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TO CONTACT

The Learning Clinic
4456 Noel Crescent
Val Therese, ON P3P 1S8
(705) 969-7215

rkirwan@thelearningclinic.ca

www.thelearningclinic.ca



A Parents' Guide To The Special Education Process

by...

Robert Kirwan OCT, B.A. (Math), M.A. (Education)
Education, Training & Career Development Coach

Helping Parents Meet The Needs Of Their Children Through A Better Understanding Of The I.P.R.C. and I.E.P. Process

It is important for parents to realize that access to Special Education services is one of the fundamental rights your children are guaranteed under the Ministry of Education. Therefore it is your responsibility to see to it that your children are receiving the kind of care that they truly need in order for them to accomplish their education and career development goals.

While the schools are doing a good job of providing an education for your children, you, as parent, are ultimately responsible for overseeing the development of your child, so you must pay close attention to what is going on in your child's classroom. The Human Rights Code further provides for equal treatment with respect to services of all kinds, without discrimination on the basis of, among other things, disability. Education is considered a service under the Human Rights Code, and anyone providing this service has an obligation to accommodate your child's needs upon identification of an exceptionality under the acts and regulations.



Unfortunately, the Human Rights Code also specifies that service providers may be excused from providing these services if doing so will cause “undue hardship” for the provider, “considering cost, outside sources of funding, if any, and health and safety requirements, if any”. This means that even if your child is identified as requiring special education services, funding and staffing limitations may come into play in the actual delivery of those services. This means that there may be times when you as parent will have to step up as an advocate for your child and fight for these services.

I have been contacted by many parents over the years who clearly do not understand the process that is involved with respect to identifying the special needs of their children. Many are frustrated at the lack of response of the school board to their demands for service, however, in a significant number of cases there is nothing more that the schools can do for their children.

Keeping all of the above in mind, I would like to examine the Special Education provisions that are available in the Ontario Public School System and which are designed to meet the needs of your child. If the following does not answer all of your questions, or if you feel you would like additional assistance, then feel free to contact The Learning Clinic Education Centre at (705) 969-7215 for further clarification. I will be only too happy to help you in any way I can.

The Learning Clinic Presents...

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO THE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROCESS

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Chapter One

The Fundamentals of Special Education

Section 1 of the Education Act defines a special education program as:

“an educational program that

- 1. is based on and modified by the results of continuous assessment and evaluation;**
- 2. includes a plan containing specific objectives; and**
- 3. includes an outline of educational services that meets the needs of the exceptional pupil”.**

Based on the above definition, you should keep in mind that whenever you see the term “special education program” it refers to “everything” including continuous assessment and a program plan that includes the “educational services” necessary to meet the needs of your child, but only if your child has been identified as an “exceptional pupil” according to the Education Act. However, when we refer to a student's "special education program" we usually include those students who are receiving services but who may not be identified as exceptional.



The term “special education services” on the other hand is defined as “facilities and resources, including support personnel and equipment, necessary for developing and implementing a special education program”.

Therefore, when taken together, a special education program must include some method of continuous assessment plus a plan that includes whatever resources and support necessary to meet the needs of an exceptional pupil or any other student who is in receipt of special education services.

What this means is that school boards must have a way of considering pupils who may need services; assessing whether or not they need services; and then finding a way of accommodating the pupil if it is found that the pupil needs special education services.

School Boards, under the Education Act, have therefore been required to establish an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) to consider pupils who may be deemed exceptional. They have also been required to establish a means of developing an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for each student so identified.

PLEASE NOTE ONCE AGAIN that the definition under the Education Act clearly states that a “special education program” is one that is provided for “exceptional” students.

This is an important distinction. There are many students in schools today who are receiving “special education services” of some sort, and for all intents and purposes they are considered to be part of a special education program. Nevertheless, unless they are “identified as exceptional” the school board is NOT obligated to provide those services. Those services “may or may not” be provided, depending on available resources and funding.

It has been my experience that there is a huge misunderstanding among parents who complain about not receiving "special education services" from their school. Upon further review of their situation I often find that their children have not been identified as exceptional. In fact, they may even have once been provided special education services by the school, but those services were provided during a time when the resources were available and the school board could absorb the costs. When conditions change, schools sometime have to discontinue the provision of services they are not obligated to deliver.

I will now provide you with an overview of the IPRC and IEP processes that form part of the Special Education Program in most schools in the province. This review should give you a pretty good understanding of how the process works. If your child is in need of special services, or if he has an IEP, or if you are scheduled to attend an IPRC meeting, then I would strongly suggest that you take the time to read the entire document that follows.

LEGAL OBLIGATION OF THE BOARD



First of all, the Education Act requires that all school boards provide special education programs and services for their exceptional pupils. This is a legal requirement that the board must adhere to. If the school board cannot provide the programs or services, then it must purchase the services. Funding is provided to the board to provide these services. Unfortunately, budget constraints make it difficult for the board to adequately address the special education needs of all pupils under their care so it is important for them to make sure that they are at least able to offer the services to students who clearly qualify as exceptional and for whom funding has been provided.

While many parents feel that they have a right to special services if their children are having difficulties in school, the fact is that many children who are having learning problems may not actually qualify for a special education program when reviewed by an IPRC. This has been the cause of much frustration on the part of parents who understandably are upset at the lack of support that is being given to their children. Unfortunately, the board’s hands may be tied because they simply do not have the funds which would enable them to provide



more special education services than that for which they are funded. Therefore, it is often left up to the classroom teacher to deal with the challenges of helping the other students who are underachieving in school but who simply do not qualify for assistance.

It is important to keep in mind that the Ministry of Education is very clear that “all students formally identified as exceptional by an IPRC must have access to an education that will enable them to develop the knowledge and skills they need in order to participate in the life of Ontario's communities.” This means that school boards MUST provide exceptional pupils with special education programs and services that are appropriate for their needs. School boards cannot opt out of their legal responsibilities, even if they claim a lack of funds.

To give you some idea of the extent of special education programs and services offered in Ontario, about 10% of all students enrolled in our public elementary and secondary schools have been identified by an IPRC as exceptional pupils. Another 5% of all students who were not formally identified by an IPRC are also provided with special education programs and services.

While school boards MUST develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for every identified student, they also have the discretion to develop an IEP for students who have not been formally identified. Therefore, they have seen it necessary to provide an IEP for almost 5% of their student population who are underachieving, but who are not formally identified. These students often receive similar programs as those provided to identified students, subject of course to budgetary limitations. Most students who receive special education services, but who are not identified as exceptional, will not have an IEP since the IEP implies some legal obligation on the part of the board. In order to avoid confusion, if a teacher can access special education services for some of their students in order to help support the program, then they will without developing an IEP.



It is clear that school boards are facing extreme financial pressures as a result of their special education programs which are much more costly to operate. If anything, school boards will exercise an abundance of caution when it comes to denying special education services to a student who comes before an IPRC meeting. Many experts feel that a significant number of identified students are merely underachieving and could benefit from other types of training and support, but the IPRC is providing them with a formal identification in order to access funding so that they can address their needs with qualified special education teachers. Without the identification the school boards would be hard-pressed to provide the classroom teachers with sufficient resources to meet the needs of their underachieving students. As the Ministry of Education faces continuing political pressure to trim budgets, the whole special education system is under attack because it is so costly to administer these services.

Nevertheless, if you are a parent of a child who is struggling in school, you will be adamant about the school board meeting the needs of your child by providing special education services. You want the IPRC to err on the side of caution and identify your child for special assistance, subject to annual reviews where your child may at some point be taken off the identification role. The IPRC is well-intentioned and my role as a representative of a parent is not to make life difficult for the committee members, but rather to help the parent get through the process and understand her responsibilities.

Always keep in mind that the IPRC process exists as a method of identifying and placing students who

truly do qualify as exceptional.

DEFINITION OF AN EXCEPTIONAL PUPIL

An exceptional pupil is defined in the Education Act as “a pupil whose behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he or she is considered to need placement in a special education program.”

