

UNDERSTANDING THE IEP: A Guide For Families

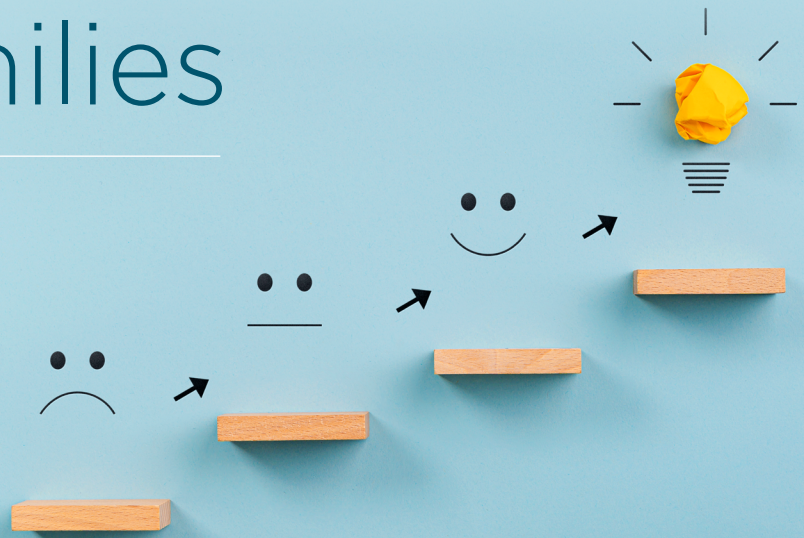


TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE BASICS

What is an IEP?	2
The IEP and Parent's Rights	2
What is an IPRC?	3
The IPRC and Parent's Rights	4
Pro's and Cons of the IPRC Process	4

VOCABULARY GLOSSARY

Modifications	5
Accommodations	5
IEP Goals	6
Curriculum Expectations	6
High School Achievements	
High School Diploma	
High School Certificate	
Certificate of Accomplishment	

THE IEP PROCESS

1. Gathering Information	7
2. Setting the Direction	7
3. Developing an IEP	8
4. Implementing the IEP	9
5. Reviewing and Updating the IEP	9

WHO IS ON THE "TEAM"?

Student	10
Parents	10
Principal	10
Special Education Teacher	10
Classroom Teacher	10
Education Assistant	10
Support Personnel	10

STRATEGIES FOR ENSURING COLLABORATION 11

SOURCES 11

THE BASICS

WHAT IS AN IEP?

An intervention

A written plan of action that describes a child's learning needs, and the teaching strategies that will best support a child's learning.

A document that summarizes:

- a student's strengths and needs,
- clearly identifies goals and expectations,
- and keeps a record of important resources, supports, successful teaching strategies and personal information about a student.

A focused, flexible document that is developed by school staff in collaboration with parents and a student.

An accountability and planning tool for educators, parents and a student to work together to reach a goal(s) and focus their efforts on a common purpose.

A good IEP provides consistency, continuity, and a clear strategy to educators who are developing lesson plans and designing learning opportunities for students.

An IEP is not

A detailed record of every minute of a student's day.

A teacher's effort to meet Ministry requirements. An IEP should be created for a specific objective and with collaboration from parents. Otherwise, an IEP risks becoming "just paperwork" and will sit in a student's file rather than an effective and meaningful tool.

A one-time meeting, or lifeless document. For an IEP to be effective, it should be used, regularly reviewed, and updated by everyone working with a student.

THE IEP AND PARENT'S RIGHTS

Ontario Regulation 181/98:

School principals are responsible for ensuring that every student who has been identified through an Identification Placement Review Committee (IPRC) process has an IEP. They are required to do this within 30 days of a student's placement in a special education program.

A transition plan must also be developed for students (14 years of age or older) who are moving from secondary school to post-secondary activities.

A student does not need to go through the IPRC process to have an IEP developed for them.

Policy Memorandum No. 140:

School principals are responsible for ensuring that Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is incorporated into the IEP of a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Any school board staff or community ally who have previously (or are currently working) worked with a student who has ASD can participate in the IEP discussion.

