

Individual Education Plans

A Guide for Parents

By Catherine Abraham and Joyce Gram

in collaboration with the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils



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Many parents are not sure what to expect at an Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting. When they meet school staff on behalf of their child, they may feel vulnerable or even frightened. Often, they don't know what to do and are not clear about their role in the process.

Some IEP guides focus on rights and responsibilities in legislation and policy. In this guide, we take a different approach. Our focus is to help you understand how an IEP meeting works and how you and your child, working

Sample IEP Goal Showing Collaboration

- › identify times and activities where his anxiety increases, and maintain a log to track these incidents
- › provide daily computer-assisted learning time with a peer for math

Goal assessment and evaluation

Every two weeks, using a logbook, the teacher will review with Joe's parents his increasing time in school and his progress in dealing with anxiety.

Within one month, Joe will

- › form friendships with two other students

Within two months, Joe will

- › reduce the number of incidents of anxiety, as noted in the logbook, to no more than one per day
- › participate fully in the half-day program

This goal will be reviewed with his parents in three months.

Our Child's Role in the IEP

George Bernard Shaw

Our Child's Learning Style

Parents can find it difficult to label their child's learning style. But that is only because we don't think about what we know in those terms. When the topic is presented differently, we reveal the true depth of our knowledge.

We have no trouble describing what we do when we want to tell our child something important. We may get down on one knee, make eye contact, talk simply or ask our child to repeat to us what we have just told her. As parents, we know what works for our child.

When we give our child a new game, puzzle or toy, we know how she will approach it. Intrinsically, we know our child's learning style. It is important that, with our help, the school and teacher also know. This information should be included in an IEP and be used in setting goals and strategies. School assessments can affirm our observations and shed light on our child's learning style.

The Ministry of Education determines what must be included in an IEP. School districts have the freedom to develop a format that meets their needs. Nothing prevents us from asking for additions or changes to suit our child. For example, we may want to create a list like the following:

My child learns best when ...

- › she can be seated at the front of the class
- › she can watch others doing the task first
- › instructions are kept simple or are broken down into steps
- › she has an opportunity to discuss the task before beginning it
- › she is in a calm, quiet space
- › she feels she can work at her own pace and doesn't feel pressured
- › she has a chance to move around, rather than sitting at her desk for long periods

We may also want to create a list showing when our child becomes frustrated—at what times and in what circumstances. Strategies that work at home often transfer well to school, providing consistency between the two settings.

Children learn best when material is presented in a way that matches their learning style and unique learning strengths. Part of the rationale for creating an IEP with you, the parent, is to tease out this kind of information that schools need to help your child succeed. It's part of the collaborative process.

Sample IEP Goal Using a Child's Learning Style

Goal: To help Mark develop an interest and enjoyment in reading

Strategies

The teacher will

- › adapt reading materials to Mark's reading level, with the assistance of the resource teacher
- › help Mark select reading material at his reading level, including books on sports
- › include material with a sports focus in language arts units
- › extend time requirements for Mark to complete reading assignments, to improve his success rate
- › provide oral tests and/or a quiet space for testing
- › provide both oral and print directions, adapted to his reading level, on class assignments
- › send school assignments home for preview with parents
- › send vocabulary words home for preview with parents

The teaching assistant will

- › provide one-on-one instruction in sounding and blending unfamiliar words
- › maintain a daily journal, with Mark, to show his reading progress and accomplishments

Goal assessment and evaluation

- › Mark will select and read three books per week at progressive reading levels.
- › Mark's grades will improve overall in the next reporting period.
- › The teacher will meet with Mark and his parents monthly to review his daily journal.

This goal will be reviewed by the teacher, resource teacher and Mark's parents within three months.

Notes

Transitions

Transition to a new environment—a new schedule, new teacher, new classroom, new school—can be difficult for any child, but children with special needs are more likely to have problems. Research clearly shows that long-term preparation is extremely important and that our involvement in the transition is key to its success.

