Augmentative and Alternative Communication Skills and Strategies:

Expanded Core Curriculum for Students using Augmentative and Alternative Communication Systems

District Name:
District Number:

Developed by: AAC course development committee, organized by SET-BC.
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School name:

Principal's name:

Board/Authority Approval Date:

Board/Authority Signature:

Course Name: Augmentative and Alternative Communication Skills and Strategies
(AAC Skills and Strategies)

Grade level: Grade 11

Credits & Hours of Instruction: 1 credit is the value attached to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that most students can acquire in approximately 30 hours of instruction, as per Ministry of Education guidelines. Each unit is expected to involve 30 hours of instruction, and represents 1 credit. (Individual students may require significantly more or less instruction depending on their abilities and challenges.) Credits can be used as part of the 28 credits of electives needed for graduation.
Prerequisites:
The student must be a person who needs to use augmentative and alternative communication to communicate with others, and who has an augmentative and

alternative communication system.

Individual students who use AAC systems vary significantly in the level to which they have acquired AAC skills and strategies upon entry into high school. In some cases they may have already developed significant competencies as a result of the formal and informal training and experiences in their home, school and community. Similar to other curriculum courses in the BC high school program, with Board approval, students who use AAC have the right to challenge the AAC Skills and Strategies course and, if successful, receive the corresponding high school credits.   Any individual unit of this course can be taken as an Independent Study and the student can receive credit for this unit.

Special Training, Facilities or Equipment Required: This course must be taught in consultation with a Speech Language Pathologist.

Rationale:
Students with severe communication difficulties require augmentative and alternative forms of communication. Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) is essential for the student to participate fully in their high school program, and ultimately to reach their full potential to live independently, have appropriate career opportunities, and live rewarding and fulfilling lives. The mastery of AAC involves the acquisition of competencies that are different from and additional to the competencies that speaking students must acquire to become effective communicators. These competencies, which fall in the linguistic, social-relational, strategic and operational domains (described below in the organizational structure) need to be taught systematically and sequentially.

Organizational Structure:

People who use AAC proficiently need to develop competencies in four domains: the linguistic domain, the social domain, the operational domain, and the strategic domain (Light, 1989).

LINGUISTIC COMPETENCIES involve mastering language with a focus on expression, knowing vocabulary, knowing sentence structures and knowing how to generate language via the augmentative and alternative communication system.

SOCIAL COMPETENCIES involve knowing how to communicate effectively and in a socially appropriate way (such as gaining attention, introducing a topic, changing topics; putting the communication partner at ease) via the augmentative and alternative communication system.

STRATEGIC COMPETENCIES involve competencies that a person who uses AAC must develop to circumvent or minimize the barriers imposed by the AAC system. An example of this is a strategy to compensate for the slower rate of speech dictated by characteristics of AAC system: The student may develop a pre-stored phrase - "I have something to say about that"- that can be produced quickly to alert the communication

partner to the point in the conversation relevant to the student's next utterance.

OPERATIONAL COMPETENCIES involve mastery of the skills of the technical operation of the AAC system, such as adjusting the volume, adding pre-stored messages or vocabulary to the AAC system, troubleshooting common technical problems, etc.

Unit/Topic	Title	Time
Unit 1	**Responding & Initiating**: Teaches skills and strategies for the student to develop <u>beginning competencies foundational to the development of independent communication</u> via their AAC system.	30 hrs
Unit 2	**Communicating with Familiar Partners & in Familiar Environments**: Teaches skills and strategies for <u>independent communication in specific contexts</u> via their AAC system	30 hrs
Unit 3	**Communicating with Unfamiliar Partners & in Unfamiliar Environments**: Teaches skills and strategies for <u>independent and effective communication in most contexts</u> via their AAC system	30 hrs
Unit 4	**Communicating for Learning / Independence / Employment**: Teaches skills and strategies for <u>independent and highly effective communication in all contexts</u> via their AAC system.	30 hrs
	Total Hours	120 hrs

Each unit of this course addresses increasingly sophisticated and challenging competencies in each of these domains. The learning outcomes expected on the completion of each unit are outlined below.

Unit 1: Responding & Initiating

It is expected that the student will acquire <u>beginning level</u> skills and strategies for communication via AAC. Specifically:

LINGUISTIC COMPETENCIES:
It is expected that the student will:
- communicate information about preferences and interests using patterned phrases (e.g. I want..., I like..., I am...)
- communicate requests for school or personal objects (e.g. I need my walker. I need a drink.
- ask and answer basic questions, largely based on memorized/ pre-stored repertoire (e.g. My name is Sarah. What is your name? I went to the movies. What did you do on the weekend?)

