

**Your Educational  
Rights & Needs Matter:  
A Student's Guide to  
(IEPs) & Learning  
Accomodations**

Advocacy Working Group 2019-20

"If a child  
can't learn the way we teach, maybe we  
should teach the way they learn."  
- Ignacio Estrada

## OPENING WORDS

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Student well-being and support go hand-in-hand with student achievement and success. Through this studentmade, student-centered learning resource, the Ontario Student Trustees' Association (OSTA-AECO) looks to support students in having accessible knowledge of their learning needs, and more importantly, their rights. It is crucial to understand that education is not one-size-fitsall, and learning is an individual, subjective journey. With this, we hope to support students in valuing their educational experience through understanding that learning differently is never the wrong way of learning.

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*2019-2020 OSTA-AECO Adovacy Working Group Co-Chairs*

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## WHAT IS AN IEP?

An Individual Education Plan (IEP) addresses predetermined educational expectations and examines how a school may address these through accommodations, modifications, alterations and/or unconventional programs and/or certain evaluative, instructional and assessment methods.

Regardless of personal background, all students require support from loved ones, peers and educators in order to reach their full potential within the classroom. Specific students have special needs that require support beyond what is received in a regular school setting; an IEP provides the accommodations to ensure that students in need receive the best quality education and succeed amongst their peers.

### Useful Resources

The Individual Education Plan Process:  
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/individu.html>

The Individual Education Plan, A Resource guide (2004):  
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/guide/resource/index>.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF AN IEP

The needs of these students are not fulfilled through ordinary instructional/assessment practices. For specific programs/subjects/courses of need, accommodations and exceptional programs must be modified to suit their grade-level expectations. These students are known as exceptional pupils.

In terms of the format of an Individual Education Plan (IEP), it is a written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student, based on a thorough assessment of the student's strengths and needs that affect the student's ability to learn and demonstrate learning. A student's IEP must typically have a direct progress reporting link to the Provincial Report Card. In some cases, a student's program will include, in part or in whole, expectations derived from an alternative program (such as social skills, communication, and behavior management) as described in an IEP.

# DESTIGMATIZATION

According to the Ministry of Education, over 178, 500 “exceptional pupils” were identified by the Identification, Placement and review Committee (IPRC). With this, an additional 162, 000 students were also provided with a special education program and services, without being formally identified as exceptional. Students with learning disabilities often report feeling stigmatized and stereotyped in school settings. This can have dramatic effects on academic performance in critical subjects such as math. Such barriers to learning can, in turn, have a lifelong impact on achievement. While qualitative reports suggest the widespread experience of stigmatization in this group, few in-depth studies have examined this potentially important issue. We have the potential to inform and open new avenues of support in the effort to improve education for people with disabilities. Understanding more deeply the cognitive and affective experiences of individuals with learning disabilities is an important first step toward helping us develop effective interventions.

**SEEKING LEARNING  
ACCOMMODATIONS  
MAKES A STUDENT**

**UNINTELLIGENT**

**PROACTIVE**



# WHO CAN ACCESS AN IEP?

Learning accommodations are intended to aid exceptional students in developing the knowledge and skills required to live a commendable life in Ontario communities. Specific definitions and criteria are in place in regards to a student's identification as an exceptionality. These exceptionalities must always be utilized by school boards when a student is identified as a pupil in need of

an IEP. These are formally evaluated by an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC). School boards are also required to develop a written and official IEP for all formally identified students. With this, they also have the ability to create IEPs for students who have not been formally identified, but are receiving special education services/ programs.

## IEP GOALS SHOULD BE



# DIFFERENT VARIATIONS OF IEPS

In Ontario, students with the following exceptionalities require accommodations and/or modified educational programs:

- Behavioural
- Communications
- Intellectual
- Physical
- Multiple and/or all of the above

*IEPs come in many different variations for different students.*

There is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to an Individual Education Plan. They are supposed to be individualized and adapt to each student's needs. The *Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Resource Guide* states that the Education Act lays out 5 umbrella categories that students will be placed into for needing an IEP. The 5 sections are are put in place so educators can have a basis of where to start to improve students' learning. Also by putting students into groups it can allow for subcategories to be made for students to get the individualized help they need.

Students will not always fall into just one category and will sometimes. Especially because a student does not need a diagnosis to achieve an IEP since there are many different circumstances.





# ACCOMMODATIONS

Under the Education Act, school boards must practice in accordance with the regulations of special education services/ programs for exceptional students. These are laid out in Identification and Placement of Exceptional Pupils (O. Reg. 181/98), which include reviews which identify the placement of students and the identification decisions that parents/guardians may disagree with. Also refer to Highlights of Regulation 181/98<sup>3</sup>. If a parent believes their child will benefit from special education programs and /or services as described in an IEP and the school board does not agree, the parent has the right to request that an IPRC meet to determine if their child is an exceptional student. All exceptional students must have an IEP.

