



Calgary and Area RCSD

Complex Communications Project

Background

As part of its mandate Calgary and Area RCSD serves children and youth with Low Incidence Disabilities. Low Incidence Disabilities include blindness or visual impairment, deafness or hard of hearing, deaf blindness and complex communication disorders¹.



Purpose of the Project

The aim of this project was to increase the knowledge of Complex Communication Needs in the region, and to collect and develop resources to build the skills of families and service providers to help children and youth with complex communication needs in the best possible way.

Complex Communication Needs define any one who is not able to communicate effectively through speech alone. Augmentative and Alternative Communication refers to the range of other ways children and youth use to communicate beyond speech, such as with pictures, sign language or speech generating devices.

Project Goals

1. Explore what conditions are needed to make sure children and youth get the most out of their Augmentative and Alternatives Communication strategies at school, at home, and in the community.
2. Identify current resources and develop new strategies, resources and training for teachers, parents, caregivers, and service providers in order to create the conditions for successful communication.

The project goals were achieved through four components.

Project Components

The Literature Review looked at the latest research on children and youth with Complex Communication Needs. The Literature Review is available online through the Calgary And are RCSD website.



Resources were developed based on the information gathered in the other project components.

Parents, Teachers and Speech and Language Pathologists were sent surveys to get the number of children with Complex Communication Needs in the region, and information on the successes and challenges they and their families face meeting their needs.

Focus Groups were held with volunteers from the surveys to get detailed information on the needs of children and with Complex Communication Needs and recommendations on how to meet those needs.

¹from Education Alberta (<https://education.alberta.ca/teachers/resources/prb/>)

Project Results

Definitions

“Complex Communication Needs” refers to children and youth who are not able to communicate effectively through speech alone.

“Augmentative and Alternative Communication” refers to the range of other ways children and youth use to communicate beyond speech, such as with pictures, sign language or speech generating devices.

What We Learned

There are **over 400** children in Calgary and the surrounding area who use Augmentative and Alternative means to communicate.



Augmentative and Alternative Communication **supports overall communication development.**

Augmentative and Alternative Communication **does not prevent speech development.**

Augmentative and Alternative Communication is **useful to all children and youth.**

It is **as important to work with** the communication partners, such as **parents and teachers**, as it is to work with children who have Complex Communication Needs.



Parents and teachers feel they need to **work together** to ensure children use Augmentative and Alternative Communication tools and strategies effectively.

Into Practice

Storybook kits have been developed for use in the classroom by trained staff. These storybooks focus on turn-taking communication that reflects daily conversations. These kits also include activities to help children to participate fully in the classroom.

A Resource List was created to help parents, service providers, and teachers find credible information and navigate the Augmentative and Alternative Communication options available for children and youth.

Acknowledgements

Calgary and Area RCSD would like to thank Alberta Education for supporting this work through the Low Incidence Capacity Building Grant.

Calgary and Area RCSD would also like to recognize the consultants, in-kind time from service providers, and the RCSD partners who contributed to this project.

A special thanks to the Complex Communications Project Committee:

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