Exceptional students are those who have special needs that may not be met through the regular school program. In that case the school board must meet these needs by modifying the age-appropriate grade-level program. The following chart briefly explains the different categories and definitions of exceptionalities that may be identified by an IPRC. If your child is identified as exceptional, then he would fall under one of these headings and definitions and you will see this on your “statement of decision” as well as part of your IEP.

CATEGORIES OF EXCEPTIONALITIES

An IPRC may identify students under the following categories and definitions:

1. BEHAVIOUR

Behaviour is a learning disorder characterized by specific behaviour problems over such a period of time, and to such a marked degree, and of such a nature, as to adversely affect educational performance and that may be accompanied by one or more of the following:

(a) Inability to build or maintain interpersonal relationships

(b) Excessive fears or anxieties

(c) Tendency to compulsive reaction

(d) The inability to learn which cannot be traced to intellectual, sensory, or other health factors, or any combination thereof

2. COMMUNICATION

There are five different classifications of Communication disorders.

Learning Disability:

A learning disorder evident in both academic and social situations that involves one or more of the processes necessary for the proper use of spoken language or the symbols of communication, and that is characterized by a condition that:

a) is not primarily the result of:

- impairment of vision;
- impairment of hearing;

- physical disability;
- primary emotional disturbance;
- cultural difference;
- developmental disability

and

b) results in a significant discrepancy between academic achievement and assessed intellectual ability, with deficits in one or more of the following:

- receptive language (listening, reading);
- language processing (thinking, conceptualizing, integrating);
- expressive language (talking, spelling, writing);
- mathematical computations;

c) may be associated with one or more conditions diagnosed as:

- a perceptual handicap;
- a brain injury;
- minimal brain dysfunction;
- dyslexia;
- developmental aphasia;

Autism:

A severe learning disorder that is characterized by:

a) disturbances in:

- > rate of educational development
- > ability to relate to the environment
- > mobility
- > perception, speech, and language

b) lack of representational symbolic behaviour that precedes language

Deaf and Hard of Hearing:

An impairment characterized by deficits in language and speech development because of a diminished or non-existent auditory response to sound.

Language Impairment:

A learning disorder characterized by an impairment in comprehension and/or use of verbal communication or the written or other symbol system of communication, which may be associated with neurological, psychological, physical, or sensory factors, and which may:

a) Involve one or more of the form, content, and function of language in communication and

b) Include one or more of the following:

- Language delay
- Dysfluency
- Voice and articulation development which may or may not be organically or functionally based

Speech Impairment:

A disorder in language formulation that may be associated with neurological, psychological, physical, or sensory factors, that involves perceptual motor aspects of transmitting oral messages, and that may be characterized by impairment in articulation, rhythm, and stress.

3. INTELLECTUAL

There are three classifications of intellectual exceptionalities:

Giftedness:

An unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability that requires differentiated learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the regular school program to satisfy the level of educational potential indicated.

Mild Intellectual Disability:

A learning disorder characterized by:

a) an ability to profit educationally within a regular class with the aid of considerable curriculum modification and supportive service;

b) an inability to profit educationally within a regular class because of slow intellectual development;

c) a potential for academic learning, independent social adjustment and economic self support.

Developmental Disability:

A severe learning disorder characterized by:

- a) an inability to profit from a special education program for students with mild intellectual disabilities because of slow intellectual development
- b) an ability to profit from a special education program that is designed to accommodate slow intellectual development
- c) a limited potential for academic learning, independent social adjustment, and economic self-support

4. PHYSICAL

There are two classifications of Physical exceptionalities:

Physical Disability:

A condition of such severe physical limitation or deficiency as to require special assistance in learning situations to provide the opportunity for educational achievement equivalent to that of pupils without exceptionalities who are of the same age or developmental level.

Blind and Low Vision:

A condition of partial or total impairment of sight or vision that even with correction affects educational performance adversely.

5. MULTIPLE

Multiple exceptionalities refer to a combination of learning or other disorders, impairments, or physical disabilities, that is

of such nature as to require, for educational achievement, the services of one or more teachers holding qualifications in special education and the provision of support services appropriate for such disorders, impairments, or disabilities.

CHAPTER TWO

THE IPRC PROCESS



The IPRC process comes into play quite often during the course of conversations with many parents who contact me at my private practice, The Learning Clinic Education Centre. When parents discuss difficulties that their child is having in school I always ask if an IPRC has been held for the child. In some situations, children have been “identified” and are receiving a modified program of instruction through an IEP as prescribed by the IPRC. In other cases, the children have not been identified, but are still receiving some form of special education support and service through a voluntary IEP which is the prerogative of the school to provide if the principal and staff feel it will help meet the needs of the

child. Many parents will be satisfied that the school is doing everything it can by providing some additional services, so often it is not necessary to have your child declared "exceptional".

You will see as we go on in this document that there is a very important distinction between an Individualized Education Plan that has been developed for an “exceptional pupil” as identified by an IPRC and one that has been developed for a pupil who “could benefit from the services” but who has not been officially “identified” as exceptional. On the one hand, an IEP for an exceptional pupil is a “legal obligation” of the principal and school board and a parent has a “right” to the support and services outlined in the IEP. However, even though the IEP for a pupil who is not exceptional may still be as comprehensive and as thorough as one for an exceptional pupil, the non-exceptional program is still being provided voluntarily by the school and is subject to budget and staff limitations. This is an important distinction if you ever get into a disagreement with the school over the level of services being provided.



For the most part, parents seem quite confused about the whole IPRC process. They know that their children are having difficulties and that they attend meetings at the school to discuss their child’s learning problems, but few of the parents I have spoken with understand their rights under the legislation, and fewer of them understand the IEP that has been developed for their children.

Acting as a representative on their behalf at IPRC meetings is one of the services I provide to parents as part of my private practice. I am therefore going to write this document as if you are a client of mine and I am providing advice and recommendations to you about the process. In so doing, I hope this will help you understand the IPRC process and be helpful if you find yourself involved in the process at some time. If there is anything you do not understand, please email me at rkirwan@thelearningclinic.ca so that I may be able to clarify the matter.

THE IDENTIFICATION, PLACEMENT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

IPRC is short form for Identification, Placement and Review Committee.

The Education Act (Regulation 181/98) requires that all school boards set up an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) that is composed of at least three persons, one of whom must be a principal or supervisory officer of the board.



In most cases, when you are asked to attend an IPRC meeting to discuss your child, you will be meeting with the principal of the school, the special education support staff member(s) who have been working with your child or who will be responsible for special education at your child's school, and possibly the Superintendent of Special Education. There must be at least three persons from the board present to form the committee. In some cases, the same three people from the board office will attend the meetings. In other cases, a committee consisting entirely of the principal and special education staff members from your school will form the committee.

Your child's teacher "should" be present, however, because of your child's teaching responsibilities, if the meeting is held during the day; your child's teacher may be unable to attend. I would recommend that if you are called to an IPRC meeting you should insist that the meeting be held at a time when your child's main teacher is available so that your child's teacher can be part of the process. If the teacher is not present, you can be assured that the teacher will have made some sort of report or evaluation that will be taken into consideration at the meeting. But keep in mind that you do have the right to ask for a more convenient time if you are invited to an IPRC meeting. Or at the very least, you can make a specific request that your child's teacher be present for the meeting and usually the Principal will comply with your request.

You should always keep in mind that the IPRC will always try their best to accommodate your requests in this process, so you are strongly encouraged to communicate your wishes rather than just complain in private if you are not happy with the date or time of the meeting. You do not need to fear an IPRC. It is a body that is interested in the best interests of all children at the school, however, you as a parent are the person who is ultimately responsible for meeting the needs of your own child. You are your child's advocate. It is expected that you will fulfill your obligations to the best of your ability. Therefore, do not be afraid of trying to get the IPRC comply with your wishes.

ROLE OF THE IPRC

The IPRC is responsible for the following:

- Deciding whether or not the student being presented to the committee should be identified as exceptional.
- Identifying the areas of the student's exceptionality according to the categories and definitions provided by the Ministry of Education.
- Deciding an appropriate placement for the student.
- Reviewing the identification and placement at least once in each school year.