Policy Memorandum No. 140 and Ontario Regulation 181/98 [subsections 6(2)-6(8), 7(4)-7(7) and section 8]:

Requires that a transition plan is developed for all students (from kindergarten to Grade 12) who have an IEP.

A transition plan must be created regardless of whether they went through the Identification, Placement, Review Committee (IPRC) process or not.

Policy/Program Memoranda Nos. 140 and 156:

Lists the requirements for transition planning.

WHAT IS AN IPRC?

IPRC stands for Identification, Placement and Review Committee.

Every school board is required to have one or more committees. An IPRC has a minimum of three members. One must be a principal or supervisory officer of the school board.

A meeting where a group of people determine whether a student is “exceptional” and what type of classroom placement they require.

There are 5 ways a child can be identified as exceptional.
(Behaviour, communication, intellectual, physical, multiple)

Types of placements that are available include:

- Regular class with indirect support (support from technology, peers, etc.)
- Regular class with resource assistant (support from EA, SERT)
- Regular class with withdrawal assistance (outside the regular class for part of the day)
- Special class placement (special education classroom)

If you want more information about the IPRC process read Ontario Regulation 181/98.

THE IPRC AND PARENT'S RIGHTS

Your school or school board is required to publish a parent's guide to the IPRC process.

If you feel the process has not been followed correctly, or if you have concerns about decisions that have been made, you have the right to appeal. That means, there is a formal process in place for you to voice your concerns.

The school's parent's guide to the IPRC process will describe your rights to appeal and the steps involved. The guide should also include a list of community organizations and associations that parents can contact for advice/or help.

Parents Rights:

- To be present at IPRC discussions and meetings where decisions are made
- To request other people attend the meetings with you
- To have a review meeting yearly
- To make submissions to the committee about what you feel should be included in your child's IE.
- To give or refuse medical assessments that are being requested by the school
- To appeal a decision that was made by the committee
- To have an IEP in place within 30 days of the decision

NOTE: With a parent's consent, adjustments are sometimes made to a student's situation without a formal IPRC meeting.

Parents and principals can call for an IPRC meeting at any time when either party deems it necessary for the success of the student.

Parents can ask for information in a language they understand and/or are more comfortable with.

THINGS FOR PARENTS TO CONSIDER ABOUT THE IPRC PROCESS

The IPRC process gives parents or guardians a legal framework for,

- ensuring the timely development of an IEP,
- ensuring they and their child (16 yrs. and older) has decision-making power.

The IPRC process gives parents/guardians and educators the right to appeal decisions. It also enables officials beyond the school or school board to intervene should difficulties arise.

An IPRC process is not required to have an IEP.

Families who have fully inclusive education in mind, will want to consider if the IPRC is necessary for their child's success. Much can be accomplished by working proactively, maintaining good parent-to-school communication and by working closely with educators.

Sometimes, the best placement for your child is not available, you may find you are offered the second-best possible placement.

VOCABULARY GLOSSARY

MODIFICATIONS

A curriculum modification is a change that is made to the curriculum to adjust learning expectations to a level that a child can understand.

For example, a student may work on a grade 1 math curriculum while their peers work on a grade 6 math curriculum.

Modifications can also involve:

- Changing expectations to a level that a child can meet
- Decreasing the number of expectations
- Decreasing the complexity of the regular curriculum expectations
- Enables students to remain in a classroom with peers their own age

Parents Should Note: Modifications can impact the number of credits a student earns.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations are individualized supports that a student needs to meet curriculum expectations.

Accommodations consider a child's learning style, pace, and goals.

A FEW TYPES OF ACCOMMODATIONS	SOME EXAMPLES
Adjustments that are made to how information is taught	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using visuals, chunking information into smaller bits
Adjustments to how a child is assessed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Testing vs a project assignment• Giving a child extra time
Adjustments to how a child is asked to demonstrate what they have learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Giving a presentation vs writing an essay
Human supports that may be needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having a scribe
Technology that is needed to better understand or communicate in the classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using headphones• Special lighting• Use of a computer or ipad

Accommodations do not alter curriculum expectations. They do not change what your child is learning. They just allow information or assessment (grading) to be given in a different way.

