits of your involvement in your child's education are backed up by research. Studies clearly indicate that good schools become better schools when they are strongly connected with parents as part of the learning community. Additionally, research also tells us that children also do better in school when families are involved. This is especially true when the child has special needs.

Some of the positive results of a genuine partnership between parents and schools include: positive student behaviour, improved student achievement, and reduced absenteeism. From my experience, these three benefits are huge for students with learning disabilities.

We know that students that are diagnosed with a learning disability have average to above average intelligence. They are very capable students whose brains are wired differently and they often have difficulty sharing their learning the way the teacher is expecting them to. This leads to frustration and poor self-esteem after trying and trying for so long and not seeing the academic gains that they would have hoped for based on the effort they have put in. When students don't feel successful in school, this frustration can lead to negative behaviours, including work avoidance and reduced attendance. I'm not saying that these issues won't exist if parents are involved, but there is a greater chance that these issues will be less of a problem.

Another benefit is that our students are more likely to complete high school, which we know that intellectually, our students are more than capable of, but unfortunately find themselves with a higher dropout rate than their non-learning disabled peers, due to some of the reasons that I mentioned above.

And finally, there is increased confidence among parents in their children's school when they become involved in their education. For students with learning disabilities, these benefits are significant. Realistically, they are going to face more school-related obstacles than some of their peers, so anything we can do to help make their path a little less bumpy is going to be worth the effort.

## [SLIDE - Working Together - Share What You Know!]

[Text on slide: Image of one blue circle with text Parental Involvement, plus sign, one red circle with text School Involvement, arrow pointing to dark blue circle with text Student Success

- Talents and abilities
- Likes, Dislikes, Interests
- Extracurricular
- Family relationships

- Peer relationships
- Family routines and schedules
- Hopes and dreams
- How your child learns best]

**Anne:** A parent's participation in the education of their child, especially a child with special needs, is invaluable. As a parent, you understand your child's talents and abilities, likes, dislikes and interests, their extracurricular activities, family relationships and dynamics, including that of extended family and pets, peer relationships and dynamics, family routines and schedules, hopes and dreams for the future, including any short term or long term goals, and how your child learns best, whether it's by doing things, through demonstration, through listening, and so on. This is all really great information that can impact the decision-making around programming, pathways and goals for your child. By sharing knowledge, resources and time, parents can help ensure their child is in the best learning environment to meet their needs. Together, parents and teachers of students with learning disabilities, can create pathways to school success.

**[SLIDE - Diagnosis... Now what?]**

*[Text on slide: Image of red question mark sitting on red bullseye*

*Image of LD@home logo and the document title Survival Guide for Parents*

*Image of York Region District School Board logo and the document title A Parent's Guide to...Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC)*

*Image of the document title The Individual Education Plan (IEP), A Guide for Parents]*

**Anne:** So, over the course of the next few slides, I'm going to be sharing a lot of information about the IPRC and IEP process. I'm going to try and make it as clear as possible without going into too much detail because I'm not sure how far along in the process everyone is and it can be a little confusing if it is your first time through it. I have included a couple of links at the end of the presentation that will take you to parent handouts that will be a great resource for you as you move through this process, especially if you're at the beginning stages. And thank you again to Amy from LD@home for creating the accompanying document that lists all the resources as well, which will be available as a PDF.

The first is an excellent resource put out by LD@home called Survival Guide for Parents, which is basically a manual for parents of how to support your child from his or her initial diagnosis straight through to being an assertive advocate for your child's needs in school and beyond and it goes into much greater detail than what I'm about to share.

There are two other resources, developed by two different school boards, that I've included, the York Region District School Board and the Waterloo Region District School Board, that describe the IPRC and IEP process in parent-friendly language and are only a couple of pages in length. They're great resources to return to for more detailed information regarding this process.