Keep in mind that deciding whether or not your child should be identified as exceptional is the primary role of the IPRC. You must also remember that a significant number of children at all grade levels consistently underachieve in school. Your child may be one of those underachievers but he may not qualify for special education programs or services. In fact, studies have concluded that a rather large number of children who have difficulty with school do not qualify for special education assistance, so the IPRC will not simply "rubber-stamp" all students who are brought before them for consideration. There are many budgetary and resource constraints in place today that are forcing the IPRC to turn away a lot of "underachievers" who do not qualify as being exceptional. That being said, before a pupil is brought to an IPRC for consideration, there is usually a great deal of evaluation and investigation that has gone on beforehand. Your child's classroom teachers will have done their own testing and evaluation, in consultation with the principal, before recommending an IPRC. Therefore, most students who come to an IPRC meeting usually meet the criteria in some manner.

If your child is identified as exceptional, then the committee must designate one or more categories of exceptionality. This is necessary for the development of an appropriate special education program of instruction for your child.

The IPRC has several options available with respect to placement.

- Your child may simply remain in a regular class for the entire day and be given indirect support by the classroom teacher who often receives some special consultation on best practices that may be effective with your child.
- Your child may remain in the regular class all day long and be given specialized instruction from a qualified special education teacher, either individually or in a small group, within the classroom for a small part of the day.
- Your child may remain in the classroom for most of the day and receive specialized instruction outside the classroom for less than 50% of the school day from a qualified special education teacher. These are usually for short periods of 20 to 40 minutes each day or several times a week. These sessions may consist of one-on-one instruction or there may be a small group of up to 4 or 5 students with similar needs in the room at once. There is usually a designated "special education room" where the "resource withdrawal" students receive their instruction.
- Your child may be placed in a self-contained special education classroom for at least 50% of the day and then integrated into the regular class for at least one instructional period of each day.

- Your child may be placed in a self-contained special education classroom or school for the entire school day in more severe cases.

Once the placement is made, the IPRC must meet “at least” once per year to review the placement and determine if there are any adjustments to be made to the student’s program. These “annual meetings” are often held during the last couple of months in the school year for elementary school children who have been previously identified by an IPRC. Therefore, if your child has already been identified and is receiving a special education program under an IEP, you may be familiar with the annual review meeting. By holding the review meetings at this time of the year the principal is better able to organize his classes so that they are more conducive to the special education needs of his identified students for the following school year which begins in September. Several days of IPRC meetings may be held at this time of year so that the students can all be reviewed at the same time. For a school of 400, this may require meetings for anywhere from 40 to 60 students.

In some cases the IPRC meeting is held at the beginning of the school year. This is usually the case with students who will likely continue in similar special education programs from year to year without much change. Even though, I would recommend to parents that they make every attempt to hold the IPRC meeting in the spring or in June so that you can discuss your child’s placement and program for the following school year. It makes for a much less stressful summer vacation if you know exactly what your child can expect on the first day of school in September.

HOW DOES THE IPRC PROCESS BEGIN?

There are two situations in which the principal of your child’s school **MUST** request an IPRC meeting for your child.

YOU CAN REQUEST THE MEETING:

If you feel that your child may benefit from special education services, then you have a right to make a written request to the principal for an IPRC to make a determination. If you deliver such a request in writing to the principal, it sets the whole process in motion.

Within 15 days (these are actual calendar days) of receiving your request, the principal will usually contact you by phone to let you know that you will be receiving a written letter acknowledging your request, giving you an approximate date when the IPRC will meet, and providing you with a copy of the board’s Parents’ Guide to Special Education. When the principal phones you it is a good opportunity for you to ask for a day and time that would be most convenient to your schedule and also to let the principal know that you would like the classroom teacher to be present. It is easier to make the changes before the letter is written by the principal, so this is a courtesy on your part that will be appreciated by the principal.



The Parents’ Guide is designed to help explain the process to you and also to let you know about your rights as guaranteed under the Education Act. You can usually find a copy of the Parent’s Guide on the board web site,

so you should check it out even before you make the request to the principal. That way you will know how the process works. When I represent parents in these matters I like to come into the picture before the letter is written by the parent so that we can plan our approach together.

Unfortunately, there is no requirement as to how soon the IPRC must convene. The principal will need time to gather relevant material from the classroom teacher and also to have his special education teachers get involved in some of the initial evaluation. This may also include some testing at the board office. Some parents also use the time to have their children assessed by independent professionals who will provide their report that will be submitted to the committee. When the IPRC does meet it will have to take into consideration all of the available information in making the determination. Therefore, do not be surprised if the approximate date for your IPRC meeting is quite vague. You may be told that the meeting will be held some time during the next couple of months, or you will be given a range of dates. In some cases, this is a good thing because you want as much information available as possible so that the IPRC can make an informed decision. Your written request puts everything in motion.

Notwithstanding the above, if it is agreed by you and your child's principal that your child could indeed benefit from special education services, then the principal may make arrangements to provide those services pending the IPRC meeting. This is important for you to remember in case there is some delay in holding the IPRC meeting. For example, if the IPRC meeting is not going to occur for several months, then you may be able to arrange for some interim services that will at least help your child a bit while you are waiting. Depending on budget and staffing constraints, the school may be able to accommodate your requests. It is your responsibility as the parent to try to get as many services as possible for your child, so do not take this option lightly.

Remember, that it is best to "suggest" an interim consideration rather than just sit back and let your child continue to experience problems in school. When I work with a parent on this matter I like to discuss what the parent feels she would like to see implemented while we are waiting for the meeting to take place. This suggestion can also be spelled out in the original letter. For example, by simply requesting an IPRC, and by suggesting services that you would be satisfied with for your child, you may be surprised with the result. As long as you are not asking for the "moon" the principal may decide to comply with your requests voluntarily without the need to go through the IPRC process.

Quite often when a parent requests an IPRC it is because the teachers and principal have not felt that your child would qualify as an exceptional student. As a parent, you may feel you want certain services, but the school may not feel it is necessary. Rather than go through the trouble of setting up an IPRC, the principal may simply find it much easier to comply rather than oppose your request. After all, your concern is for your child. You do not want an IPRC meeting if you don't need one. That is why I like to get involved before the parent sends the letter requesting the IPRC. We may be able to achieve our goals much faster and with much less difficulty simply by asking.

THE PRINCIPAL CAN REQUEST THE MEETING:

If your child's teacher or teachers believe he may benefit from a special education program they will discuss their recommendation with the principal. If he/she agrees with their recommendation, then the principal will send you, the parent, written notification that an IPRC will be held. Once again, within 15 days of the principal giving you this



notification, you will receive the approximate date of the meeting as well as the Parent's Guide.

This notification is usually provided so that the principal may initiate special testing procedures on your child which will be used to help the IPRC make their determination when they meet. A principal will very seldom subject your child to this special testing without notifying you or at least receiving your permission for the testing to take place. Let me state that it is in the best interests of your child to allow the testing to take place, so unless there are extenuating circumstances I usually advise my clients to let the testing go ahead as desired by the school board.

Keep in mind that the principal will most likely give you a phone call to discuss his desire to schedule an IPRC meeting for your child. That phone conversation will have a significant impact on whether or not he goes ahead with the process. In most cases, this phone call will not be a surprise. As parent, you may have some indication that the call was coming.

This is where I usually come into the picture. A parent will get a phone call explaining that the school would like to hold an IPRC meeting for their child. The parent then calls me to get some direction and advice. We then examine all of the pros and cons of giving permission to begin the process. Keeping in mind, that the principal does not need your permission to initiate the IPRC process. However, principals do not like confrontation so they will usually accede to your wishes if they are reasonable.

NOTIFICATION OF THE IPRC MEETING

At least ten (10) calendar days prior to the meeting, the chair of the IPRC (usually the principal) will provide you with written notification of the date, time and place of the meeting. As the parent you will be "invited" to attend and you will be asked to indicate if you will in fact be attending. Note, that this is a notification of when the meeting will be held and an "invitation" to you as the parent to attend. Your attendance is not mandatory and you may not be consulted beforehand about when it will be held.



