

Individual Education Plans

HELPING YOUR CHILD ACHIEVE SUCCESS IN THE CLASSROOM

What is an IEP?

Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are learning and teaching plans developed for students who learn in a very different way or at a very different rate than their classmates. An IEP is a written record that outlines your child's individual program. It helps you and the teachers track your child's progress and plan next steps in learning.

An IEP may be written for any student who requires an individual program. Ontario law (Regulation 181/98) requires the writing of an IEP for all students who are identified as exceptional through the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) process. Regulation 181/98 also requires that an IEP be written within 30 school days from the beginning of a new placement and/or from the beginning of each school year.

What is the parent/guardian's role?

Parents and guardians play an important supporting role in the IEP process. An IEP can help your child achieve success at school. It is important for you to understand and to participate in developing your child's plan.

You may know things about your child's approach to learning and behaviour that no one else knows. It is essential that you share this information as well as your ideas about your child's learning style with the teachers, principal, and health care professionals working with your child. This will help to ensure that the final contents of the IEP will best support your child.

Your child will have the most success when school and family work together.

Developing your child's IEP

Preparing an IEP is a group effort. It is the principal's responsibility to make sure that an IEP is written but the development of the plan is the work of a team of people.

This team may include the parents/guardians, your child, your child's special education teacher, the classroom teacher and if necessary community health care professionals. Each of you will provide information, ideas and strategies.

Your child's IEP will:

- **describe your child's educational strengths and needs;**
- **explain how grade level work will be changed to help your child participate in class and be successful;**
- **describe how the program will be delivered;**
- **describe how your child's progress will be monitored.**

Writing the plan involves three main steps. Following is a brief look at each of these steps.

1. Gathering information

During this step, team members will meet to gather information about your child. The school staff may share previous IEP or IPRC recommendations, report cards, tests your child has completed, samples of your child's work, and observations of your child in his/her classroom.



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Your input will help to identify the best way to teach your child

Parent/Guardian's role

You are a key information resource. Be sure to tell about your child's:

- ★ talents and abilities;
- ★ likes and dislikes, interests and frustrations;
- ★ family relationships and dynamics (including extended family and pets);
- ★ family routines and schedules.

Parents/Guardians can also help school staff by:

- ★ sharing ideas and concerns about your child's abilities to participate in class and complete school work;
- ★ sharing reports or assessments and returning completed forms;
- ★ agreeing to have the school contact other professionals who are helping your child;
- ★ keeping a good record of reports, test results, appointments and discussions with the school.

2. Documenting medical and health needs

It is important to keep the whole child in mind when developing an IEP. This will help ensure that the plan is reasonable and achievable. Your child's health care needs are essential pieces of information.

An IEP includes a section for recording medical and health care issues. This section is used to record a diagnosis that affects your child's ability to learn and to document any services that your child is receiving from a community support agency, such as physiotherapy or occupational therapy.

It is important to keep the whole child in mind including any health care needs.

3. Preparing the plan

Once the information about your child has been gathered, your child's teachers and the school staff will write the plan for helping your child to learn. Your child's educational strengths and needs will be identified in order to decide on his/her program goals and expectations.

Your child's IEP will include:

- **program goals designed to address his/her learning strengths and needs;**
 - **an outline of the program;**
 - **the method of how progress is reviewed;**
 - **a transition plan;**
- (This is provided for children over 14 years of age. It is not provided for those identified solely as gifted)*
- **resources and support materials.**

I) SETTING GOALS

A key part of the IEP is setting learning goals for your child. Each goal should be practical, reasonable, and provide the opportunity for success.

When identifying these goals, it is important that your child's strengths and needs are taken into consideration.

The main focus is helping your child to be successful in his/her classroom. How to do this varies from child to child. For example:

- ★ some students may require changes in how the material is presented or how he/she is to complete the work.



- ★ some students may need more significant changes, like working in a quiet room or working on different lessons.
- ★ some students may need to focus on developing skills like paying attention, improving hand-eye coordination or maintaining self-control.

For example, your child may need help to learn to sit still and pay attention. A goal of sitting through an entire lesson may be unrealistic. To prevent frustration, a more practical goal may be to encourage your child to sit still for five minutes, then build up to one full lesson. This increases opportunities for success.

Identifying your child's strengths and needs helps to determine goals and expectations.