**[SLIDE - Diagnosis... Now what?]**

[Text on slide:

- Inform the school
- Identification, Placement, and Review Committee

Image of red question mark sitting on red bullseye]

**Anne:** So, there are two scenarios in which your child could receive a psychoeducational assessment. The school could put forward a request and your child could receive one of the limited, coveted spots for an assessment by the school board psychologist. Or, as parents, you could have had it done privately. If that is the case, and your child has come back with a diagnosis of a learning disability, your first step will be to inform the school. You should contact the school and indicate, in writing, that he or she has special needs and request a meeting with your school team to begin planning to support your child. Do this as soon as possible and take the time to introduce yourself and share information about your child. It's a great opportunity to establish a good relationship with the teacher and the school team.

Depending on the special education model used by your school board, you may wish to request an Identification, Placement and Review Committee meeting and discuss an Individual Education Plan, the IPRC and the IEP.

**[SLIDE – IPRC]**

[Table on slide:

Diagnosis	Identification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meets DSM Criteria</li> <li>• Diagnosed by psychologist based on cognitive and academic testing through a psycho-educational assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determined by IPRC</li> <li>• Uses the data from the psycho-educational assessment</li> <li>• Reflects the criteria outlined by the Ministry of Education</li> </ul>

- Request must be in writing.
- The principal will give you a written response within 15 days of receiving request.]

**Anne:** I'd like to take a minute to quickly describe the difference between a diagnosis and an identification because this can get confusing.

A diagnosis in a psychological assessment is not the same thing as an identification, as determined by the IPRC meeting. A diagnosis in a psych means that your child has met the DSM, which stands for Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, criteria, and this is used by psychologists and psychiatrists.

An identification is determined by the IPRC committee, and it reflects the criteria outlined by the Ministry of Education. Either you or your school principal can refer your child to IPRC if it is believed your child would benefit from a special education program.

The request must be in writing and the principal will give you a written response within 15 days of receiving the parental request, with an indication of when the IPRC will meet. This is just an

approximation. You will then receive another letter giving you 10 days notice for the date and time of that meeting.

**[SLIDE - Diagnosis... Now what?]**

[Text on slide: Inform the school

- Inform the school
- Identification, Placement, and Review Committee
  - Discuss all relevant information about your child
  - Consider all the assessments that have been completed
  - Discuss your child's strengths and needs
  - Determine identification, placement and program
- Developing IEP
  - Outline the program and services
  - Specific special education expectations
  - Accommodations vs Modifications
  - Method for Review
  - Transition Plan

\* Identified vs Non-Identified

Image of red question mark sitting on red bullseye]

**Anne:** So back to what happens at the IPRC. At the IPRC, you will review and discuss all relevant information about your child and consider the assessments that have been completed. You will also discuss your child's strengths and needs. The committee will then decide if your child should be identified as exceptional, and with most of you here tonight, the identification for your child will be Communication, Learning Disability. Appropriate placement and program would also be discussed at this time and it's important to know that preference is given to keeping a child in his or her home school with the appropriate program and services wherever possible.

There are many resources out there to help you understand this process in greater detail. As I mentioned earlier, I have provided links to additional resources that can explain the process in greater detail at the end of this slide show.

After the IPRC, an IEP will be developed by the school staff in consultation with you. An IEP is a written plan that stands for Individual Education Plan and it's meant to meet the needs of your child drawing upon his or her strengths and needs. The IEP includes an outline of your child's special education program and services, what level of support he or she will be receiving within a regular classroom or a specialized program. It will outline specific educational expectations, which come directly from the Ontario curriculum, and it will identify specific learning goals that your child will be working towards.

It will also identify necessary accommodations or modifications. These terms will be new to you if this is your first experience in special education. Accommodations, I'm going to explain what the two of them are; accommodations do not alter the curriculum expectations for the grade, but instead it refers to supports and strategies that will be put in place for your child to access the grade-level curriculum. I often use this analogy to explain; I'm going to use the notion of eyeglasses. Accommodations are like

eyeglasses; if a child couldn't see the work because their eyesight was bad, you would give them a prescription, and then, once they're able to see the work on the board or in the book, they can do the same work as their peers. That's what accommodations are. Perhaps your child needs longer than others to get work completed, or needs to have access to technology in order to get his or her ideas down on paper. These are accommodations. They are doing the same work as their grade peers. Modifications are different. Modifications are actual changes to the grade level expectations which could include perhaps doing a different grade. So, for example, a student that's in grade six could be working on grade three expectations, or it could also mean an increase or decrease in the number or complexity of grade level expectations. The latter is becoming more popular now. In my role, I am often seeing students who are working on one or two expectations at their grade level, rather than all ten or twelve that the rest of the class is working on. This allows them to take part in the regular lesson, have conversations with their peers about the big ideas and feel included and part of the class. It is not always possible however, but it is a great option if it is.

