

Section Seven

Special Education

There are many ways to support children with speech and language delays or impairments in school, and for some students an Individual Education Plan (IEP) may be required. The IEP is a document that is created for any student that has special education needs that require changes to the regular classroom program. Changes can include accommodations (such as visual supports for directions) or modifications (when the child does something different than the grade-level curriculum) or an alternative program (learning skills that are not part of the Ontario curriculum).

Children with a severe speech or language impairment, or those with other needs related to their disability, may be identified through the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) process. School board practices regarding the IPRC vary across the province. A few school boards do not use the IPRC process at all, and some do not use the IPRC to formally identify students with speech and language impairments alone (for example, the student has no other exceptionality identified).

OAFCCD Parent Tip

Every school board has a Special Education Plan that documents how the needs of students with speech and language impairments will be met. Check the school board website for the Special Education Plan or ask the Principal for a copy.

Frequently Asked Questions About Individual Education Plans (IEP):

1. Why Does My Child Need An Individual Education Plan (IEP)?

- Your child must have an IEP if they have been identified as exceptional through an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (I.P.R.C.).
- Your child may have an IEP if they require special accommodations, such as an FM system for a child with hearing problems, or a picture or symbol based communication system, or computer hardware or software for learning.
- Your child must have an IEP if they require accommodations for provincial testing.
- Your child must have an IEP if they require modifications to the curriculum, (e.g., if they are still learning letter recognition, when most of the other students are reading words).
- Your child may have an IEP if they are working on skills that are not part of the curriculum (e.g., anger management or social skills development).

2. How is the IEP Developed? Who Has Input and Who Approves It?

The IEP is developed by the school with input from the parents. The classroom teacher is responsible for writing and using the IEP with support from the special education teacher and other professionals involved with the student. The Principal is responsible for making sure an IEP is developed and will sign the finished document.

The teacher or another school staff member such as the special education resource teacher may talk to the parent on the phone, or in a meeting about their child. The information will be used to develop a list of the child's strengths and needs. The parent may also be asked about how the child performs tasks at home and for any ideas or tips that help the child to be successful.

When the IEP is completed a copy will be sent home and the parent will be asked to sign a form saying that they were involved in developing the IEP.

3. What are Learning Expectations?

All public schools are required to teach the provincial curriculum as outlined by the Ministry of Education. The provincial curriculum identifies the learning expectations (e.g., what the student will know for each component at the end of each grade or course). Students are required to have an IEP when their learning expectations will be significantly different from the curriculum.

4. What is the Difference Between Accommodations, Modifications and Alternative Expectations?

Accommodations are the teaching strategies, supports and/or services that are required to allow the student to learn the curriculum and demonstrate learning. Accommodations do not alter the provincial learning expectations for the grade level.

There are three types of accommodations:

- **Instructional Accommodations** - strategies or tools that allow a student to access the curriculum. For example, a text to voice software program that allows the student to hear the same story repeated many times, or in shorter sections.
- **Environmental Accommodations** - strategies to change the room, or place where the student works. For example, a quiet space at the back of the room to work away from the classroom distractions.
- **Assessment Accommodations** - strategies or tools that allow the student to show what they have learned. For example, a student may produce a picture or make an oral presentation, rather than write a story.

Modifications refer to the changes made to the grade level expectations for a subject or course to meet the needs of the student. For core subjects, such as Math and Language, the expectations may be from another grade level (higher or lower). For content subjects, such as Social Studies or History, the modifications may include significant changes to the number and/or complexity of the learning expectations.

Alternative Learning Expectations refer to learning related to skill development in areas not represented in the provincial curriculum. The expectations represent a specific program or course taught to the student. For example, an Anger Management or Social Skills program, Orientation and Mobility training for the visually impaired.

5. What Types of Information Should Be Included in an IEP?

Although, each school board has their own form for the IEP, the Ministry of Education has developed a set of standards which outline what should be in every IEP. However, all IEPs will include:

- **Student Profile** - name, school, grade, etc.
- **Assessment Information** - dates and summary of student assessments by professionals, such as Speech-Language Pathologists, Psychometrists, Physiotherapists, etc.