NOTE: I always advise my clients that if they would like to attend the IPRC meeting and if there are days and times when you will be unavailable, then you should send a written letter to the principal informing him that you would like to attend and then provide him with the dates and times when you will be available. By doing this you will be providing the principal with valuable information that will have to be taken into consideration when the IPRC meeting is arranged. If the IPRC meeting is scheduled on a date and time when the principal knows beforehand that you will not be available, it raises questions with respect to whether the board is doing everything it can to allow you as parent to attend this very important meeting. Therefore, you will usually find the IPRC is quite cooperative in meeting your request for a change of time and/or date. Therefore, do not wait for the principal to tell you when the IPRC meeting will be held. Instead, you send the information about your preferred date and time well ahead of time so that he knows

your preferences.

Before the IPRC meeting occurs, you will receive a written copy of any information about your child that the chair of the IPRC has received. This may obviously include the results of assessments or a summary of information of special testing. It should also include evaluations about your child that have been provided by the classroom teachers or special education teachers.

NOTE: I always advise my clients to contact the chair of the IPRC immediately upon receipt of the notification of the meeting date to request this written disclosure of information if it is not already included in the package. It is quite possible that the information will be included as a package when the notification of the meeting is provided. However, if not, you want to make sure that you receive the information as well in advance of the meeting as possible. It is not satisfactory for you to be given the information while you are in the waiting room just before the meeting is to commence. You want to have a chance to review the information and to be prepared to get involved in the discussion with the IPRC.

NOTE: I also advise my clients to send the chair of the IPRC any information you can provide the committee that may be relevant to the decision in advance. This includes any assessments you may have obtained, or any professional reports you may have already gathered. It is always best if all participants of the meeting are well informed and prepared in advance so that fruitful discussion can take place at the meeting. Quite often there are time constraints on the participants and decisions must be made quickly. Unexpected information that is presented by the parent at the meeting is not going to speed up the process, or worse, it may result in a hasty decision that may end up not being in your child's best interest.



NOTE: If you cannot attend the IPRC meeting make sure the principal knows about this. Soon after the meeting you will receive the IPRC's written statement of decision of the identification and placement as well as any recommendations regarding special education programs and services for your child. You will be asked to review the decision and sign it.

WHO MAY ATTEND THE IPRC MEETING?

The IPRC meeting is a very important event in the life of your child. This is not the same as an ordinary parent-teacher interview. That is why the parents as well as the pupil, if he is 16 years of age or older, may be present at and participate in all committee discussions that deal with the student. You as the parent are not just an observer at the meeting. You may get involved in the discussion and ask as many questions as you wish. You are also entitled to be present when the committee makes their identification and placement decision.

Besides the chair and the two other official members of the IPRC, there are a number of others who may attend the meeting. Please note, that in each case below, the key word here is that they **MAY** attend the meeting. Unless they happen to be designated as one of the official three (3) members of the IPRC they do not have to be in attendance.

- If your child's principal is not one of the members of the IPRC, he may still attend the meeting;

- Your child's classroom teacher;
- Special education staff from the school if they are not already part of the committee;
- Board support staff such a superintendent of special education or a board consultant;
- A representative of an agency who may be able to provide further information or clarification, such as Children's Aid, Social Services, etc.;
- Any other person may attend at the request of your child's principal. For example, there are times when your child's future principal may be requested to attend the meeting or your child's previous teacher;
- Any other person at the request of the parent or student 16 years of age or older. There may be people you wish to bring to the meeting to support information you are about to present.



PLEASE NOTE that you, as parent, are also permitted to be accompanied by a representative who may provide support OR speak on your behalf during the meeting. This is a very important consideration that most parents either ignore or of which they are unaware.

It is my professional opinion that it is advisable that you be accompanied by a representative who may speak on your behalf during an IPRC meeting. It is one of the services that I provide through The Learning Clinic Education Centre and one that I strongly recommend to all parents who are going through this process. It is not very expensive when you realize just how important the IPRC process actually is with respect to the future of your child.

The reason a representative is helpful is that a lot of information about your child will be discussed by professional educators who have many years of experience with the IPRC process. The process can be quite intimidating if you are sitting in the room by yourself without any support or representation, facing three to six educators who are making decisions on behalf of the future of your child. Having the services of a professional advisor representing you who is fully knowledgeable about the procedure and who has had a chance to examine all of the documents in advance will prove invaluable to you in the end. You will at least have the assurance that someone will be able to interpret for you what went on during the meeting and moreover that you have someone with you who will certainly be able to ensure you're your child was in fact given due consideration. As your representative I am in a position where I can ask the committee to "clarify" certain points that are made, or be more specific about assistance. In a lot of cases the terminology is kept vague so that there is more leeway when it comes to developing the IEP.

PRELIMINARY MEETING

Although there is no requirement for this to take place, there



are times when you will be contacted by the principal or someone else on staff to come in for a preliminary meeting. Some school boards encourage this meeting so that the parent can review the results of any assessments that have been done and go over the format for the IPRC meeting. Quite often the parent will be advised of the recommendations that will be made by the school staff during the IPRC meeting. It is a chance for the parent to ask questions about her rights under the Acts and Regulations and also to be informed of the possible or most likely outcome of the meeting.

While this is not part of the official IPRC process, if you are going to be bringing along a person to represent you at the IPRC, it is advisable that you bring that representative along to this meeting as well. There shouldn't be any surprises during this preliminary meeting since there is already a requirement for you to receive full disclosure of all of the information that is to be discussed or presented to the IPRC. This may be the way the school "discloses" the information. It is always a much appreciated courtesy when you have a chance to speak to a staff member in advance of the meeting in an informal setting, so you should attend. It also gives you advance warning of any particular information to which you may not be in agreement. Having an opportunity to discuss the information beforehand makes the actual IPRC meeting much less stressful.

Your representative may notice things that are missing or that require further clarification during this preliminary meeting. By asking the questions, the person from the school who is attending the meeting can rely the inquiry to the principal so that he can have the answers ready for the IPRC meeting. It just saves a lot of time.

Just a note that you should always request to see your child's OSR folder when you attend one of these preliminary meetings. The OSR will contain copies of all reports that have been made on your child in the past and they may contain pertinent information that you can use during the IPRC meeting.

THE MEETING

Because this is a procedure that is legislated under the Education Act, the meeting will appear somewhat formal at times. Nevertheless, once the chair introduces everyone and explains the purpose of the meeting all available information about your child will be reviewed. This will include some or all of the following, whichever is available:

- an educational assessment;
- a health or psychological assessment conducted by a qualified practitioner if they feel that such an assessment is required to make a correct identification or placement decision;
- If it is felt that one would be useful, and with your permission if your child is less than 16 years old, they will conduct an interview with your child. This is always an interesting situation. In most cases the interview will have taken place beforehand and the results simply recorded and provided at the IPRC meeting. Usually this would occur in some other context, but if it is going to be recorded as part of the IPRC hearing, then you may be asked to attend the interview. However, it is possible, depending on the circumstances, for your child to be asked to answer



a few questions in front of the committee. Keep in mind that you also have a right to request that your child provide information at the meeting. However, you should also keep in mind that as stressful as an IPRC meeting can be on you, the parent, it can be much more traumatic on your child. Therefore, bring your child into the process only if you are absolutely convinced that it will be in his best interests and will support a point you are trying to make with the committee. We will discuss this very carefully in advance of the meeting.

- They will consider any information that you wish to submit about your child;
- The committee may discuss any proposal that you may wish to suggest about a special education program or special education services for your child.
- You are encouraged to ask questions and join in the discussion at any time. This is also where you would utilize the services of a representative who will be able to ask some pointed questions of clarification about some of the issues discussed at the table.
- During the meeting information will likely come up that includes not only the academic performance of your child, but also behaviour, attitude and potential responses of your child to any changes that result from the decision of the IPRC.
- Once all of the information has been presented and considered, the committee will make its decision. You will be present while they make their decision.

NOTE: There is no legal requirement under the Education Act for anyone to keep a written record of what is said during an IPRC meeting. Most people in attendance keep their own notes, however, there is no official record unless discussed with the chair and all those present, and it is agreed that someone will keep official notes. From my own point of view, I would discourage official records so that all parties may speak freely about your child. After all, we want to end up with a decision that is in the best interests of your child, and when people know that they are being recorded, they are sometimes intimidated about speaking freely.