Back to the IEP. It will also talk about methods for reviewing progress. This usually includes regular reporting periods, regular report cards, but depending on your child's goals, it may include an alternate report card as well.

And lastly, it will include a transition plan for students over 14 years. This is a plan of how the school is planning on assisting your child to support them through some upcoming changes in their education, like the transition from elementary school to secondary school. We know that many students with special needs struggle with change because they don't know what to expect or what is expected of them.

Different school boards have different processes around identifying students. Ontario's Education Act requires school boards to provide special education programs and services for students who need them. Not all school boards identify students without a request by the parent, but this does not mean that they deny services. A non-identified IEP or an NX-IEP can be put in place for your child so that they may receive accommodations or modifications, as determined by your child's strengths or needs. That is a conversation that needs to be had with your in-school resource teacher.

### **[SLIDE - Supporting the IEP]**

*[Text on slide: There are many things you can do at home to help your child to reach his/her goals.*

- Talk to the teacher about what s/he plans to accomplish.
- Do what you can at home to support your child's goals.
- Take every opportunity to communicate with your child's teacher.
- Provide additional insights and resources to the school.
- Share significant personal/family events as relevant.

(Excerpt from YRDSB "The Individual Education Plan: A Guide for Parents)

Image of three puzzle pieces that say: IEP Meeting, What to Expect???? You

Link to LD@home glossary - <http://www.ldathome.ca/what-are-lds/glossary/>

**Anne:** It is very important that, as a parent, you take an active role through this whole process. There are many things you can do at home to help your child reach his or her goals. I'm going to outline a few

of them here, and then I'll go into more detail in upcoming slides. Talk to your teacher about what he or she plans to accomplish. Do what you can at home to support your child's goals. Take every opportunity to communicate with your child's teacher. Provide additional insights and resources to the school. And share significant personal/family events as relevant.

The IEP and IPRC process may seem intimidating if this is your first time through it. The very notion of having your child diagnosed can be overwhelming at first. I've had many parents call me in tears because their child has received a diagnosis and they aren't sure exactly what that means. They feel like it limits their options or that it means their child isn't smart. This is completely not the case, but it's natural to feel worried about their future, especially if you do not have a good understanding of what a learning disability is. On top of all of that, school personnel may use terminology that is new or overwhelming to you, and it's okay to seek clarification or ask questions if you're confused or unsure about the information being shared.

It is important to remember that there are many supports out there for you, and again, some resources will be shared at the end of this presentation. For right now, I've included a link to the LD@home glossary of terms that will be very helpful for you to familiarize yourself with before meeting the school team and throughout your child's years in school. It breaks down all the terms in language that is easy to understand if you're not in the education field. At the end of the day, experience has shown that when educators and parents work together to develop the IEP, they share a common understanding, and that reduces potential future conflict. Establishing a positive relationship with the school team will be essential for the continued success of your child.

#### **[SLIDE - Maintaining a Positive Relationship]**

*[Text on slide:*

- Take time to meet and listen carefully
- Treat each other as equal partners of the planning and decision making team
- Allow each person to express opinions and give suggestions
- Approach disagreements in a manner that encourages positive problem solving
- Encourage a second opinion when there is an unresolved disagreement

Lynn Ziraldo (2016)

Image of two people smiling holding two cans connected by a string drawn on a blackboard]

**Anne:** Lynn Ziraldo, the former Executive Director of the LDA York Region, claims that a positive school climate can help the entire school community work together to address concerns related to programs and services before conflict or disagreement arises.