Accommodations can be instructional (the way something is taught), environmental (physical surroundings) or change the way a student is assessed (graded).

IEP GOALS:

Goals are generally broad and written with a target in mind.

Ask educators to align curriculum goals with long-term goals for life beyond school. This will help educators to support your child to learn and practice skills that are relevant to your long-term vision.

Curriculum Goal Example: The student will demonstrate an understanding of how to write a standard resume.

Life Goal Example: The student will develop skills that will prepare them for employment in a retail work environment.

CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS:

In general, expectations are specific and are both measurable and observable. They identify what a student will be asked to demonstrate. Curriculum expectations are outlined in Ontario's Ministry curriculum documents for each course.

HIGH SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENTS

A) High School Diploma (OSSD)

- 18 compulsory credits and 12 electives
- Must pass Ontario literacy testing
- 40 hrs of community service (volunteering)
- Required for college or university programs
- Beneficial to have when applying for jobs

B) High School Certificate (OSSC)

- 14 credits (7 compulsory and 7 electives)
- Not required to pass literacy test
- Not required to complete volunteer hours

C) Certificate of Accomplishment

- For students who are leaving school at 18
- Recognizes achievements a student has made and can be useful for applications to other training or employment beyond high school
- Accompanied by a student's transcript and their IEP (if applicable)

Students can return to school to earn more credits or take non-credit courses.

If a student returns to school, they can attain an OSSD or OSSC if they complete the necessary requirements.

THE IEP PROCESS

1. GATHERING INFORMATION

The purpose of an IEP is to address a student's significant learning need. Educators will gather information so that they can better understand your child's needs and what they can do to help your child to be successful. In some cases, they may want to investigate further, conduct new tests, or seek advice from experts (ex. medical professionals). Information varies from case to case but in general here are a few things that you can expect will be collected.

Documentation:

Every student in Ontario has an OSR or Ontario Student Record and it is a great starting place.

- Report cards
- Previous IEP's or IPRC notes/documents
- Medical assessment results
- Formal testing results (ex. literacy test results)
- Information on specialized equipment

Perspectives:

Gathering perspectives from a variety of people that know the student well and have a history with them (ex. parents, principals, special education teachers, previous teachers, other professionals, and the student themselves) also provides good information.

- Classroom observations and evidence of successful teaching strategies
- Samples of a student's work from a certain year or even over time

2. SETTING THE DIRECTION

Ideally, several people would collaborate and be involved in developing an IEP. However, the written preparation of an IEP is commonly done by the student's classroom teacher or in collaboration with the special education teacher. Many schools in Ontario have a team in place that meets and discusses the students who use services at school or who are in a special education program. These professionals are also commonly used to help shape and give direction to an IEP.

Parents can be involved in this process by:

- Attending ALL meetings
- Filling in paper work from the school, sending it back early and following up on it
- Coming to IEP meetings prepared to speak about their vision for the child's future or expectations for them.
- Bringing evidence of your child's strengths, understanding or skills (ex. a video, previous school work) to meetings.

3. DEVELOPING AN IEP

Once information is gathered, reviewed, and once any gaps or discrepancies have been addressed, the material is summarized in an IEP document.

School boards will either use their own IEP template or the Ontario Ministry of Education's template (2007).

An IEP document includes the following information:

Student Profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contact information, medical and health information, child's strengths and needs, a reason for implementing an IEP
Assessment Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Curriculum and education pathways a student has followed or is currently pursuing• Accommodations that have been made• Any standardized testing results (ex. grade 3, 6, and 9 literacy tests)
Special Education Program Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Course-specific information• Goals and expectations for learning• Teaching strategies/notes and resources
Transition Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Long and short-term goals• Actions (strategies and resources) required to meet those goals• Timelines
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Members of the education team• Log of communication
Approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Signed by administrators and parents/guardians

NOTE: Not every section of the form will be filled out every time. Due to time constraints, it is likely that the focus will only be given to areas of the document that need the most attention.