THE DECISION

After all of the information is presented, the committee will make its decision. You will be part of this decision making discussion.

The IPRC will then render its decision in writing, usually right at the meeting itself. As is often the case, notes are being taken during the discussion and these notes usually form the summary of the IPRC meeting. There is usually place on a special form for all of the items that will form part of the statement of decision so it is often just a matter of photocopying the notes and signing the document.

The written statement of decision will include:

- whether the IPRC has identified your child as exceptional. In other words, the first thing that must be decided upon is whether or not your



child is exceptional;

- If your child has been deemed to be exceptional, then the IPRC must indicate the categories and definitions of any exceptionalities so identified, as they are defined by the Ministry of Education;
- the IPRC's description of your child's strengths and needs;
- the IPRC's placement decision; and
- the IPRC's recommendations regarding a special education program and special education services;
- where the IPRC has decided that your child should be placed in a special education class, the reasons for that decision must also be indicated.

NOTE: Before the IPRC can consider placing your child in a special education class, it must consider whether placement in a regular class with appropriate special education services will meet with your child's needs and be consistent with your preferences. This simply means that the IPRC must give full consideration to your wishes when rendering its decision. This is why it is so important for you to make your wishes understood during the discussion portion. The IPRC realizes that if it makes a decision that goes against your wishes, they may end up in an appeal process which is never desirable. This almost becomes somewhat of a negotiations session with the IPRC to satisfy your requests. If your child is to remain in the regular classroom, then the decision will include recommendations regarding the amount of in-class support services, resource withdrawal services, etc.

AFTER THE DECISION

IF YOU AGREE with the IPRC decision, you will be asked to sign your name to the Statement of Decision to confirm that you agree with the identification and placement decisions made by the IPRC.

The Statement of Decision may be signed at the IPRC meeting or you may exercise your right to take the statement home and return it after you have had a chance to examine it more closely. Even if you feel you agree with the decision, I would advise you that it never hurts to take the Statement of Decision home with you so that you can have a good look at it before signing it. You have up to 15 days to bring it back signed if you are still in agreement with everything in the Statement of Decision.



If the IPRC has identified your child as an exceptional pupil and you agree with the IPRC identification and placement decision, the board will immediately notify the principal of the school at which the special education program is to be provided. This may mean that the principal of another school will be thus notified so that he knows he will need to develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for the student. This is why the IPRC meeting is usually held in May or June for students who are going to be going to another school in the fall.

IF YOU DO NOT AGREE with either the identification or placement decision made by the IPRC, you have the right to appeal, subject to some time-line restrictions that are outlined below:

1. Within 15 days of receipt of the decision, you may request that the IPRC hold a second meeting to discuss your concerns. Note that this means 15 days from the day of the IPRC meeting at which time you were given the Statement of Decision to sign. That is why it is very important for you to bring the Statement of Decision home with you to read before you sign it. You may find one or two statements or points of information that you would like to change or delete. You may also have been a bit intimidated and forgot to bring out a couple of suggestions during the meeting. If that is the case it may simply be a matter of making a “friendly amendment” to the Statement of Decision that the principal may be able to make without the need to call for a second meeting.



NOTE: If you do request a second meeting, you should have some additional information or points to present to support your objections. This is not simply a chance to repeat everything that was done during the first meeting, but an opportunity to “change” something about the original decision with which you have a concern.

2. If you feel that a second meeting will not resolve the matter, you can appeal directly to the secretary of the board within 30 days of the receipt of the original decision. Your notice of appeal will clearly indicate the decision with which you disagree and it will include a statement that sets out your reasons for disagreeing. If you do decide to go through the appeal process, I would strongly recommend that you get someone to represent you.
3. If the IPRC holds a second meeting and you are still not satisfied with the statement of decision, you have 15 days after the receipt of the second statement of decision to file a notice of appeal to the secretary of the board.

NOTE: If you do not sign your consent to the IPRC decision and you do not appeal the decision within the stated time line, the board will instruct the principal to implement the IPRC decision. You cannot simply ignore the statement of decision and hope that it goes away. If you do, the next time you will be in a position to request a review of the decision will be three months after your child is in the special education program.

APPEAL PROCESS

If you initiate the appeal process by submitting a written notice of appeal to the secretary of the board, the following steps will ensue:

1. The board will establish a special education appeal board to hear the appeal. The appeal board will be composed of three persons who have no prior knowledge of the matter under appeal. You will be allowed to select one of the persons on the appeal board. Normally, the board will select one of the other persons. The two selected persons will agree on a person to act as chair. Once again, the parties forming the appeal committee should have no prior knowledge of the case.
2. If you file an appeal, the decision of the IPRC will not be implemented, unless both you and the principal/board agree to a temporary placement pending the results of the appeal. For example, rather than doing nothing during the time of the appeal, you and your child's principal may agree on a temporary placement so that your child is receiving at least some of the services that may end up getting following the appeal.
3. The chair of the appeal board will then arrange a meeting to take place at a convenient time and place, but no later than 30 days after he or she has been selected (unless parents and board both provide written consent to a later date). Remember that this 30-day clock starts the day the chair has been selected, so if the two representatives selected by you and the board have difficulty agreeing upon a chair, then the appeal will be delayed.
4. The appeal board will receive the material reviewed by the IPRC and may interview any persons who may be able to contribute information about the matter under appeal.
5. You and your child, if he is 16 years old or over, are entitled to be present at, and to participate in, "all" discussions. Once again, remember that you have a right to bring along a representative who may speak on your behalf.
6. The appeal board must make its recommendation within 3 days of the meeting ending. This is where it is a bit confusing. You are entitled to be present and to participate in all discussions involving the appeal, therefore, it would stand to reason that the decision would have to be made in your presence. That means that the decision should be made at the appeal hearing. It is something that can be questioned if the appeal committee indicates that it will need more time to discuss the matter.



The appeal board may:

- a. agree with the IPRC and recommend that the decision be implemented; or
- b. disagree with the IPRC and make a recommendation to the board about the student's identification, placement, or both.

7. The appeal board will report its recommendations in writing, both to you and to the school board, providing the reasons for its recommendations.
8. Within 30 days of receiving the appeal board's written statement, the school board will decide what action it will take with respect to the recommendations. At this point it is important to note that school boards are not required to follow the appeal board recommendation.
9. You may accept the decision of the school board, or you may appeal once again by writing to the secretary of the Special Education Tribunal. Information about making an application to the tribunal will be included with the appeal board's decision.

NOTE: Very few appeal cases ever make it to the Special Education Tribunal stage. Most will be resolved at the board level because it is obviously not in the best interests of your child to continue to fight over placement. Most cases that end up at the Tribunal are due to the fact that the parent wants something that the board simply cannot justify. In addition, prior to taking the case to the Tribunal, there is usually a "mediation" step that can be considered where you and the board will be able to come up with a satisfactory resolution to the issues.

PLACEMENT REVIEW ANNUALLY

Once your child has been placed in a special education program through the IPRC, a review meeting will be held once during every school year thereafter. The review IPRC will examine the same type of information that was originally considered and will decide whether to continue the placement or whether a different decision is warranted. The IPRC will also, with the parent's written permission, consider the progress the student has made in relation to the IEP.



It is important that you attend this review meeting. Therefore, even if you are given the opportunity to waive your right to this annual review, you should still insist on it taking place. Legally, you, as parent, are the only person who can dispense of the annual review if you provide the principal with written notice of such.

As the parent, you also have the right to request a review IPRC meeting any time after your child has been in a special education program for a minimum of three months. You would only do this if conditions have changed or if you were originally not fully endorsing the decisions made by the IPRC in the first place. You may only request a review once in any three month period.

The school principal, upon written notice to you, is also permitted to request a review meeting after the three month period has expired. This may happen if he feels that conditions have changed.

Finally, the Director of Education may also request a review meeting in cases where the board is required to purchase service from outside the board.

CHAPTER THREE

Individual Education Plan (IEP)

When an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) identifies a student as an exceptional pupil, the principal must ensure that an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for that student is developed and maintained.