# COMMON ACCOMMODATIONS

There are numerous ways a student who has requested an IEP can be accommodated by their classroom teacher in order to best suit their learning capabilities, and have a fair chance at an equitable education. Some of the accommodations that are able to be made include:

- Oral and written instructions
- Use of visuals
- Photocopies of notes
- Study guides
- Use of manipulative or concrete materials
- Small group instruction

Students requesting an IEP can also receive accommodations in regards to their learning environment as well as the manner in which they are assessed. Some common accommodations include:

- Preferential seating (in a specific location to support student's needs)
- Alternative work location
- Additional time
- Use of a scribe for verbatim recording of responses
- Use of computer and/or assistive technology
- Choice of assessment

Every student has their own learning style and thus each student who decides to request an IEP will have their own, unique combination of accommodations, as deemed necessary by the student's classroom teacher. Accommodations will be developed through consultations between the student, the student's parents/guardians and all teachers who teach the student.

# HOW CAN I ADVOCATE FOR MYSELF DURING THIS PROCESS?

To ensure that your needs are successfully met, it is essential that you properly advocate for yourself. You can do this in various ways such as, building amicable relationships with your teachers, and establishing effective ways to communicate with your schools' councilors. To ensure that your needs are successfully met, it is essential that you properly advocate for yourself. You can do this in various ways such as, building amicable relationships with your teachers, and establishing effective ways to communicate with your schools' councilors.

Knowledge is key in this process, therefore it is important to ask questions when you don't understand something. If you feel that your needs are still not being met, talk to your guardians about consulting with a special education advocate. These can be accessed through local service or case management agencies. In addition, your local school district may have resources.

## WHO DO I CONTACT FOR SUPPORT?

Students who are looking for support to begin the process of developing an IEP should discuss with their parents and homeroom teacher to set up a meeting with the school and the Special Education Teacher (may be called the Student Success Teacher, Learning Support Teacher, Inter-departmental Special Education Head or other).

# ENSURING THE PROCESS IS CORRECT

The IEP process involves the following five phases:

- 1 Gather information
- 2 Set the direction
- 3 Develop the IEP as it relates to the student's special education program and service
- 4 Implement the IEP
- 5 Review and update the IEP

# MOTIVATION & CLOSING WORDS

"I am a Student Trustee and I served a one year Term with LDSB from 2019-2020. Not only that, but I have been a student who has had a Learning Disability (LD) since Grade 2 for reading and writing. For my LD I had to get an IEP (Individual Education Plan) for the longest time I had almost no understanding of what any of this meant. I just knew I was at the back of the classroom learning when all of my friends were at the front together. For the longest time I saw this as a disadvantage for myself and I felt as if I wasn't smart enough to do the work all of my peers were doing. The addition of being bullied for it didn't help either. However, once I got older and realized that without my IEP and the extra help I would have never been able to accomplish what I have. Yes, I will not disagree when someone says that it is difficult having a Learning Disability but I also believe that learning is not something everyone does that same, which is the beauty of it. Humans would have never been able to discover all of the things we did if it weren't for the different ways people processed information to bring up new topics. Therefore, the next time someone tries to say that learning in a different way or needing support they don't remember that you are only seeing a topic in a different light and just need a new path to understand it. Furthermore, that no one is less intelligent or worthy to learn; we all have that capability; we just need to discover it in our own way."

-Jessica Crook

*2019-2020 Limestone District School Board (LDSB) Student Trustee*

# MOTIVATION & CLOSING WORDS

"I helped write this handbook as part of the Advocacy Working Group of OSTA-AECO because, like many, I am familiar with special education and having to seek accommodations. I myself didn't have an IEP, but it's something that would have helped me. I have epilepsy and, many times, I had to seek out accommodations from teachers for modified work or extensions due to my seizures. The term disability is always difficult to wrap your head around, especially when you're in a classroom and you need to ask for things that are different from your classmates. I learned that it doesn't have to be a bad thing because asking for accommodations, asking for help, it's just to help you succeed. Everyone deserves the same opportunity to be successful. I spent time during my term as a part of my boards Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) and their IEP Subcommittee to advocate for students and bring forward student voice during discussions. This really allowed me to see that so many students learn differently and that it is okay to learn differently."

-Madison Davis

*2019-2020 Hastings Prince Edward District School Board  
(HPEDSB) Student Trustee*

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