What is an Individual Education Plan?

About "Special Education" · https://inclusionactionontario.ca/docs/the-individual-education-plan/

If you have a student with disability related needs, you've probably heard the term IEP or Individual Education Plan. Here we provide an overview of what an Individual Education Plan is.

Individual Education Plans, or IEPs, are prepared when a student is identified as "exceptional" in a school board. This identification is done through the Identification, Placement and Review Committee. It is becoming routine for boards to provide IEPs even in the absence of a formal identification through the IPRC to address the duty to accommodate and support students with disabilities. Primarily the IPRC process is now used when families seek segregated placements, since by law, students are otherwise required to be in the regular classroom. In practice, families sometimes consent to special education placement. It is IAO's view that this practice allows boards to side step their obligations under both the Education Act and the Human Rights Code.

IEPs contain instructional accommodations and learning goals. They may also contain accommodations for disability related needs. They should focus on strengths and build on those strengths. Labels don't help us with this. Students in special education classrooms will sometimes all have the same or a very similar IEPs, by virtue of their label/exceptionality, defeating entirely the purpose of the IEP. Sometimes a board's template IEP form is itself a barrier to inclusive practices, limiting school staff in what options they can apply to any given student's situation because of a label.

IEPs will have instructional accommodations; modifications to the curriculum; or alternative curriculum.

Be careful of "alternative curriculum". Alternative curriculum is curriculum outside any approved curriculum. It is often given to students with intellectual disability or developmental disabilities. It is typical of segregated placements. A January 2020 paper examined the impacts of alternative curricula on students with intellectual disability, and concluded that the general education curriculum should be the default curriculum for all students.

The goal of "alternative curriculum" is not to learn subject matter, or even have access to it, but to teach social skills and skills for "every day living". At Inclusion Action in Ontario, we view this "alternative curriculum" as something the student should learn at home and in the community, in context; it should not be the primary focus at school.

Modified curriculum is approved curriculum from anywhere in the curriculum. Modified curriculum can also be at grade level, but may have fewer learning expectations. Finally, the IEP can provide for accommodations for the student to access the grade level content with no other modifications.

Parents and guardians should be involved in the development of IEPs. *Be sure to ask for drafts and to meet with the school team to prepare the IEP and also to review drafts after they are prepared.* If a student is 16 years of age are older, their input is also to be considered. If you have a younger student, invite them to participate, too.

Invite others who know your child well to help you with the development of the IEP. This can be peers, siblings, or other professionals, like speech language pathologists.

School boards must prepare an IEP within thirty days of the placement of an exceptional student. If a student has a disability that requires accommodation, the school board will also typically use an IEP to outline those accommodations.

Except for students who are identified solely as gifted, students over 14 years of age are also required by law to have transition plans in place for transition to post secondary or the workplace. Year-to-year transition plans are also to be developed. These are included in IEPs. In 2013, the Ministry passed a policy and program direction (PPM 156) requiring that transitions be addressed in IEPs for any student with an an IEP.

IEPs are legal documents which bind the board to deliver the program outlined in that document. At the same time, they are supposed to be living documents. They can be reviewed and updated at any time. As a matter of course, in elementary settings, IEPs will be updated in the new school year and in preparation for Term 2. Be sure to keep dialogue with the school open to ensure the IEP goals are being met.