- **Student's Strengths and Needs** - summary of skills that the student is good at (Strengths) or that the student needs to develop (Needs).
- **Subjects or courses where the IEP is used** - this may be all subjects, or may be just the subject areas where the student is having difficulty.
- **Accommodations** - this is usually a list of the strategies used to help a student learn and may include assistive technology or communication devices being used.
- **Provincial Assessments** - dates and results of Grade 3, 6 or 9 Provincial Tests, Grade 10 Literacy Test, or reason for exemption from the test.
- **Special Education Program description** - The Special Education Program will include:
 - Current level of achievement (description of what the child can do)
 - The Annual Program Goal (a statement describing what the student can reasonably be expected to do by the end of the school year)
 - The Learning Expectations for the subject or course (these are usually taken from the Ontario Curriculum but are different to the program of the other students in the same grade or class)
 - Teaching Strategies (any unique strategies that the teacher will use to help the student learn)
 - Assessment Methods (description of how the student will be evaluated to show what they have learnt)
- **Alternative Programs** - sometimes a student will be working on a program that is not usually part of the curriculum, for example, Anger Management, or Social Skills Development. The type and length of the program, as well as the goals for the student should be listed.
- **Human Resources** - a list of the people who will be helping the student and teacher with the student's program (may include time with a special education teacher or a professional, like a Speech-Language Pathologist).
- **Transition Plan** - for students over the age of 14 the IEP must include a plan to help the student prepare for leaving high school.
- **Log of Parent Consultation** - a record of the dates and ways that the parent was consulted about the IEP. There may also be a section for parents to comment on the IEP.
- **Principal's signature** - the completed IEP must be signed by the Principal.
- **Parent (or student over age 16) Signature** - the parent/student will be asked to sign the IEP to confirm they were consulted in its development.

Other items that might be considered when developing an IEP for a speech and/or language impaired student:

- strategies for specific skills including listening, speaking, speech production, social interactions, reading, writing, self-advocacy and organization
- accommodations to support small group and class participation
- intervention by a Speech-Language Pathologist
- alternative oral presentation options (e.g., in writing, audio or video taping or one-on-one with teacher)

- strategies for development of the student's study skills, including note taking, test performance
- development of appropriate interpersonal communication and social skills for different settings (school, recreation, employment, with peers, etc.)
- development of good work habits, including punctuality, responsibility, timely task completion, and appropriate appearance

For students in high school:

- development of self advocacy skills to obtain support and necessary accommodations for academic or work environments
- identification and development of specific vocational skills for targeted workplace
- participation in a co-op program, possibly with the assistance of a peer mentor, or a job coach (paid or volunteer)

OAFCCD Parent Tip

School staff welcome your participation in the development of the IEP. It is not your job to know all of the possible learning strategies and accommodations that are available. However, you can share information about your child's strengths and needs, what has been tried in the past and what has helped your child to be successful.

6. Who Has Access to the IEP During the School Year?

The IEP is intended to be a working document for the classroom teacher. The teacher should be making sure that all the accommodations are being provided and tracking how the student is doing in achieving the goals of the IEP. Other school staff, including the special education teacher and the Principal, will be helping the teacher and will have access to the IEP. The parent will get a copy when the IEP is developed and each time it is changed. A copy of the IEP is also placed in the student's Ontario Student Record (OSR).

7. Can the IEP Be Changed? How Often? What is the Process?

The IEP should be reviewed and changed at the beginning of each school year, once each reporting period, and within 30 days of the annual IPRC meeting. The IEP may also be revised if there is significant change in the child's needs or circumstances (e.g., a change in the child's health or behaviour).

The reporting period in elementary school is three times each year. At the secondary level, in schools with a semester system, the IEP will be revised at the beginning of the second semester to reflect the new course load.

If the student is still working with the same accommodations or on the same program there may be no need to change the IEP. However, if the student has achieved the program expectations or is having more difficulties, it may be necessary to change the IEP. The parent should be consulted on any changes.

