



# A Handbook for New Elementary Teachers in Ontario



# Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

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# The problem: teacher education often doesn't prepare new teachers to teach exceptional learners in an inclusive classroom

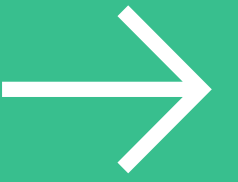
Today, more than ever before, general education teachers must teach a wide range of learners with diverse needs, as inclusive classrooms are the norm. Teachers must provide instruction that meets the needs of all learners, including those with exceptionalities (Stanovich and Jordan, p.173). Research shows that many new teachers do not feel prepared to teach in an inclusive classroom. This is a problem. McCrimmon explains, "[Many] Canadian BEd programs do not provide adequate training regarding the specifics of childhood disabilities. As a result, many Canadian teachers struggle with the application of inclusive principles in their classrooms and find the education of children with exceptional learning needs challenging" (p.236).

One of the essential parts of inclusive education is IEPs. The goal of this handbook is to create a resource that can help new teachers to feel more prepared to create and implement IEPs, helping them to meet the needs of all learners.





# What is an IEP?



An IEP refers to the document that is written for a student with an exceptionality / exceptional needs and to the individualized school program that they are provided with (Stanovich and Jordan, 2010). IEPs play a role in ensuring that all students are provided with the support that they need in order to learn. The document "must house specific data, including the current performance level of the child (academic, functional, and social), the annual goals and measurable short-term objectives, any specific education services (changes or adaptations to the study program) provided for the child, the date and expected duration of said services, as well as achievement criteria and the assessment dates and details" (Tremblay and Belley, 2017, p.3017). In Ontario, IEPs are developed if a student is identified as exceptional by the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC), or if a school believes that the student needs a special education program, even if they are not formally identified as exceptional.

IEP = INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN



# Why IEPs are Important (1)

The *Education Act* requires that schools provide a special education program for students who can benefit from it, whether or not they have a formal diagnosis of an exceptionality. All children and youth have a legal right to education, and school boards are responsible for providing special education to students of all needs and abilities. A special education program includes a plan (the IEP) that can help meet the needs of the student (Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Education Act*).

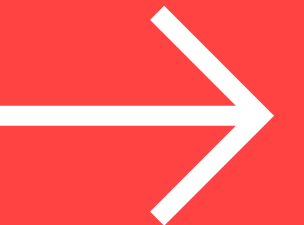
The Ontario Ministry of Education believes that "of particular importance [...] is the goal of ensuring equity, with its focus on providing the best possible learning opportunities and supports for students who may be at risk of not succeeding. Everyone in our publicly funded education system – regardless of background or personal circumstance – must feel engaged and included..." (Ontario Ministry of Education, *Special Education in Ontario*, p.2). IEPs are one of the ways to ensure equity for all students.





# Why IEPs are Important (2)

As stated, inclusive classrooms are the norm. In a typical elementary classroom in Ontario, there are students of many differing abilities and needs, and not all students are performing at grade level. IEPs allow students of different abilities, needs, and exceptionalities to be in classrooms with students of similar ages. This is important, as research shows that inclusive education can be very beneficial. In *Examining the General Programmatic Benefits of Inclusive Schools* (2002), Douglas Fisher, Virginia Roach, and Nancy Frey explain that "[studies show that] segregation of students in special education in separate classes is actually deleterious to their learning and that students in special education generally perform better on average in a regular classroom" (p. 71). There are many benefits of inclusive education, and IEPs are one of the components that make inclusive education possible.





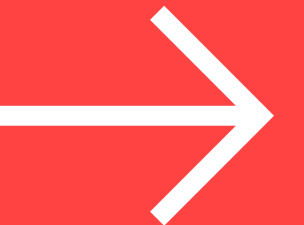
## Why IEPs are Important (3)

The Ontario Ministry of Education's document *Learning for All: A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students, Kindergarten to Grade 12* outlines some of their key beliefs, as seen in this picture taken from the document (p.7). For many students, IEPs play a large role in fulfilling the goals of these beliefs.