According to the Ministry of Education, "An IEP is a written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student. It identifies learning expectations that are modified from or alternative to the expectations given in the curriculum policy document for the appropriate grade and subject or course, and/or any accommodations and special education services needed to assist the student in achieving his or her learning expectations. The IEPs of students who have no modified or alternative expectations will focus only on accommodations and services."

There are only three reasons for the development of an IEP, and the reason for your child's IEP must be stipulated on the form

According to the Ministry of Education, an IEP will be developed for one of the following reasons:

1. An IEP "MUST" be developed for every student who has been identified as an "exceptional pupil" by an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee;
2. An IEP "MAY" be developed for a student who has not been formally identified as exceptional, but who has been deemed by the board to require special education programs or services in order to attend school or to achieve curriculum expectations and/or whose learning expectations are modified from or alternative to the expectations set out for a particular grade level or course in a provincial curriculum policy document.
3. An IEP "MUST" be developed, as supporting documentation, if an Intensive Support Amount (ISA) funding claim is submitted by a school board on behalf of a student who has not been identified as exceptional by an IPRC, but who is receiving a special education program and services.

Therefore, whether your child has been identified as exceptional by an IPRC, or the principal has decided that your child could benefit from a special education program or services in order to achieve the normal curriculum expectations, or if your child's learning expectations have been modified in some way, you will expect to see an IEP developed for him. Generally speaking, if your child is receiving any kind of special education services, even if those services are being provided by the classroom teacher, and your child's learning expectations have been modified from the normal curriculum, your child will have an IEP.

THIRTY SCHOOL DAY REQUIREMENT

An IEP must be developed within thirty “school days” of the placement of an “exceptional” pupil in a particular program. This means that once your child has been identified by an IPRC, thirty school days after his first day in the new program the principal must make sure that an IEP is completed for him.

If the IPRC was an annual review and your child will be continuing in the special education program, it means that the principal must make sure that within 30 school days after the beginning of the school year, (or semester for secondary school students), the IEP that was already in place for your child is reviewed and updated if necessary. If there are any significant changes to the IEP, you should be consulted. However, with a “review” of an IEP, there are many things that must be changed, such as annual goals, so you should be very careful about reading everything over again.



For example, when the teachers feel that, based on their evaluation and monitoring of your child’s progress, adjustments are needed in your child’s special education program, they may decide to make some changes to the IEP. These changes may involve new strategies and resources, increasing or decreasing the level of support, or adjusting expectations. If there are going to be “significant” changes to the IEP, and the key word here is “significant”, then you must be consulted before the changes are implemented. If you notice that your child’s program has been changed, and if you feel the changes are significant, then you should contact the principal for more information. It is quite possible that what you feel is significant was not considered such a big deal by the school. In any event, the date of all revisions to the IEP must be recorded in the IEP, so the next time you have a chance to review the IEP for your child, look to see if there have been any revisions.

This thirty day requirement applies to all students who receive a special education program, including those who have not been identified as exceptional but who are still receiving special education services. Remember that under the legal definitions in the Education Act, students who have not been “identified” as exceptional, are not “really” in a special education program. You may be receiving similar services, but you are not necessarily guaranteed the same level of protection or rights. Nevertheless, the time limits still apply with respect to the IEP.

Out of an abundance of caution, I would call the principal of your child’s school, or drop in to see your child’s teacher some time during the month of September and ask about the IEP. You should ask to see a copy of the IEP and get the teacher to show you where there have been any changes. There should always be some changes since the annual goals are only for one year at a time.



PREPARING AN IEP

Developing an IEP for your child is not an easy process. While the Principal is ultimately responsible for “signing off” an IEP, he usually delegates the responsibility of developing the IEP to one of his special education staff members and that person in turn will lean heavily on the classroom teacher. It is the classroom teacher’s responsibility to initiate effective planning and implementation of the IEP.

Information must be gathered from a variety of sources to establish a basic profile of your child. The recommendations of the IPRC are very important in this process, but other sources of information that should be reviewed include:

- Your child’s Ontario Student Record (OSR) which will include previous report cards and the previous IEP if your child had an IEP in the past;
- classroom observation;
- Your child’s current work;
- information provided by you, your child; school and board staff who have previous experience working with your child, and, other professionals and paraprofessionals, and, with your permission, information provided in various types of assessment reports and through diagnostic tests;
- results of further assessments, if needed, undertaken in consultation with you.

In addition, a list of all of the information sources used in developing and updating your child’s IEP must be provided. Therefore, when you, as the parent, look over your child’s IEP, you should see a list of all of the sources of information that were used to prepare the IEP and also all of the sources that were used to update the IEP if your child was already in a special education program. Take a good look at this list. It will tell you a lot.

As you can see, it takes a lot of work to develop an IEP for the first time. Once an IEP is prepared, it doesn’t require much more effort to update it since this is usually simply a matter of “adding” any changes or revisions. However, with up to 15% of all students with an IEP today, this means that an average class will have up to 4 students who are in a special education program with an IEP. It is not unusual for some teachers to have 8 or more students in their class with an IEP, which has huge implications with respect to accommodating their needs.



You will see just how much work is involved in preparing an IEP as you read the next section.

AN IEP MUST INCLUDE

When you look over your child's IEP you may feel a bit overwhelmed. It will be multiple pages in length and it will be filled with a great deal of highly sophisticated vocabulary and technological terms. Since you will be asked to sign a document stating that you approve of the IEP, you **MUST** read it carefully. The next section is an attempt to familiarize you with what you should be looking for. Some of the things are more critical than others.

(A) ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

First of all, the IEP is a legal document and as such it must include some basic information. Make sure that all of the information is correct and check the spelling and dates. It is embarrassing to look back at an IEP and see that you misspelled your child's name or put down the wrong date of birth.

- *Your child's full name must appear*
- *Gender*
- *Date of birth*
- *Student identification number (if applicable)*
- *Current school year*
- *Name of the school and principal*
- *Date of your child's most recent IPRC.*



NOTE: If your child is receiving an IEP, and you are certain that he has not been identified as exceptional, then you may or may not have had an IPRC meeting. However, if you have attended an IPRC, or if an IPRC meeting was held to consider whether your child was exceptional, then there must be a date in this space that indicated when the last IPRC meeting was held. Remember that an IPRC meeting must be held for all exceptional children at least once per school year. Most children who have an IEP have at least had one IPRC, so if the date is more than a year earlier, then your child is likely not identified as exceptional. You will see that on the next line. If your child is exceptional, then you want to make sure that there was an IPRC meeting within the last school year, or that you waived the meeting.

- *Your child's exceptionality*

NOTE #1: This is a very important section. If your child has been identified as exceptional by an IPRC, then the description of his exceptionality must be consistent with that provided in the IPRC's statement of decision. In other words, you should always examine the IEP while you have the IPRC statement of decision by your side so that you can check one against the other.

NOTE #2: If your child has not been identified by an IPRC, then you will see written somewhere on the IEP a statement describing the characteristics of your child that make the provision of special education services necessary. This is a very important section, so make sure you understand what is written in this

space and make sure it is consistent with the IPRC statement of decision.

- *IPRC placement decision*

NOTE#1: This section will indicate the placement options that are to be provided to your child. Once again, this information must be consistent with the IPRC statement of decision. The main options available may include placement in a regular class with or without withdrawal support provided by a qualified special education teacher; placement in a special education class with partial integration in regular classes; and placement in a special education class for the entire school day.

NOTE #2: You may also notice that this section is blank if the IPRC did not identify your child as being exceptional. In some cases students are merely given services by the regular classroom teacher and do not require support from special education teachers.

- *Your child's current grade and/or special education class placement*
- *Subjects or courses to which the IEP applies*
- *Relevant medical conditions*

This will include any medical conditions affecting your child's ability to attend school or to learn must be listed, along with any related specialized health support services that your child requires on a constant or intermittent basis. This only applies to the most severe cases.

- *Relevant assessment data*

NOTE #1: This is where you will find a complete list of all of the sources of information that were used to assess your child. We looked at how the IEP is put together above. This is where all of that information is listed.