She recommends the following tips for effective teamwork between school and home: take time to meet with each other and listen carefully. Regular and on-going contact is best. Little issues can be dealt with in the early stages before they escalate. Establish a best time to meet and speak. Choose a method of communication that works best for each partner, for example: writing in a planner, email or phone call. I'll share some more ideas regarding this in the next slide.

Treat each other as integral parts of the planning and decision-making team. As parents, you know your child best. As mentioned earlier, you know your child's strengths, abilities, needs and challenges. As a result, you have a vital role to play in the planning and decision-making team. Your participation will make a positive and meaningful contribution to your child's education.

Allow each person to express opinions and give suggestions. Giving positive feedback is also important; make sure it's not always negative. It allows everyone to feel valued and appreciated, which is key for every good relationship. It will allow them to be more open to your suggestions as well.

Approach disagreements in a manner that encourages mutual problem solving. Developing a positive partnership means that both the teacher and the parent can feel comfortable approaching each other if issues arise. Later in the presentation, I'll show some tips on how to manage tense situations and also share a resource you can turn to if conflict does arise.

Encourage a second opinion when there is an unresolved disagreement or when there is no answer to a difficult question. This may include a facilitator from the education office or an advocate from a community agency. I've often had families bring friends or relatives to school meetings as a support for themselves. It's nice to have an extra pair of ears to hear the information, especially when you are so emotionally invested. We do know that sometimes learning disabilities can run in families as well, so if you have a difficult time remembering facts or processing information, it wouldn't be a bad idea for you to have someone that you trust at the meeting to offer their perspective.

#### **[SLIDE – Communication]**

*[Text on slide:*

- Develop a communication strategy that works for both of you
- Provide the teacher with resources you find useful.
- Help and support the teacher when possible
- Prepare for the IEP meeting and other teacher conferences
- Provide new information and assessments as they are completed
- Offer constructive feedback
- Be realistic
- Keep track

Image of puzzle with different words relating to communication on pieces, in the middle three pieces are missing and COMMUNICATION is written]

**Anne:** The message you have likely heard throughout this process is that communication is key. Research tells us that both parents and teachers feel that on-going communication is vital to the success of a child's education. A strong parent-teacher relationship needs trust and mutual respect for the knowledge and skills that both parties bring to the table.

Some tips for keeping an open line of communication with the school team are: develop a communication strategy that works for you. Set up the best method to communicate with the teacher to share brief updates and information about your child's progress. This can look different depending on the tools used in your child's classroom. It could be as simple as a planner or a communication book to

go back and forth each evening, but we know that this can be problematic for our students with executive functioning difficulties. Staying organized and remembering materials is not always a strength for many students with learning disabilities. Our students at Sagonaska are forever forgetting their materials in residence or in the classroom, and that is even with constant reminders and supervision from classroom teachers and residence counsellors. Therefore, another method of daily contact may be best. Email is a great option and one that I personally prefer. Phone check-ins work if you can find an agreed upon time. Check with a classroom teacher to determine the best way to get in touch with one another.

It has been mentioned before, but you can provide the teacher with resources regarding your child's needs. You truly are the expert of your child, and I'm sure many of you have already compiled a list of articles or bookmarked website addresses that you believe would be useful to the education of your child. These resources could even include a list of handouts you have received from your family doctor or pediatrician, as well as a list of strategies that work at home. The teacher will appreciate the sharing of resources that are specific to the needs of your child because we know that no two students with learning disabilities are alike. What works for one of our students may not work for the next.

When possible, lend a helping hand in the classroom. Be prepared to help out other children as well. The extra body in the room will make it possible for all students in the room to receive a little extra individual attention and it will help to build a supportive relationship between you and the teacher. It's not always possible to volunteer in the classroom, so make sure you ask your teacher what you can do at home to support your child's learning. There may be a reading program that he or she would like you to try at home with your child, something like working on sight-word lists, or practicing reading just-right books out loud to improve fluency.