8. How Can Parents Contribute to the IEP?

Parents must be consulted in the development of the IEP and must receive a copy when it is completed and/or revised. Parents can provide an invaluable perspective on their child's personality, development and learning. Parents should provide:

- up-to-date medical information about their child
- copies of assessments and reports
- important information about their child's likes, dislikes
- learning style, interests, and reactions to situations
- the talents and skills their child demonstrates in the home and community.

In addition, parents can reinforce and expand the educational efforts of the teacher by providing opportunities to practice and maintain skills in the home; and provide feedback on the transfer of skills to the home and community environments.

9. What if I Can't Attend School Meetings About the IEP?

The development of an IEP will not always require a face to face meeting. When an IEP is developed as a result of the IPRC, a case conference before or after the IPRC may be held. However, in many cases the school staff may involve parents through phone calls or by sending copies of the draft IEP home. At the end of the process, parents must be provided with a copy of the IEP and a form to sign indicating whether they were involved in its development. This form usually includes a place for comments.

OAFCCD Parent Tip

Each time that you receive a copy of the IEP, review the document carefully and compare it to the previous version. When signing the return portion of the IEP you can make a comment on the IEP contents or the student's progress. (Send a separate piece of paper if there is no place for comments on the form). Your comments will show that you are interested and involved and provide a record of your concerns or ideas that may need to be considered at the next review.

10. Does My Child Need an IEP in High School?

It is important that student's IPRC or an IEP continue in high school. There are several reasons why these processes remain important, including:

1. **Multiple teachers** - High school students typically have a different teacher for each course so it is important to have a written record of the student's strengths and needs and the services and supports that are required. The IEP will document the courses to which it applies and what accommodations and supports the student may require.
2. **Reduced communication between home and school** - The level of communication between home and school is more limited in high school, and it may be a challenge to keep informed about school events. The IEP must be reviewed each term and this will provide an opportunity to contact school staff and discuss what is working and what needs to be changed. It will be very important that you stay involved and ask questions, as you are your child's best advocate until your child is ready to take on this role for him or herself.
3. **Grade 10 Literacy Test** - This province wide test of reading and writing is taken under strict conditions, and students who may need accommodations to complete the test must have an IEP. Eligible accommodations are documented in the IEP.

4. **Transition Planning for employment or further education** - An important component of IEPs for students over 14 years of age is the requirement for the student to have a Transition Plan. Development and review of the IEP provides an opportunity to talk about the student's plans after completing high school and to identify activities to support the student's plans for post secondary education or employment. Colleges and universities have special education services and supports available but they will require documentation of student needs, and information on the accommodations that have been successful in high school.

11. How Do I Know if the IEP is Working?

Parents and students have a key role in monitoring the IEP. Ask your child whether they are getting all the accommodations, programs and services documented in the IEP. Keep in touch with the teacher and ask about visiting the classroom (see Appendix 2). Keep track and discuss what is working and what isn't helping and follow-up if you think that accommodations or strategies from the IEP are not being implemented. Share success stories with the teacher and other school staff.

At each reporting period you will have a Report Card for your child. Look at the marks and comments on the Report card and have IPRC Statement and/or copy of the IEP available. Look for evidence of progress or areas of challenge. Write comments on the return section of the Report Card and be ready to share your comments and ideas during the next revision of the IEP. Developing, monitoring and revising the IEP is a continuous process. If something doesn't work, try a new strategy. If an accommodation or strategy is effective, make sure it is available for all subjects and in the next grade.

OAFCCD Parent Tip

Every school board has a Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) that includes volunteer members from parent organizations. SEAC members provide advice to the school board Trustees about special education and also help families by providing information about special education programs and services. Look on the school board website for information on the agencies that have a member on the SEAC and how to contact them.

Frequently Asked Questions About the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) Process:

1. What is an IPRC?

IPRC stands for Identification, Placement and Review Committee. The committee is composed of at least 3 persons one of whom must be a Principal or a supervisory officer of the board. Under the Education Act, the IPRC is a legal process used by the board to:

- a) recognize that the student has specific learning needs;
- b) decide if a child meets the criteria for identification as an exceptional student;
- c) identify the area of exceptionality; and
- d) decide an appropriate educational placement.

The IPRC and IEP ensures that the student's needs are documented and there is a record of the accommodations required, modifications to the curriculum, and the supports and services being provided to the student.