An IEP meeting is the logical and practical place to plan with children and school staff to ease these transitions. Ideally, when the transition is between elementary and middle or secondary school, staff from both schools will be involved.

A number of factors can change with a transition:

- › a new teacher or teachers, or from one teacher to many teachers, each with a different teaching style
- › new resource teachers and other staff
- › friends and classmates
- › classrooms and other locations
- › rules and expectations for student behaviour
- › schedules and the organization of the school day

All of these factors and more must be considered in IEP planning. We know our children and have essential information to share with the school about their fears and the challenges they will face. The more we prepare our child, and the more we ensure that each of these factors is considered, the better the transition will be.

—

Helping Children Cope with School Transitions

Sample IEP Goal on Making a Transition

Goal: To assist Sarah in making the transition to secondary school

Strategies

The Grade 7 teacher will

- › arrange additional transition visits with the secondary school resource teacher
- › give Sarah's parents a list of after-school sports activities at the secondary school that they may wish to attend
- › identify two students to help Sarah with the transition. They may wish to accompany her for lunch at the secondary school on a weekly basis.
- › help Sarah prepare a five-minute presentation about herself. Sarah will give this presentation to secondary school staff.

The teaching assistant will

- › accompany Sarah on secondary school visits
- › liaise with secondary school aides on appropriate strategies to use with Sarah
- › show Sarah the art room and music room, and introduce her to those teachers

Goal assessment and evaluation

Sarah will

- › report every two weeks to the Grade 7 teacher and her parents on her positive experiences
- › be able to find her way around the secondary school
- › give a presentation to secondary staff within two months
- › with her parents, meet with the secondary school resource teacher within one month and arrange for further meetings

This goal will be reviewed in three months.

Notes

Adaptations in an IEP

IEPs may include adaptations or modifications to accommodate a student's particular learning needs. The Ministry of Education says that formal decisions on whether a program, or part of a program, includes adaptations or modifications do not need to be made until grade 10.¹

Adaptations are changes to

- › the strategies used to teach a student
- › the materials available to the student
- › the assessment tools used to evaluate his learning

Adaptations are made to ensure that the student is able to achieve the learning outcomes of the curriculum.

For example, a student who is blind or partially sighted may have a better chance at success if he can have someone read subject materials out loud to him or he can use a Braille reader. Other common adaptations include

- › taking tests orally rather than in writing
- › having extra time to complete assignments
- › using a computer with word prediction or a spell checker
- › working on learning outcomes from a lower grade level

Adaptations such as these can be made for specific courses; the student may not need them or continue to need them for all courses. Or he y(the m)Tjh v

Modifications in an IEP

The number of students needing **modifications** to their learning outcomes is much smaller than the number needing adaptations. A student whose program is modified will be working on goals different than the provincial curriculum.

The Ministry of Education says that modifications should be considered for those students whose special needs are such that they are unable to access the curriculum, for example, students

- › with limited awareness of their surroundings
- › with fragile mental or physical health
- › medically and cognitively or multiply challenged¹

Examples of students who might have modifications in their IEP are

- › a student who is learning to count money while her peers are learning algebra
- › a student who is learning to name the planets while her peers are studying the solar system
- › a grade 5 student who is learning how to listen to stories at a pre-primary level and to turn pages at the appropriate time

Sometimes it is clear that a student's IEP includes modifications rather than adaptations. At other times the distinction is blurred. It is a good idea to talk about this in the IEP meeting and to read the Ministry's guide.

A student whose IEP contains modifications will receive report cards with comments or letter grades in relation to the particular goals in the IEP rather than to the learning outcomes for the subject or course.

The student might earn a School Completion Certificate, now known as an Evergreen, upon graduation.