Being prepared and making sure you arrive on time for parent-teacher meetings is very important. If you know what the goals of the meeting are ahead of time, you can come with specific questions and concerns that will help to keep the discussion on track and keep the conversation focused on the best interests of the student. When the team is working based on mutual understanding, then it will be easier to determine the best course of action and next steps in supporting your child's programming.

Keeping your child's support team in the loop will help to continue to provide the most effective educational programming for your child. Notify your school of any outside assessments or evaluations that are completed, as well as any significant events that are happening in the home or in your child's personal life, like a death in the family or being cut from a sports team. At Sagonaska, we meet every morning to talk about what incidents may have occurred the night before in residence so we are aware who might be having a bad day so that teachers can be careful as to what strategies they use that day, and aware of how hard to push the student. Anything that could impact your child's life socially or emotionally will also impact their ability to learn and focus on school. Continued open communication will be essential to ensure the conditions are optimal for your child to learn. Your child's needs might change depending on home life, outside tutoring, or strategies he or she has developed, so it's important to keep everyone up-to-date so you can discuss how these factors are affecting your child's programming.

If needed, provide constructive feedback. You are hearing your child's perspective when they come home at night, and chances are they are more willing to open up to you than they are to their teacher. You'll have an idea of what is working for your child and what isn't. It's important to encourage your child to speak up for themselves if they feel their needs aren't being addressed or an accommodation is being overlooked, but at the same time, they may not feel comfortable or confident enough, in which case, you will need to be the advocate for your child and feel comfortable approaching the teacher if there are concerns. Because some students with learning disabilities have difficulties with receptive language as well, which means the way they've taken in information they've heard or read, it may be that they have misinterpreted something the teacher has said or done, so seeking clarification and offering suggestions is a good way to make sure everyone is still on the same page. In the guide created by LD@home, there are a couple of great sections on how to be an advocate and how to be assertive without being rude. There are some amazing suggestions there to help you if you need to have some of those difficult conversations.

It's important to be realistic. It is important to remember that everyone wants your child to succeed. The realities around the amount of resources available within the public school setting is something that needs to be considered by all parties. Although everyone with special needs would benefit from having the most advanced technology and uninterrupted individualized one-on-one intervention, it's not always possible or realistic. There are many accommodations that can be put in place for a child that would be feasible in most settings, such as preferential seating in the classroom, extra time for tests and assignments, reduced homework, visual cues and schedules, even access to assistive technology. However, a one-on-one educational assistant is most likely not an option in most classroom settings. This is a situation where having a good relationship with your school team is beneficial because you can have honest conversations about what is available and creatively problem solve as a team to get your child the supports that he or she needs to be successful.

The last thing I want to share about communication is that it's very important to keep track of your conversations. It will help you to stay organized, and ensure that your child is getting the support that they need.

**[SLIDE - School Communication Log]**

*[Image on slide: LD@home School Communication Log template]*

**Anne:** So, this would be a good time to share that LD@home has created a really user friendly PDF that can be filled in and saved to document the conversations that you have with the school. It prompts you to document when the communication happened, who it involved and what was discussed. It also helps you to keep track of any action items, who is responsible and what the next steps to follow up would be. It will be a great resource for you to use and can also help to keep the meetings with the school focused on your child's needs and what the team can do to support him or her. The link to this PDF will be included in the document of online resources that will be available after this webinar.

**[SLIDE - Conflict happens..]**

*[Text on slide:*

- Establishing common goals and understandings reduces future conflicts

- When emotions run high, it is easy for misunderstandings to occur
- Neither good nor bad
- Seek solutions in fair and respectful ways
- Strive for agreement on major issues
- Goals need to be challenging and achievable, yet realistic
- Keep students best interest in mind

Image of two figures with arms crossed and backs to each other]

**Anne:** As mentioned earlier in the presentation, when parents and educators develop the IEP together, they establish common goals and understandings, which usually reduces future conflict. However, when emotions are strong, it's easy for misunderstandings to occur. Unfortunately, mutual understanding and shared expectations may not always be possible.