### Our Shared Beliefs

- All students can succeed.
- Each student has his or her own unique patterns of learning.
- Successful instructional practices are founded on evidence-based research, tempered by experience.
- Universal design and differentiated instruction are effective and interconnected means of meeting the learning or productivity needs of any group of students.
- Classroom teachers are the key educators for a student's literacy and numeracy development.
- Classroom teachers need the support of the larger community to create a learning environment that supports all students.
- Fairness is not sameness.

*(Adapted from Education for All, K-6, pp. 4-5.)*





# The Process



- Parents may request that their child be assessed by the IPRC. The principal may also decide that they want a student to be assessed. At a meeting, the IPRC will assess the student to diagnose the exceptionality and recommend special education programs that would be helpful (including an IEP). The IPRC process may be skipped if a parent does not request one and if that school decides to create an IEP without a formal diagnosis
- An IEP is formed by the IEP team. The IEP team differs based on the student, but generally includes the student's teachers and special education educators (such as the resource teacher) in consultation with the student's parents/guardians.
- The teacher observes and reflects on the student's progress, and adjusts the IEP if necessary.
- The IEP is shared with parents and relevant school staff.
- The teacher reviews and updates the IEP at the beginning of each reporting period.
- The IEP is put into practice - modifications may be made, accommodations are followed, etc.





# The Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC)

The IPRC consists of at least 3 people. One of these people must be the school principal. Usually, the school resource teacher and other school / school board staff join. Ideally, the student's parents are also part of the committee. The IPRC assesses and identifies a student as exceptional ("identification"), decides what special education program is best for the student ("placement"), and reviews the special education program at least once per year.





# Components of an IEP

(1)



As explained in *The Individual Education Plan: A Resource Guide* by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2004), IEPs must include:

- **The reason for the development of the IEP:** this can include the decision made by the IPRC or a brief explanation of why the school chose to develop the IEP.
- **Student strengths:** this should state what the student excels at. For example, the student's learning style, learning skills, hobbies and interests, etc.
- **Student needs:** this should state why the student requires an IEP. For example, cognitive challenges, social skills, etc.
- **Health services that the student receives:** this should state the health services that are required while the student is at school.



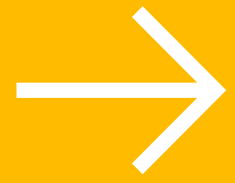
# Components of an IEP

(2)



- **Assessment methods:** for each learning expectation, the IEP should include an assessment method. For example, "2 minute oral presentation" or "paragraph written with text-to-speech software."
- **Documentation of consultation with the student's parents/guardians:** parents/guardians play a key role in developing and updating their child's IEP. Documentation of consultation with parents/guardians during the development of the IEP must be attached to the IEP.
- **Transition plan (if necessary):** a transition plan is not required until the student is 14 years old, but may be included if the student is switching schools, going to high school, etc.
- **Required accommodations** (*see Accommodations, Modifications, and Alternative Skills Areas*)
- **Subjects and expectations that are modified from the age-appropriate grade level** (*see Accommodations, Modifications, and Alternative Skills Areas*)
- **Current achievement level** (*see What to Include in a Modification*)
- **Annual goals** (*see What to Include in a Modification*)



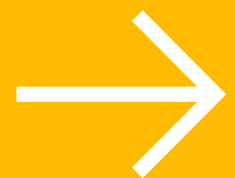


# Individualization

It is important that the IEP team really individualizes the IEP, rather than creating IEPs that are very similar for all students with a similar exceptionality. As stated by Michele Kamens, "The core purpose of the IEP *is* individualization" (p.78). It is important to focus on a student's strengths and abilities, in order to tailor the IEP to meet their specific needs (Kamens, p.78).