- *Elementary school program exemptions or secondary school compulsory course substitutions*

NOTE #1: The IEP may recommend that your child be exempted from specific courses, such as Oral French. It is possible that your child may need to substitute other courses in place of the normal classroom program. Not only must these exemptions and substitutions be listed, but the educational rationale behind the decisions must be supplied. It is important that you take a good look at the educational rationale and that you be comfortable with those statements.

(B) DESCRIPTION OF STRENGTHS AND NEEDS

The IEP must also contain a description of the strengths and needs of your child.

If your child has been identified by an IPRC as being exceptional, then this description will be included in the IPRC statement of decision and what you find in the IEP must be consistent with that statement.



The description of strengths and needs in the IEP should, however, contain more detail and elaborate on the specific strengths as well as the specific needs of your child, especially if there are additional assessments and/or observations that have been made by teachers since the IPRC. This is a place where teachers may be able to be “less formal” in their descriptions.

The description of the strengths and needs of your child will obviously be reflected in other places of the IEP, namely with respect to the description of your child’s current level of achievement, the learning expectations and the special education strategies, accommodations and resources being used to meet your child’s needs.

(C) CURRENT LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT

This is where you will find the “baseline” position of your child. Here you will find information about your child’s current level of achievement in “each” of the subjects, courses, or skill areas to which the IEP applies. It is what will establish the starting point for your child and will be what is used to measure the progress of your child toward the achievement of his specific learning expectations. Therefore, when you attend the annual IPRC review meeting, the committee will look at the “baseline” position, examine the latest assessments and evaluations, and decide if the special education program has been successful in moving your child closer to the learning expectations outlined in the previous meeting.

When you receive copies of your child's IEP during every reporting period, you may notice that the "Current Level of Achievement" has not changed. This is because the summary formed the "baseline" or starting point for the IEP and was written when the IEP was developed in the first place. Each reporting period you will receive a summary of how your child has progressed in relation to the current level of achievement.



This section will be different for your child if this is his first IEP than if he has had previous IEP’s.

If you look at your child’s report card, you will see some indication on the report that will tell you if the letter grade or mark your child received in a specific subject was based on accommodated or modified curriculum expectations as per the IEP. If the program includes modified expectations, then the report card will indicate that your child has an IEP. Modified programs of study include expectations that are above (if gifted) or below your child's age-appropriate grade level. In other words, if you look at the math mark on the report card and your child received a "B", but there is an indication that he has an IEP, then it means that the "B" was based on expectations that were below normal grade-level expectations. Subjects which were not modified will not be indicated with an IEP.

In some cases a student's needs are so severe that his program must be modified so much that the Ontario curriculum policy documents no longer apply. In this case the program contains "alternative" expectations. Examples of this are in the areas of life skills.

Some of his subjects may require no accommodations or modifications. The subjects or courses in which your child will receive instruction will be classified accordingly.

Accommodated only (AC)

The term *accommodations* is used to refer to the special teaching and assessment strategies, human supports, and/or individualized equipment required to enable a student to learn and to demonstrate learning. Accommodations do not alter the provincial curriculum expectations for the grade. *Accommodated only (AC)* is the term used on the IEP form to identify subjects or courses from the Ontario curriculum in which the student requires accommodations alone in order to work towards achieving the regular grade expectations.

Modified (MOD)

Modified (MOD) is the term used on the IEP form to identify subjects or courses from the Ontario curriculum in which the student requires modified expectations – expectations that differ in some way from the regular grade expectations. Generally, in language and mathematics, modifications involve writing expectations based on the knowledge and skills outlined in curriculum expectations for a *different grade level*. In other subjects, including science and technology, social studies, history, geography, and health and physical education, and in most secondary school courses, modifications typically involve changing the number and/or complexity of the *regular grade-level expectations*. The student may also require certain accommodations to help him or her achieve the learning expectations in subjects or courses with modified

Alternative (ALT)

Alternative expectations are developed to help students acquire knowledge and skills that are not represented in the Ontario curriculum. Because they are not part of a subject or course outlined in the provincial curriculum documents, alternative expectations are considered to constitute *alternative programs* or *alternative courses* (secondary school courses). Examples of *alternative programs* include: speech remediation, social skills, orientation/mobility training, and personal care programs. For the vast majority of students, these programs would be given *in addition* to modified or regular grade-level expectations from the Ontario curriculum. Alternative programs are provided in both the elementary and the secondary school panels.

Alternative courses, at the secondary school level, are non-credit courses. The course expectations in an alternative course are individualized for the student and generally focus on preparing the student for daily living. Examples of alternative courses include Transit Training and Community Exploration (KCC), Culinary Skills (KHI), and Money Management and Personal Banking (KBB). *Alternative (ALT)* is the term used to identify alternative programs and alternative courses on the IEP form.

(D) ANNUAL GOALS

This is another extremely important section of the IEP.

What you will find here are statements that describe what your child can reasonably expect to accomplish by the end of the school year in the subjects, courses or skill areas to which the IEP applies. This means that if your child's learning expectations are modified from the Ministry curriculum guidelines, then you should see a statement that takes into account your child's strengths, needs and current level of achievement to describe realistic and "observable" achievements. The key word here is "observable". The goals must be written with "measurable and observable objectives"



so that it will be clear to determine the growth that is being exhibited in your child.

For example, instead of saying that one of the goals is to have your child become better at memorizing his multiplication tables, you would expect to see, “The student will be able to correctly answer 16 out of 20 multiplication questions using digits from 2 through 9, in a period of 5 minutes.”

If your child has an IEP and for some reason the curriculum expectations are not modified, annual goals are not required. This may be in the case if your child is gifted, in which case he is only required to meet the Ministry expectations to begin with. Also, your child will not require annual goals for subjects in which there are no accommodations or modifications.

(E) LEARNING EXPECTATIONS

The IEP must also contain learning expectations that describe the specific knowledge and skills that your child should be able to demonstrate during the course of the year. These are short-term objectives or stages that your child will have to demonstrate as he is progressing from his current level of achievement to his annual goals. It will give everyone a chance to determine how well your child is progressing towards his annual goals. The key here is that the learning expectations statements must describe specific, realistic and observable achievements. They must also be clearly identified as modified expectations.

Furthermore, these expectations must be reviewed at least once every reporting period and updated as necessary. You must be advised of any such updates which are entered and dated in the IEP.

When your child is under an IEP, you will often receive a copy of the updated IEP once every reporting period. This may or may not coincide with the receipt of the report card. The only thing that will change each term will be the "Learning Expectations" section which will indicate progress your child has made from his "current level of achievement" towards his "annual goals". It may not look as if much has changed in the IEP, since this is the only section where there will be changes made. However, if your child has accomplished some or all of the learning expectations for the previous term, then the teacher will be required to set up new learning expectations for the upcoming term. This will be clearly indicated in the IEP.

(F) STRATEGIES, ACCOMMODATIONS AND RESOURCES

The IPRC likely will have made recommendations for the special education services needed to facilitate your child’s learning, and as a result specific strategies, accommodations and resources required must be identified in the IEP. Further, they have to be listed in the following categories:

- Teaching strategies and accommodations;
- Human resources; and
- Individualized equipment

Teaching strategies that are listed in the Ministry guidelines include:

- using special resources such as reading material that is consistent with students' reading levels and



learning styles, and videotapes, audiotapes, and other audio-visual materials that give learning experiences greater breadth and depth

- using learning resources that provide direct experiences of seeing and touching (i.e., tactile materials)
- providing enrichment units, additional readings, and other opportunities (e.g., problems to solve) that extend learning
- using a variety of teaching and learning strategies, such as special interest groupings for research projects; peer partners, collaborative groups, and cross-age tutoring; mentorship programs; and independent study plans
- collaborating with resource teachers, teacher-librarians, and other professionals
- simplifying the language of instruction
- providing opportunities for performance in areas of special talent
- providing all students with strategies for understanding and accepting exceptional students and integrating them into the regular classroom

Individualized accommodations listed in the Ministry guidelines include:

- giving students extra time to complete classroom assignments
- allowing students to complete tasks or present information in alternative ways (e.g., through taped answers, demonstrations, dramatizations, role play)
- allowing students to tape lessons for more intensive review at a later time
- providing a variety of learning tools, such as adapted computers for completing writing tasks and calculators for completing numeracy tasks
- providing for the use of scribes
- using pictorial schedules to assist students in making transitions



Human resources include both teaching staff and non-teaching support staff.