The existence of issues between parents and schools is neither good nor bad. When solutions are sought in a fair and respectful way, it is often possible to resolve disagreements in a positive manner. It is important to strive for agreement on major issues, such as long term goals and priority of needs. Goals need to be challenging, but achievable for the student and realistic for the teacher to achieve within the context of the whole class. And, as always, the focus needs to be on your child.

**[SLIDE - What can we do to make sure we resolve it in the best way possible?]**

[Text on slide:

- Understanding Conflicts - responses, factors, reasons, and warning signs
- Preventing Conflict - positive climate, communication, strategies
- Resolving Conflicts - communicating, advocating, active listening, constructive thinking
- Collaborative Approach - problem solving, common ground, using a facilitator

Shared Solutions: A Guide To Preventing and Resolving Conflicts Regarding Programs and Services for Students with Special Education Needs

Image of Shared Solutions document]

**Anne:** So, *Shared Solutions* is an excellent resource that was released by the Ministry of Education in 2007, meant to help parents and educators and students with special needs work together to prevent conflicts, resolve them quickly and allow students to develop and succeed in their learning. The guide focuses on informal conflict resolution, which is often the most effective approach and offers case studies to learn from. There is so much great information in this document and it's available online to download. This just highlights the different sections in the document.

So, it's important to remember that in order to be a strong advocate for your child, and in turn, teach your child to speak up for themselves, you need to be familiar with the special education program and policy and services available within the school system. For example, expecting your child's teacher to use a direct instruction reading program like Empower may not be possible. Schools and school boards select the intervention programs that they wish to use within their school system and Empower is a reading program developed through SickKids that cannot be delivered without the appropriate training and resources. If the board does not support the use of Empower, it would not be realistic for you to

request that your child receive it. We need to know, as a team, what is possible and reasonable in terms of support for your child.

### [SLIDE - Quick Tips for Shared Solutions]

[Text on slide:

- Listen actively and intently
- Acknowledge the other party's position
- Acknowledge the validity of the other party's feelings
- Apologize if it seems appropriate to do so
- Use humour
- Change the timing or take a break
- Use "Yes...and" instead of "Yes...but"
- Ask questions that elicit a yes response
- Change language from "you" to "us"
- Agree on a shared upon, mutually acceptable solution

Image of Shared Solutions document

Image of Tear-Out Sheet – Shared Solutions on the Go]

**Anne:** The best thing about this document is this one-page tip sheet for parents and teachers alike that outlines some of the most useful strategies for communicating, problem-solving and ensuring mutual respect when resolving conflict.

I'll just highlight the tips quickly here. The first one is active listening. Active listening means using appropriate body language, nodding, looking at the speaker and making eye contact whenever possible.

Acknowledging the position and feelings of the teacher and parent or school goes a long way to developing trust and respect, as I mentioned earlier, when I was talking about how to maintain a good relationship. Often, there are potential limitations based on school staffing and resources available. When you recognize and acknowledge that this could be the case, but are willing to discuss alternatives as a team, you can begin to troubleshoot or problem solve how to resolve the conflict. It is important to remember that everyone is invested in the well-being of the student and wants your child to be successful. It is just a matter of knowing how to best support the student with what is possible and realistic.

Apologies go a long way in tense situations. There is not much more to say about it than that. It goes along with the idea of validating others' positions or beliefs. If you've overstepped or made an incorrect assumption, apologizing can be a first step in repairing that home-school relationship.

Humour, when used correctly, can lighten a mood or break tension. Remember not to make jokes at the expense of others, but if you are able to create a relaxed vibe in the room by sharing a funny story or anecdote, it will help to make everyone feel more comfortable and willing to work together.

Sometimes it's best to take a break and walk away if emotions are running high. One of the strategies we are often using with our students to help deescalate or manage their behaviours is a quick five

minute break to take a walk or get a drink of water. These same tactics, believe it or not, work for adults. Parents are understandably so invested in the education of their child, so it makes sense that it may be difficult to keep emotions in check, so removing yourself from the situation, even for a few minutes, will help to clear your head and gain perspective.

Using “yes, and” instead of “yes, but” leads to more discussion. When you are saying “yes, but” it says, ya, that’s a great idea, but it’s not going to work; discussion is closed. The idea of “yes, and” shows that you’re willing to investigate and explore together how we can make this solution work.