# Other Important Things to Know When Forming an IEP

- When forming an IEP, it is helpful to have data from formal assessments. Assessments include psychological assessment, behavioural assessments, occupational therapy assessments, etc.
- Although they contain the same information, the structure of IEPs differ depending on the school board. School boards will provide you with an IEP template.
- As previously stated, parents/guardians must be consulted during the IEP process. If parents/guardians do not consent to or sign the IEP, the IEP should still be implemented. Parents/guardians must know of the IEP, but their decision regarding the IEP does not impact implementation.
- It is important to involve students in the process. As explained by Hart and Brehm, "remind students there is a team of people working together to ensure their success, but that they are a member of the team and should take the lead in learning how to help themselves to be successful in school and life" (p.48).

**Individual Education Plan** IEP

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**REASON FOR DEVELOPING THE IEP**

☐ Student identified as exceptional by IPRC ☐ Student not formally identified but requires special education program/services, including modified/alternative learning expectations and/or accommodations

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**STUDENT PROFILE**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_

Student OEN/MIN: \_\_\_\_\_ Principal: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Grade/Special Class: \_\_\_\_\_ School Year: \_\_\_\_\_

Most Recent IPRC Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Annual Review Waived by Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Exceptionality: \_\_\_\_\_

**IPRC Placement Decision (check one)**

☐ Regular class with indirect support ☐ Special education class with partial integration

☐ Regular class with resource assistance ☐ Special education class full-time

☐ Regular class with withdrawal assistance

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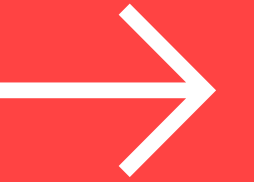
**ASSESSMENT DATA**

List relevant educational, medical/health (hearing, vision, physical, neurological), psychological, speech/language, occupational, physiotherapy, and behavioural assessments.

Information Source	Date	Summary of Results



# Accommodations, Modifications, and Alternative Skills Areas



## Accommodations

On IEPs, accommodations refer to a change in **how** the student learns material or completes an activity. The student still has the same curriculum expectation(s), but their means to achieving the expectation may be different. Examples of accommodations are giving a student more time to complete a task, providing a student with an audio story rather than written text, having a student orally explain their thinking rather than explain in writing, and adapting the number of questions that a student must complete.

## Modifications

On IEPs, modifications refer to a change in **what** the student is expected to learn. Generally, modifications involve changing the grade level expectations. For example, a student in a grade 3 class may be working on the expectations for grade 1 Math and grade 2 Language.

## Alternative Skills Areas

On IEPs, alternative skills areas (ALT) may be included. They do not correspond with curriculum expectations, but rather are non-academic areas to work on. For example, social skills, fine motor skills, or personal care.



# Examples of Accommodations



## Instructional Accommodations

- Reinforcement
- Assistive technology
- Graphic organizers
- Manipulatives
- Hands-on activities
- Larger fonts
- Mind maps
- Visual cues

## Environmental Accommodations

- Alternative work space
- Quiet setting
- Headphones
- Study carrel
- Flexible seating

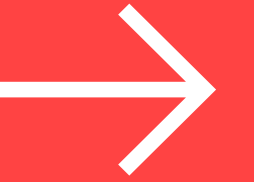
## Assessment Accommodations

- Verbal explanation of understanding
- More time
- Scribing
- Assistive technology
- Less questions

\*The accommodations that are listed on an IEP should be the ones that will actually benefit the *specific* student - not a list of all possible accommodations.



# What to Include in a Modification



## Current Level of Achievement

The current level of achievement refers to the previous letter grade that the student achieved. It is important to include the grade that the student was working towards, and *MOD* if the grade's curriculum expectations were modified.

## Annual Program Goal

The annual program goal refers to the general goal that the student is working towards in a particular subject. The annual program goal can be reviewed and updated as needed.

## Learning Expectations

The learning expectations refer to the specific curriculum expectations (put in language that is easy to understand) that the student is working towards for each modified subject. The IEP team can choose what expectations the student should be working towards. For example, if modified for grade 1 math, the IEP team could choose for the student to work towards a few of the grade 1 expectations rather than all of them.