Good questions to ask: Who will track my child's progress? How will the record keeping be handled? Who will be responsible for communicating and to whom? What is the time frame for accomplishing the goals and needs that have been outlined in the IEP? How can I support these goals at home?

4. IMPLEMENTING THE IEP

Parents and educators need to be informed of any changes or adjustments to the IEP.

The IEP is a working document. It should evolve and change over time. A red flag that this is not happening is if goals or details of an IEP have not changed overtime.

Most IEP's need to be adjusted early on.

5. REVIEWING AND UPDATING THE IEP

Progress on strategies, goals and expectations is recorded in a student's report card by their teacher.

A crucial step in developing an IEP is establishing a monitoring cycle. A student's IEP must be reviewed at least once every reporting period. Principals are responsible for ensuring IEPs are updated.

Good questions to ask: Does the plan still reflect my child's needs and goals? Are the strategies and resources still effective? If so, what evidence is there that strategies and resources have been effective? Is there any new information that might change our plan? Is my child showing interest and commitment to the learning process?

WHO IS ON THE “TEAM”

Usually, a core group of people make up the team: the principal (or designate), classroom teacher, and special education teacher. Other teachers, professionals, parents-guardians, and advocates can also be added to the team depending on the student’s needs and goals. The group should work together, but every person should have a role in the process. As a parent or guardian, these are the people you may want to get to know, build rapport with, and maybe even invite to be part of the process.

STUDENT

Having your child involved in the process from a young age will help them to be ready to advocate for themselves in high school and as an adult. Even if your child isn’t involved in the conversation, having a presence in the meeting reminds people of who they are there for. If your child cannot be present, find a way to make them part of the process.

For example: bring a video or photo of your child, have them draw a picture of their goals for the future or their interests.

PARENTS

- Hold a wealth of information and history of the child’s learning and overall well-being
- Required to implement interventions both at home and school

PRINCIPAL

- Head of the team
- Assigns one member to carry primary responsibility for the IEP
- Responsible for meeting provincial requirements
- Strong admin support is a key factor for success

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER

- Sometimes called the SERT or special education resource teacher
- Usually responsible for scheduling, chairing, and maintaining records for team meetings
- Usually, the person ready to assist in designing and implementing interventions

CLASSROOM TEACHER

- Usually collects most of the assessment data, often in collaboration with the Special Education teacher
- Likely to carry out the strategies and implement the IEP
- Responsible for making sure that the rest of the team understands what can be accommodated reasonably in the classroom
- Most likely to be the person to communicate with parents

EDUCATION ASSISTANT (EA)

- Under the direction of the teacher, is responsible for certain types of instruction or assistance within the classroom or school

SUPPORT PERSONNEL

- Not regular attendees at meetings and are only there when their insight or expertise is needed

STRATEGIES FOR ENSURING COLLABORATION

WHAT MAKES A TEAM SUCCEED?

A common focus. Good communication. Patience. A positive attitude.

Guidelines for families:

- ✓ Initiate regular meetings and check-ins
- ✓ Have a communication plan with your child's teacher
- ✓ Bring people who will support your vision
- ✓ Set time limits for tasks
- ✓ Follow up on agenda items, tasks and outcomes
- ✓ Set review dates
- ✓ Keep records, or take meeting notes or ask to receive a copy of them if someone else takes notes
- ✓ Share responsibility
- ✓ Be respectful of alternative perspectives and approaches
- ✓ Be a positive, team player
- ✓ Voice your appreciation and recognize positive outcomes or achievements

MORE WAYS THAT PARENTS CAN BE INVOLVED

- ✓ Attend ALL meetings
- ✓ Keep records of information that could be evidence of your child's abilities, strengths or needs
- ✓ Bring these items to IEP meetings or review meetings
- ✓ Share your insights! Be open and honest
- ✓ Ask LOTS of questions. If you don't understand, ask questions until you do
- ✓ Ask for information in a language you understand
- ✓ Assume the best
- ✓ Focus on the common goal to help your child reach their fullest potential

SOURCES

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