Your child may require the attention of special education teachers who provide direct instruction in a regular class, in a resource-withdrawal classroom, or, where required, in a special education class. Special education teachers also provide consultation services for regular classroom teachers and other school and board staff (e.g., guidance counsellors or psychologists) to assist them in developing programs that are appropriate for the student. The IEP must indicate the type of assistance provided by special education teachers as well as the

initiation date and planned intensity of the services. There must also be an indication as to where the special education teachers will be working with your child. i.e in the regular classroom or in a special education classroom.

Your child may also require the attention of non-teaching support staff such as professional and/or paraprofessional special education support staff who provide developmental, corrective, and other support services (e.g., support as teaching assistants; support services in the areas of speech pathology, audiology, psychological assessment and counselling, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, social work, medical services). As is the case with the teaching staff, the support staff involved with the student, and the type, initiation date, planned frequency or intensity, and location of the services they provide, must be identified in the IEP.

With respect to individualized equipment, this category includes any type or item of equipment or any electronic product or system commercially produced, modified, or custom-made to maintain, increase, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities

Examples of individualized equipment listed in Ministry guidelines include the following:

- speech analysers
- FM systems
- print enlargers for students with poor vision
- amplification systems
- computer hardware and software
- individually modified desks or work tables
- adjustable desks or computer tables
- Braille writers
- symbol or letter voice translators
- insulated booth and study carrels
- communication aids, such as speech synthesizers
- positioning devices for sitting, standing, and lying down

If your child requires the same types of strategies, accommodations, and resources in all subjects, courses, and skill areas, the information may be grouped in the IEP in a separate section.

However, if your child's needs relate to particular subjects, courses, or skill areas, the information relevant to each may be included under individual program area headings.

(G) ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES AND STRATEGIES

Your child's IEP will contain information about the methods by which his achievement of learning expectations will be assessed. It is quite likely that some accommodations will have to be made to the regular classroom achievement procedures in order to give him an opportunity to demonstrate his achievement of the expectations. All accommodations must be suited to your



child's particular strengths and needs.

Some of the methods and accommodations that you may see indicated in this section include:

- administering tests individually or in small groups
- providing a quiet environment in which assessment may take place
- allowing extra time for students to write tests or complete assignments
- permitting oral responses to test questions
- providing for the use of scribes
- simplifying the language of instructions and questions used in tests
- encouraging student self-evaluation

CONSULTATION

The principal is required by law to make sure that you (and your child if he is 16 years of age or older) are consulted in the development and review of your child's IEP, and that a copy of the IEP is provided to you on its completion.

There will be a place on the form that lists the consultations that are made with you. It will be attached to the IEP and will contain the following information:

- the date of each consultation
- the outcome of each consultation

You (and your child if he is over 16) will be asked to sign this form and to indicate whether:

- you were consulted in the development of the IEP;
- you declined the opportunity to be consulted;
- you have received a copy of the IEP;
- any comments you provided are noted on the form.



STAFF INVOLVEMENT IN PREPARING THE PLAN

Your child's principal is responsible for ensuring that an IEP is developed for each student who has been identified as exceptional. He is also responsible for ensuring that the IEP is developed collaboratively by school and board staff members, who are familiar with your child and who, as a team, possess the knowledge and qualifications necessary to develop the most effective plan possible for your child.

This is very important. It means that everyone who has anything to do with your child will have a common understanding of his strengths, interests, and needs. They are each expected to bring important information to the IEP development process so that the IEP will contain the kind of instruction and support necessary to facilitate your child's learning.

In elementary schools, the principal or vice-principal is expected to coordinate and oversee the work of the special education team, which may include the special education teacher, the classroom teacher, the teacher-adviser, and support staff, in developing, monitoring, and reviewing each student's IEP.



Because of the size and organizational structure of secondary schools, the principal may designate a vice-principal or a staff member to act on her or his behalf in coordinating and overseeing the development of the IEP. In some secondary schools, a special education teacher will be assigned to prepare a draft framework for the student's IEP and to bring it forward for discussion with the student's classroom teachers, including his or her teacher-adviser or guidance counsellor, as appropriate, and with support staff. In other secondary schools, the student's classroom teachers may be more directly involved in the initial development of the student's IEP. It is also expected that secondary school students will be given the opportunity to provide input about their strengths, needs, and interests and the accommodations and special education services they feel are necessary to help them learn and succeed at school.

You should pay particular attention to this section of the IEP. Each member of the team involved in the development of the IEP must be identified in the IEP. This will give you an indication of the different people who had some input into your child's IEP.

The principal must ensure that, collectively, the team members:

- have knowledge of your child and, wherever possible, experience teaching your child;
- have knowledge of the Ontario curriculum;
- are qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, special education programs and services to meet the needs of your child;
- have knowledge of the special education strategies and resources available in the school board.

Although the IEP is developed collaboratively, the principal is ultimately responsible for each student's plan. The principal must sign the IEP to indicate his or her assurance that the plan is appropriate to your child's strengths and needs and that it meets all of the standards outlined in this document. If you have any questions, therefore, you may address them to the principal.

IMPLEMENTATION & MONITORING

The implementation and monitoring of your child's IEP will be an ongoing process. It is important that your child's progress be measured on a regular basis in order to ensure that he is meeting the goals and expectations of the IEP. You should find information in the IEP that addresses the implementation and monitoring plan.

REVIEWING & UPDATING THE IEP

During the course of the year your child's progress will be evaluated and monitored. If it is found that he is not meeting, or is exceeding the expectations described in the IEP, then the teacher must try to determine why this is the case. If the cause is related to your child's exceptionality, then the IEP must be adjusted accordingly.

Changes to the IEP may include:

- altering the strategies and resources used in instruction, or the level of support the student receives;
- developing new expectations, if learning is proceeding at a faster rate than had been anticipated by the plan;
- breaking expectations down into smaller steps, if learning is proceeding at a slower rate than had been anticipated by the plan.

If revisions of the IEP result in significant changes in your child's learning expectations and/or in the level of special education accommodations and services to be provided, you "must" be consulted before the changes are implemented.

It is very important that you give full consideration to any of the changes that are made to your child's IEP. If you are not satisfied in any way, then you "must" make your feeling known to the principal. I would advise that you should first of all give the principal a phone call to see if your issues can be resolved to your satisfaction. If you are still not satisfied after speaking with the principal, then you "must" put your comments in writing on the form that will be attached to the IEP. This form is kept with the IEP and will be looked over the next time you have an IPRC for your child. You "must" sign the form to indicate that you have been consulted and that you have seen a copy of the IEP, but if you do not put your comments in writing, then it will be simply determined by default that you are satisfied with everything about the IEP. There is nothing wrong with putting your comments in writing on the form. When you meet for the annual IPRC review, you will be able to point out your concerns to the committee.



Also, if the change to the IEP is such that you simply cannot condone, then you have the option of requesting an IPRC meeting if it has been three months since the last one.

TRANSITION PLAN FOR OLDER ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

If your child is 14 years of age or older, and he has been identified with an exceptionality other than giftedness, then the IEP must include a plan for his transition to an appropriate post-secondary school program that will be suited to his strengths, needs and interests. For example, he may not be able to follow the regular curriculum, so the IEP must indicate how the school is going to ensure a relatively smooth transition. The goal is to help your child eventually make the adjustment to the workplace, further education or community living, so it is crucial that the development of life skills is included.

A transition plan must be included in the student's IEP.

The plan must include the following elements:

- specific goals for the student's transition to postsecondary activities. The goals must be realistic and must reflect the strengths, needs, and interests of the student;
- the actions required, now and in the future, to achieve the stated goals. The actions identified must build on the student's identified strengths, needs, and interests;
- the person or agency (the student, parents, educators, providers of specialized support and services, community agencies) responsible for or involved in completing or providing assistance in the completion of each of the identified actions;
- timelines for the implementation of each of the identified actions.

It should be noted that the goals and actions outlined in the student's annual education plan should support those identified in the transition plan.