OAFCCD Parent Tip

Some school boards don't use the IPRC process, and others develop IEPs as soon as the student needs individual accommodations or modifications. To find out more about the IPRC process at your school, ask for a copy of the school board Parent Guide or look for the Parent Guide on the school board website.

2. How Does the IPRC Make Its Decision?

The decision about the child's identification is based on the results of student assessments that have determined the student's strengths and needs. The Needs Statements on the IPRC should be consistent with the strengths and needs described in the Individual Education Plan.

A child is considered exceptional if they meet the criteria for identification in one of the Ministry of Education Categories of Exceptionality. The main categories are:

- **Behaviour**
- **Communication** - including Autism, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Language Impairment, Speech Impairment, and Learning Disability
- **Intellectual** - including Giftedness, Mild Intellectual Disability and Developmental Disability
- **Physical** - including both Physical Disability, Blind and Low Vision
- **Multiple Exceptionalities**

OAFCCD Parent Tip

Each school board has developed criteria based on the Ministry of Education definitions and you should check in the school board Parent Guide or in the school board Special Education Plan for more detailed information on the criteria for identification.

The IPRC will also determine the placement of the child. Placements recognized by the Ministry of Education include:

- **Regular Class with Indirect Support**
- **Regular Class with Resource Assistance**
- **Regular Class with Withdrawal Assistance**
- **Special Education Class with Partial Integration**
- **Special Education Class Full Time**

Each school board must develop an annual Special Education Plan which describes the special education programs and services available. The Parent Guide or the Special Education Plan will provide information on the placement options available in your school board.

3. Can a Parent Request the IPRC Process?

The IPRC process is usually started by the school, but can be requested by the parent by making a formal request in writing. The letter should be sent to the Principal who must respond within 15 days. The school board must provide you with a copy of the Special Education Parent Guide and this will help you understand the IPRC process, your role, and may include contact names of organizations that can help you.

OAFCCD Parent Tip

For additional information about how to request an IPRC, ask for a copy of the school board Parent Guide or look for Regulation 181/98 available on the Ministry of Education Website.

4. Can Someone Attend the IPRC with the Parent?

Regardless of how the process is started, it is important that parents participate and understand their role. Parents do not have to go through the process alone. An agency staff member or volunteer may be your representative and attend meetings with you or help you prepare for meetings. Support and assistance is available from many organizations including OAFCCD through their SEAC representatives. One of the most important changes in recent policy has been the recognition that parents may have a representative with them in their school meetings.

5. What Can I Do if I Disagree with the Decision of the IPRC?

If you disagree with the decision of the IPRC do not sign the documents and ensure that you request further meetings in writing. If you continue to have concerns, you may appeal the decision. The appeal must be submitted to the Principal in writing within 30 days of the IPRC decision. Your child's placement cannot be changed while the appeal process is underway.

6. Where Can I Get More Information on the IPRC and Appeal Process?

The IPRC process is determined by Regulation 181/98 and a copy can be found on the Ministry of Education website, as well as in the Special Education, Guide for Educators (2002).

Additional Sources of Information

Parent Guides available from each District School Board

Regulation 181/98 of The Education Act, for Identification and Placement of Exceptional Pupils (1984) Ministry of Education

Individual Education Plans Standards for Developing, Standards for Development, Program Planning, and Implementation (2000) Ministry of Education

The Individual Education Plan (IEP) A Resource Guide (2004) Ministry of Education

The IEP Electronic Template (2009) Ministry of Education Website at: www.iep.edu.gov.on.ca/IEP/

The Ontario Curriculum Unit Planner: Special Education Companion (2002) Ministry of Education

Special Education, Guide for Educators (2002) Ministry of Education

Education for All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students With Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6 (2009) Ministry of Education

Learning for All K to 12 (2009) Ministry of Education

Oral Foundations for Academic Learning (2009) Ministry of Education and Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologist (OSLA)

IEP 101 for Parents and Students (2009) Learning Disability Association of Ontario (LDAO) Website at: ldalearning.ca

Sample Individual Education Plans (IEP) on, Council of Directors of Education Website at: www.ontariodirectors.ca