SOCIAL COMPETENCIES:
It is expected that the student will:
- communicate with familiar partners, with extensive support   (e.g. a facilitator such as a teacher or educational assistant may say, "he has something to tell you on his device" or may suggest to the student what to say in a situation)
- communicate in familiar/routine contexts with support (e.g. says good morning to teacher every morning; takes attendance to office and says a pre-stored message - "Here's the attendance" on a regular basis)
- demonstrate appropriate use of communication instead of inappropriate behaviour (e.g. "I need a break" instead of hitting, "I'm finished" instead of pushing work off desk, "I don't like this" instead of spitting out food.
- demonstrate initiation of interactions with others (e.g. uses a pre-stored message such as "Hi how are you", "What's up?"or "Can I have a turn?")

STRATEGIC COMPETENCIES:
It is expected that the student will:
- demonstrate an introduction strategy with an unfamiliar communication partner with support (e.g.: "I use this device to talk.")
- communicate a request for or independently obtain their communication system when appropriate
- recognize the need to obtain the communication partner's attention before initiating a message (e.g. student makes a sound or gesture to get the partner's attention first; or student uses a phrase such as "guess what", or "I know that one!")

OPERATIONAL COMPETENCIES:
It is expected that the student will:
- demonstrate the ability to turn the system on and off when appropriate
- demonstrate the ability to adjust volume and/or turn speech on and off as needed
- demonstrate the ability to locate high frequency and high interest vocabulary on the device (e.g. can find his best friend's name, favourite activities, favourite snack food)

Unit 2: Communicating with Familiar Partners & in Familiar Environments

It is expected that the student will produce <u>appropriate communication independently in specific contexts</u> via AAC. Specifically:

<u>LINGUISTIC COMPETENCIES</u>:
It is expected that the student will:
- communicate information using simple generative sentences (e.g. student says "I'm + hungry", "Dad + like(s) + pizza")
- communicate requests and comments using simple generative sentences ("I + want + book", "I + like + movie)
- communicate a variety of pre-stored questions ("What's that?", "What's your name?" "Do you have any pets?", "What did you do on the weekend?) and answer these types of questions appropriately
- construct simple grammatical sentences using present and past tense
- demonstrate the use of descriptive language (e.g.: funny, big-little, happy-sad; fast-slow)
- demonstrate the ability to participate in selected familiar, real-life situations using appropriate language patterns (e.g. ordering food in a restaurant, participating in circle routine in school, playing a card game)

<u>SOCIAL COMPETENCIES</u>:
It is expected that the student will:
- communicate with strangers with extensive support, and with familiar partners with moderate support (e.g. with unfamiliar partner, a facilitator may cue by saying: "Mr. Smith didn't understand you. Say it again." Or with a familiar, partner, "Johnny didn't understand you, what can you do?…")
- communicate with unfamiliar partners in familiar context (e.g. able to successfully play a familiar game with a new partner.)
- communicate with familiar partners in an unfamiliar context (e.g. request a break while on a field trip)
- demonstrate a non-obligatory turn that maintains the conversation using body language and/ or device independently (e.g.: head nod or smile; interjection like: "cool", "yuck", "me too")
- ask partner-focused questions (e.g. "How about you?")

<u>STRATEGIC COMPETENCIES</u>:
It is expected that the student will:
- demonstrate the ability to adjust volume to fit the setting
- demonstrate the ability to engage communication partner(s) visually during communication, monitoring their attention and understanding
- recognize if their message was not received as intended, and, with support, utilize strategies to repair communication breakdowns (e.g. repeats, rephrases, draws attention to message display, provides additional information, uses gestures or body language or facial expression to get the message across, first letter cuing)

- demonstrate the ability to proactively inform unfamiliar communication partners about strategies to interact effectively (e.g. instructs partners to make guesses, where to position self or device, explains the meaning of body language or non-verbal behaviors such as how they signal yes and no).
- demonstrate the ability to independently use an introduction strategy with unfamiliar communication partners
- demonstrate the ability to use appropriate phrasing and pauses to maximize intelligibility (e.g. student produces an utterance – a phrase or one or two sentences - then pauses to ensure that the communication partner has understood, repeating if necessary)
- select a mode of communication appropriate to the listener and situation (e.g.: communicates by signs only with people who understand that mode but uses the AAC device with those who don't)

OPERATIONAL COMPETENCIES:
It is expected that the student will:
- ask for help if equipment requires adjustment (e.g. student uses eye gaze to direct partner's attention to an unplugged switch; student uses a gesture to indicate that the screen's backlighting needs to be adjusted)
- locate most of the pre-stored vocabulary according the architecture in their specific system.