¹ See of Education.

by the Ministry

Sample IEP Goal on Adapting a Student's Program

Goal: To increase John's attendance at school

Strategies

The counsellor will

- › identify the times at school that John enjoys and the times he avoids
- › arrange for him to attend the Learning Assistance Centre and drop his French course
- › arrange for four weekly sessions of Academy of Reading and Math computer-assisted learning
- › introduce John to the soccer club and the physical education teachers
- › review John's self-recording system in his planner for monitoring his attendance
- › inform all subject staff of John's IEP and his strength as a hands-on learner
- › act as a resource for staff for questions or concerns, as well as strategies that use his learning style

The youth worker/outreach worker will

- › involve John in sports activities in school and the community twice weekly
- › liaise with John's father to monitor John's attendance and his possible drug use

Goal assessment and evaluation

John will

- › meet with the counsellor and his father in one month to review his attendance and revise his program based on information the counsellor has gathered on classes that John enjoys and doesn't enjoy
- › improve his attendance so that he misses less than three days per month
- › participate in school sports as part of his program
- › participate in community sports twice weekly

The counsellor, learning assistance teacher and youth worker will meet with John and his father in two months to assess the effect of these strategies and plan for the next two months.

Notes

Rights and Responsibilities

All parents have certain basic rights with respect to their children in our public school system. One of those rights is to be informed of their child's "attendance, behaviour and progress in school, and to receive, on request, annual reports respecting general effectiveness of educational programs in the school district." Parents are also entitled to examine all records kept by their school board pertaining to their child.

Parents of students with special needs have the right to be consulted on their child's placement in school and on the preparation of their child's IEP. They do not, however, have a veto over the content of the IEP, nor the right to approve the IEP in order for it to be put in place.

The Ministry of Education requires that an IEP be reviewed at least once a year.

School principals carry the overall responsibility for making sure that, for every student in the school who requires an IEP, the IEP is developed, put into action and reviewed annually.

Teachers who carry the responsibility for a student with special needs must also design, supervise and assess that child's educational program. Other school and district staff may also have responsibilities to ensure that strategies contained in an IEP are met.

Asking for a copy of the draft IEP can help clear up misunderstandings early. See page 16, "When Things Go Wrong," for steps to take when our views on the IEP differ from those of the school.

For the Ministry of Education's extensive legislation and policy on special education services, see

See also [Section 46](#) by the British Columbia School Superintendents' Association.

The Ministry's [Section 46](#) lists circumstances in which an IEP is not required for a student with special needs.

When Things Go Wrong

When something bad happens to us, we usually take the time to think before we act. When something bad happens to our children—especially our most vulnerable children—our emotions often run much higher. Instinctively, we want to protect our children, even more than we would protect ourselves.

How do we reconcile our emotional turmoil when an IEP is involved? What do we do when the IEP is not being followed or we are not being consulted? What happens when our views of our child's needs differ from those of the school?

These are legitimate questions. They deserve to be answered.

Most of the problems parents encounter can be tracked to a failure of process or an absence of process, for example:

- › the process was set up and then ignored
- › the process was not properly understood
- › the process was never set up in the first place

When the relationship between parents and the school becomes adversarial, the focus often switches to blame. Who is at fault? Why won't they admit it? Immediately, emphasis shifts from the child to the adults.

The answer to this dilemma is to request a meeting as soon as possible, for two purposes:

- › to revisit the process that was, or should have been, set up at the IEP meeting
- › to address the conflict and find a resolution

BCCPAC's

_____ is an invaluable resource when problems of this nature arise.

In this guide, we have intentionally emphasized collaboration as fundamental to developing an IEP. When people collaborate, issues get resolved through respectful dialogue. A good IEP meeting is, by its nature, non-adversarial. It involves taking the time to create a process to deal with issues. It allows for failure, by acknowledging that not everything will work and that failure can be a tool for getting things right.

Sometimes we, as parents, need to be strong advocates for our children. We have the right and responsibility to make our voices heard on their behalf. Advocacy at an IEP meeting uses a collaborative voice—and that is a powerful tool to help our children.

Su Nombre es Hoy (His Name is Today)

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