Parent/Guardian's role

At team meetings, you will be asked for input in identifying your child's strengths and needs and in providing ideas and strategies that will help your child learn. You can contribute to planning goals for your child's learning by:

- ★ keeping the focus of meetings on your child;
- ★ telling the staff the hopes you have for your child's learning;
- ★ bringing ideas and information;
- ★ asking questions;
- ★ valuing everyone's input.

II) ACHIEVING GOALS

The Ministry of Education describes two main ways to help a child:

- ★ *Accommodations* are adjustments to the regular classroom program that change the way a student completes the work or where the work is completed. Examples include large print books, audiotapes and extra time to complete projects.
- ★ *Modifications* involve more significant changes. These may include the student completing alternative material or lessons based on the Ontario Curriculum that have been simplified or made more challenging.

When goals are based on the Ontario Curriculum, the IEP indicates the grade level at which lessons for your child are taught.

The accommodations and modifications need to be meaningful for the student and realistic in terms of the resources available. School boards have a legal responsibility to meet the educational needs of students, but do not have the money to give every child a personal teacher.

Plans need to be developed carefully. The resources and supports that are going to be used are described in the IEP as well as the persons responsible and the intensity of the support.

The IEP also states when and where the resources will be provided and any special accommodations.

III) DEVELOPING TRANSITION PLANS FOR STUDENTS OVER 14 YEARS

An IEP for an identified (by IPRC) student over 14 years of age, with the exception of those identified only as gifted, includes a Transition Plan describing how the student will prepare for post secondary activities such as further education, work and community living.

The Transition Plan helps to focus the student, school team and family on identifying where the student is heading and what skills, credits and other resources the student will need by the time he/she leaves school.

Each year, the Transition Plan becomes more focused on the post secondary destination. Early planning helps the student better prepare for the future. The goals and strategies included in the IEP Transition Plan depend on the age of the student and his/her eventual destination.

Encourage success by setting practical, realistic learning goals for your child.



To ensure success, everyone needs to be aware of the goals and strategies being used to teach your child.

The IEP document

School staff may use computer software to help with the preparation of the IEP. Based on Ministry of Education publications, the software program lists statements that describe a child's strengths, needs and possible goals and strategies. The statements are printed onto an IEP form. If necessary, the staff can personalize the statements to best describe your child's unique situation. A completed IEP consists of several printed pages of information about your child and his/her program.

Using THE IEP

A copy of the IEP is given to every teacher who works with your child. Everyone should be aware of the goals and strategies to be used in teaching your child.

Parent/Guardian's role

There are several ways that the family can support the plan. Parents/Guardians can help by:

- ★ making sure they understand the plan;
- ★ giving your child a quiet place to work at home and helping your child to practice new skills at home;
- ★ talking to your child about school and the daily work;
- ★ participating in communication from school to home and home to school;
- ★ keeping in touch with school staff to follow up on progress.

Reviewing and evaluating your child's progress

The IEP is reviewed at least once in each term and updated when necessary. You will receive a report of your child's progress using the provincial report card. If the outlined expectations are not from the provincial curriculum, an alternative report card will be provided. In some cases, students will receive both.

Updating the IEP

When needed, the teacher may update the IEP to include new or adjusted goals, approaches and/or resources necessary to the learning process.

A copy of the updated IEP is placed in the Ontario School Record (OSR) and copies should be shared with all of the teachers, staff and family members who will be helping your child and using the plan. Your child's report card will reflect the program as outlined in his/her IEP.

Parent/Guardian's role

You can request a review whenever you feel changes need to be made to your child's program. If your child's needs have changed significantly, the IEP needs to show this. It is best to submit the request in writing to the principal with a copy to the classroom teacher. Keep a copy for your records.

You may request a review if:

- ★ your child has met one, or several of the goals in the IEP;
- ★ your child does not seem to be making any progress toward one, or several of the goals written in the IEP;
- ★ you feel additional strategies should be considered in order for your child to progress;
- ★ you feel a service is no longer necessary in order for your child to succeed;
- ★ your child has experienced major health changes, such as illness, surgery, injury, or changes at home, such as a death in the family, parental separation or divorce.

Resources

Your principal can provide the names of organizations that service your area.

Other resources include:

- **Ministry of Education Standards for IEPs can be found at www.edu.gov.on.ca.**
- **Education Act, Regulation 181/98.**
- **[www.scdsb.on.ca/program & services/special education](http://www.scdsb.on.ca/program&services/special_education)**
- **SCDSB Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC).**