Unit 3: Communicating with Unfamiliar Partners & in Unfamiliar Environments

It is expected that the student will produce <u>independent and appropriate</u> communication via AAC in the <u>majority of contexts</u>. Specifically:

LINGUISTIC COMPETENCIES:
It is expected that the student will:
- construct grammatical sentences using future tense
- construct complex and compound sentences ("I was late for class <u>because</u> the bus broke down."; "I need the book <u>that</u> we used last year.")
- demonstrate the ability to participate in selected familiar, real-life situations using generative language (e.g. participate in a discussion about vacation plans by combining words rather than using pre-stored phrases)

SOCIAL COMPETENCIES:
It is expected that the student will:
- communicate with minimal support in most environments
- communicate with unfamiliar partners
- communicate in unfamiliar contexts
- select topics of mutual interest to self and communication partner
- demonstrate the ability to offer non-obligatory comments and/or questions related to the conversational topic (e.g.: someone is saying something about a vacation destination and the student makes a comment related to this)

STRATEGIC COMPETENCIES:
It is expected that the student will:
- demonstrate the ability to intend to contribute to a conversation by using a gesture, pre-stored phrase or word (e.g. student says "question" or "I have a question about that" or "I have something to say" or "hang on a sec")
- demonstrate the ability to plan ahead to contribute effectively in a conversation (e.g. the student will compose some questions to ask the doctor before a medical appointment)
- demonstrate the ability to independently utilize several strategies to repair communication breakdowns

OPERATIONAL COMPETENCIES:
It is expected that the student will:
- demonstrate the ability to adjust screen parameters / positioning for best visibility and access
- demonstrate the ability to add pre-stored vocabulary with support, based on the architecture of their specific system (e.g. new "vehicle" words need to be stored in the same manner as current "vehicle" words)
- demonstrate the ability to charge and care for the device

Unit 4: Communicating for Learning / Independence / Employment

It is expected that the student will produce <u>independent and appropriate</u> communication via AAC <u>in all contexts</u>. The student will demonstrate <u>exemplary communication skills</u>. Specifically:

LINGUISTIC COMPETENCIES:
It is expected that the student will:
- demonstrate the ability to complete written and oral components of grade level assignments independently (e.g. student is able to write essay, or give a presentation)
- demonstrate the ability to independently participate in class using device (e.g. answer a question in class, participate in small group)
- demonstrate the ability to understand and discuss linguistic structures and forms and how this relates to their communication system (e.g. the student understands that if a new verb is added to the system, the past and future tense forms for that verb may also need to be added)

SOCIAL COMPETENCIES:
It is expected that the student will:
- demonstrate the ability to independently communicate effectively with anyone
- demonstrate the ability to initiate, maintain, extend and terminate conversations appropriately

STRATEGIC COMPETENCIES:
It is expected that the student will:
- demonstrate the ability to compensate for all barriers imposed by an AAC system
- demonstrate the ability to creatively use the device features to communicate effectively and efficiently (e.g. student uses different "voice" settings to speak their lines in a drama class)
- analyze what is going wrong in a communication interaction, and devise a strategy to address it (e.g. student turns on "selection beep" function so that the device makes a noise when composing a voice mail message, thus preventing the voice mail system from disconnecting)

OPERATIONAL COMPETENCIES:
It is expected that the student will:
- demonstrate the ability to
    - research and arrange equipment upgrades
    - troubleshoot common glitches
    - initiate repair procedures

- demonstrate the ability to independently add pre-stored vocabulary based on the architecture of the specific system

- analyze when to use soft and hard resets

Instructional Components:

The instructional components for each course should be tailored to the student, the specific goal, and the instructional situation. They may include:
- Direct instruction
- Interactive instruction
- Modeling
- Role play
- Discussion
- Guided practice
- Videotape analysis

Assessment Components:

Eighty per cent (80%) of the grade will be based on evaluations conducted throughout the course. This portion of the grade will reflect the students' most consistent level of achievement throughout the course, although special consideration will be given to the more recent evidence of achievement. Twenty per cent (20%) of the grade will be based on a final evaluation of skills.

See appendix A for suggested rating scales for learning outcomes.

Type of assessment	Category	Details	Weighting (%)
Formative	Teacher anecdotal records Rating scale	Outcome-based performance of curriculum in real life tasks	80%
Summative	Final assessment observation Rating scale Self evaluation Peer evaluation	Outcome-based skills evaluation in real life tasks	20%
Total			100%

Performance methods and products:
- Student / instructor / mentor dialogue
- Self evaluation

- Teacher evaluation
- Teacher anecdotal records
- Rating scales
- Communication / language sampling

Further information for Instructors:
Beukelman, D. & Mirenda, P. (2006). <u>Augmentative and Alternative Communication:</u>
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<u>Individuals who use AAC</u>. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

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<u>Who Use Augmentative and Alternative Communication.</u> Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Locke, P. & Levin, J. (2005). <u>Making Connections.</u> St. Paul: Ablenet.

Park, R. (2007). <u>Speaking Out- Easier Said Than Done!</u> Vancouver: Communication
Assistance for Young Adults Project.

Rutter, I. D. (2000). <u>Allow Me!: A Guide to Promoting Communication Skills in Adults</u>
<u>with Developmental Delays.</u> Toronto: The Hanen Centre.

SET-BC, (2008). <u>Supporting People Who Use AAC Strategies: In the Home, School</u>
<u>and Community</u>. Fourth Edition. Vancouver: Special Education Technology British
Columbia.

Williams, M. & Krezman, C. (2000). <u>Beneath the Surface: Creative Expressions of</u>
<u>Augmented Communicators.</u> Toronto: International Society for Augmentative and
Alternative Communication.

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http://aac-rerc.com

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