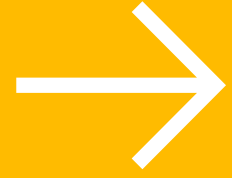


# The Classroom Teacher's Role

- Gather data about the student through observations, formative assessments, collecting work, etc.
- Play a role on the IEP team and/or the IPRC.
- Determine how the student can appropriately progress through the Ontario curriculum.
- Implement the IEP by following accommodations and required modifications.
- Implement the IEP by using individualized teaching and assessment strategies.
- Observe and reflect on the student's progress, and update IEP at the beginning of each reporting period and/or as needed.
- Communicate with student's parents and other relevant professionals.







# Things that Successful Teachers do While Working with IEPs

These tips come from Vicki Caruana's presentation "5 Things Successful Teachers Do Differently Working with IEPs."

- **Look at your beliefs and biases**
  - What do you believe about inclusion? How do you react when you see that students require an IEP?
- **Understand the nature of the exceptionality**
  - Make sure that you take the time to look into the exceptionality that the student has in order to better understand their needs.
  - Do not assume that you know everything about the exceptionality.
- **Embrace teamwork**
- **Know how to observe special education students**
  - Use naturalistic (i.e. anecdotal - direct observations in the classroom) and systematic observations
- **Be an active participant in the IEP process**
- **Tackle all necessary homework**
  - describe student's performance, review prior IEP goals, review curriculum, understand exceptionality
- **Gain understanding of key topics**
  - Understand the differences between accommodation, modification, and differentiation; review prior recommendations;
  - determine student's strengths, weaknesses, etc.; embrace UDL; know how the student is performing on goals
- **Stay on top of student progress**





# Other important things to know

- Teachers are required by law to follow the IEP. If the IEP is not followed, a parent could take a teacher or school to court. While IEPs need to be followed, they can (and should) be reviewed and updated as necessary throughout the year; i.e., if you put a modified learning goal on the IEP that needs to be changed, you will not be penalized. This is one of the reasons why constant communication with other relevant professionals and the student's parents are important.
- When reporting on a report card for a student whose subjects are modified, only comment on the expectations that the student worked on and that are listed on the IEP.





"They're a working document...it's ok/good to update it, and important to not just look at the previous one when creating the new one."

"I found I learned best when I had to do my own in my own class. I felt collaborating with the resource teacher was a huge help."

"The more you write them, the more you learn. But the key for me is keeping it straightforward and to the point. Use direct statements that makes the expectations clear and are things you know you can assess!"

# Tips from Teachers (1)

Teachers on Twitter were asked, "When you were a new teacher, what did you wonder about IEPs? What would have been helpful to know?" These are some of their responses.

"Collaboration as a team (school based and home) is the key to having successful expectations that are achievable and measurable"

"[Remember] 1) how important the strengths portion is to focus on 2) that most students with IEPs are average or above average intelligence 3) it makes your life actually easier as a teacher to follow and get involved in the process..."

"I wish people understood that there are people around to help you understand the IEP. Utilize the expertise of your school resource teacher, principal, etc."





"An IEP does not make your workload heavier, it can actually improve the classroom dynamic if a student is getting the tools and supports needed to feel they are succeeding."

"[Get] a better understanding of a Psych. Ed. report in order to create an effective IEP. We focus a lot on an IEP but it's also important to better understand the child through the Psych. Ed. before seeing the interpreted IEP."

"[It would be helpful to know] when to write MOD vs when to just write the grade that the expectation is. So I guess knowing more about technicalities! Having exemplars was always super helpful too!"

# Tips from Teachers (2)

"[It would be helpful to know] how the IPRC process really works (like step by step) and what happens when parents don't agree/consent to having an IEP developed or to specific elements of the IEP."

"It would have been helpful to know that the IEPs are a working document and can be changed and adjusted as needed if goals were being reached, or if they were perhaps not attainable at that point."

"...Never forget that they are working documents meant to be changed as the student moves on. I have seen too many IEPs look the same from one year to the next."



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