Asking questions that elicit a yes response. The focus should always be finding a solution. You want to create dialogue, not debate. Focusing on what can be done rather than what can’t be done will help to keep the meeting positive. You always have to keep the idea that everyone can win in mind.

Changing the language from “you” to “us” is pretty straightforward; you are all on the same team. This needs to be the foundation of your approach to supporting your child. Again, and most importantly, the focus should always be on the student and your child. Coming to a solution that everyone can agree on, or is at least willing to work towards, is always in the best interest of your child. Believing that a solution CAN be found is essential. Going in with a defeated attitude will not help anyone. It will also be important to remember that there is more than one way to solve a problem. You may go into a meeting thinking that you have a desired outcome, but you need to keep an open mind, as does the school. Perhaps they have a solution that you wouldn’t have thought of because you aren’t as familiar with the school system as they are, but this works the other way as well, because like I’ve said a number of times, you know your child best and you may have an alternate plan or program that you think will work based on your experiences.

So, that was a lot of information to share, but in conclusion, I want to finish with, we know that, as parents, you have a wealth of knowledge and information that can help us teachers to better assist your child. It is important for parents to recognize that, as educators, we also bring valuable training and experience with working with students with exceptional needs, and we are guided by legal obligations and professional standards. However, always remembering that the whole team has the best intentions of your child will help to move you toward a solution that everyone can agree upon.

**[SLIDE - CONTACT ME]**

*[Text on slide:*

If you have additional questions about this presentation or Sagonaska Demonstration School, please contact me or visit our website or blog.

Anne Brown

anne.brown@ontario.ca

613-967-2830 ext 288

www.sagonaskaschool.blogspot.ca

<http://psbnet.ca/eng/schools/sagonaska/>

Image of Sagonaska logo]

**Anne:** This next slide is my contact information, which will be available when the slide deck is available.

**[SLIDE - Where can you get additional support?]**

[Text on slide:

LD@Home [www.ldathome.ca](http://www.ldathome.ca)

Survival Guide for Parents <http://s3.amazonaws.com/ldathome-assets/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/28121757/SURVIVAL-GUIDE.pdf>

LD @ School [www.ldatschool.ca](http://www.ldatschool.ca)

Glossary of Terms (LD@School) <https://www.ldatschool.ca/learn-about-lds/glossary-terms/>

Ministry of Education Links for Parents

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/>]

**Anne:** And, just quickly, I want to show you, here are some additional supports that I referenced during the presentation. These too will be available through the PDF.

**[SLIDE - Resources Continued]**

[Text on slide:

YRDSB and WRDSB IPRC Handouts

<http://www.yrdsb.ca/Programs/SpecEd/Documents/Referral%20Process/SD-IPRCparentguide.pdf>

[http://www.wrdsb.ca/wp-content/uploads/Understanding-the-IPRC-Process\\_A-Parent-Guide-2014-Amended.pdf](http://www.wrdsb.ca/wp-content/uploads/Understanding-the-IPRC-Process_A-Parent-Guide-2014-Amended.pdf)

YRDSB Guide to IEP

<http://www.yrdsb.ca/Programs/SpecEd/Documents/Referral%20Process/SD-IEPguideforparents.pdf>]

**Anne:** Thank you!

**[SLIDE - Resources Continued]**

[Text on slide:

LDAC Fact Sheet for Effective Teacher-Parent Partnerships

<http://www.ldabc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/5-English-Strategies-Schools1.pdf>

Shared Solutions

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/shared.pdf>

Parents in Partnerships: A Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools

[http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement/pe\\_policy2010.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/involvement/pe_policy2010.pdf)]

**Lawrence:** Thanks Anne so much for sharing your wisdom tonight with us.

**[SLIDE – Q&A]**

[Text on slide: Image of LD@home logo

[www.LDatHome.ca](http://www.LDatHome.ca)]

**Lawrence:** We are going to have a few minutes for Q&A now. So if you do want to ask a question live now with Anne, you can either hit the raise your hand button and we can unmute you so you can speak, or if you prefer, you can type your question into the question box and I will read it on your behalf to Anne. So we do have a couple already in Anne, so if I could start you off with this one.

**Anne:** Sure.

**Lawrence:** You talked a lot about connecting with teachers and as a parent, kind of sharing your insights. How do you deal with a teacher, however, who doesn't seem to want to either use your suggestions or take your input and how do you work through that scenario?

**Anne:** That is an excellent question. First and foremost, like I mentioned before, your first contact should be with the classroom teacher, absolutely, and trying to establish that relationship. But if it is tense or it does get difficult, the next point of contact could be the resource teacher at the school, and just approaching it as, we are a team, let's bring the whole team in together and see what we can brainstorm together to see if there's any other valuable insight. You don't want it to appear that you are going above or running to somebody else, but continuing to approach it as a team, bringing the resource teacher into a meeting with the classroom teacher, might be an option for you in that scenario. And just providing, you know when you provide strategies, and giving evidence of how it does benefit the child at home and the results that you're seeing, would be a great option as well.

**Lawrence:** Okay, great. Thanks Anne. Next question talks to the issue of when you should actually talk to your child about their diagnosis. So, any tips on how parents can handle that first conversation with the child?

**Anne:** I get this question a lot from parents actually and parents are really hesitant to talk to their child about it because they're afraid of the child's reaction, but in my experience, most students know. They know that they are having more difficulty than their peers so, in my experience, a lot of students are relieved when there's finally a name for it or an explanation for it, and especially going over what a learning disability means. It means that you are average to above average intelligence; you are a very smart child and your brain is wired differently. I know that there's a lot of great resources out on the web; there's some on LD@home. I know we have a blog at Sagonaska as well where we have a student voice section and we have a couple of videos up there where students are explaining that they were relieved to finally hear that there was a name for why they were learning differently, and just making sure that you highlight that there are strengths for these students; here's the areas that you're really strong at, and we are able to use some of those strengths to overcome some of those obstacles in your academic career. In my experience, the sooner the better. I would have that conversation with your child. And you want to make sure that you have all the right information as well, so if there was an expert that you could reach out to to help with that conversation if you don't feel comfortable, you could have, perhaps ask the resource teacher to help you with that, or the school psychologist, or whatever psychologist did the testing with your child. Did that answer the question?

**Lawrence:** That's great. No, I think that was very comprehensive Anne. So, I'm very conscious of everyone's time.

**[SLIDE – Other Questions?]**

*[Text on slide: EMAIL: info@LDatHome.ca*

*TWITTER: @LDhome1*

Image of LD@home logo]

**Lawrence:** So, I think we're going to pause the Q&A there folks. I do have a few other questions already in, so those of you that already put questions in, we will make sure we get back to you with answers. If you still have a question, as you can see on this slide, you can email us at [info@LDatHome.ca](mailto:info@LDatHome.ca) and one of our team will be very happy to make sure you get an answer, or equally you can use the @LDhome1 twitter, and again, if you send us a question there or you think of a question after the webinar you'd like to have answered, we would be very happy to do so.

**[SLIDE – Thank you!]**

[Text on slide: Image of LD@home logo  
www.LDatHome.ca]

**Lawrence:** On behalf of the LD@home team, I would once again like to thank Anne for her presentation and sharing her expertise with us tonight, and I'd also like to thank all of you for joining us. Please remember you will get the slides shortly as well as a survey following today's webinar and I would stress that's very important for us; as our first webinar, we really would welcome your insights and feedback, and that will come to you in a link, and then after that, as we said at the beginning, probably after about three weeks, so we can make the video fully accessible, there will be a full recording of the webinar, and again, you'll be able to review it again at your leisure, share it with your partner if there's two of you in the process of parenting your child, or even family and friends, because often the more people that understand, the more support you can build for your student, and that's never a bad thing. With that, thank you all again for being part of our very first LD@home webinar and enjoy the rest of this very bright and sunny evening and we look forward to talking to you again shortly. But for now, goodbye.