



A Guide to Individualized Education Plans

By:

Guneetjot Randhawa

©2026



Overview

As the new school year begins, **Individualized Education Plans** (also known as **IEPs**), will once again become popular in the lives of parents of students with special needs. IEPs can be overwhelming because they can use unfamiliar words, which may be confusing for everyone, and especially for those whose first language is not English.

This guide is created to help parents and families from all backgrounds **better understand IEPs**, their **purpose**, and the **meaning of different terms and sections** so that they can better participate in their child's learning.

Please note that although every effort has been taken to ensure all the information in this guide is up-to-date and correct, this guide **may contain errors**. The best way to clarify something about your child's IEP is to **consult the Special Education teacher at your child's school**, as they are the experts in this subject.

Table of Contents

What is an IEP?	Pg. 3
Sections Present in IEPs	Pg. 3
Educational Assessments, Clinical Assessments, and Health Support Services	Pg. 4
Individualized and SEA Equipment	Pg. 5
Assessed Needs and Strengths	Pg. 5
The Plan	Pg. 6
More on Accommodations	Pg. 7
If There is an Alternative Program	Pg. 7
Transition Plan	Pg. 8
Where can I learn more?	Pg. 8
References	Pg. 9

What is an IEP?

In order to better understand the information outlined in an IEP, it is important to first understand **what an IEP is** and **its general purpose**.

An IEP is essentially a document **outlining the assessed needs of a student** and is a **written plan describing how those needs will be addressed** by your child's school. The IEP specifically describes what assessments, both in-school and clinical, were done that helped confirm what your child's needs are, the specific needs your child has, your child's assessed strengths, and modifications done in the classroom to better support your child, among many other things.

Sections Present in the IEP

Sections present in the IEP include:

- Educational Assessments
- Clinical Assessments
- Health Support Services
- Individualized and SEA Equipment
- Assessed Strengths and Needs
- Accommodations
- Modifications
- Alternative Programs [**Warning!** IAO recommends avoiding alternative programs except for very limited purposes described later in this guide]
- Transition Plan



We will be going through **what each section means** and some **terms you may encounter** while reading through them.

Educational Assessments, Clinical Assessments, and Health Support Services

Educational assessments are in-school tests done by teachers for the purpose of identifying your child's strengths and needs and are required for an **Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC)** to help determine whether your child has special needs and whether they need to be placed in the Special Education program.

A **variety of different educational assessments exist**, each of which tests multiple important skills and/or your child's knowledge in different subjects. For example, educational assessments can test a student's motor skills, social skills, mathematics knowledge, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and much more.

If you would like to access a **list of educational assessments and the corresponding skills that they test**, you can click on [this link](#) to see an example from one school board. You can also directly ask your child's teacher about what the educational assessments listed in their IEP test and what the results mean. This can help you better understand what accommodations your child needs, both at home and in the classroom, to better support their learning.

Clinical assessments are formal assessments done by a specialist (such as a medical doctor) in order to diagnose your child or reveal delays or difficulties that your child may be having in different areas (such as language articulation, comprehension, etc.). To better understand what the clinical assessments done for your child as listed in your IEP indicate about your child's needs, it is **best to ask your child's specialist**.

Health support services are **in-school medical support services** provided for



students so that they can **better participate in classroom learning**. This can include assistance in the administration of medicine, feeding, tube feeding, speech rehabilitation, and much more. These services are often for students with physical disabilities or complex

health conditions that may otherwise prevent them from fully participating in their classrooms.

Individualized and SEA Equipment

Items listed under the **Individualized and SEA Equipment** categories in your child's IEP are **specialized equipment and technology** provided to your child at school to better support their learning. Examples include chromebooks, text-to-speech software, walkers, lifts, brailers, and much more.

Assessed Needs and Strengths

This is a **very important section for families** as families know their student best. In this section, a student's parents/caregivers and school teachers list what they observe to be the **student's strengths and needs** in various different areas. These areas can include social skills, motor skills, knowledge and/or ability in mathematics or language arts, and much more.

It is important to know that the listed needs and strengths **do not need to be restricted to only schoolwork content-related areas** such as mathematics, but can be from various different parts of the student's life, such as their social abilities, relationship-building abilities, motor and/or writing abilities, etc.

This section is important as it helps guide classroom teachers in understanding what types of **support your child needs at school**.



The Plan

Students with IEPs can be supported in the classroom by **three main methods**:

Accommodations (abbreviated as **AC in your child's IEP**)

- These are essentially **changes** in the teacher's teaching methods, the classroom environment (lighting, fans, seating) or tools (e.g. communication tools, or writing tools), or in assessment methods to help **accommodate for your child's needs in the classroom** and help them succeed. An example of an accommodated assessment may be having oral conferences instead of written tests to demonstrate that a student understands the content of a subject (like chemistry). Whether or not a student has an IEP, accommodations are required under the Human Rights Code for persons with disabilities to ensure they can access the curriculum.

Modified Curriculum (abbreviated as **MOD in your child's IEP**)

- This is when your child's classroom teacher **alters what is expected from your child** at their grade level in order to **better accommodate for your child's needs** and help them be successful in the classroom. This can include changing the number of expectations put on your child in the classroom or changing how complex those expectations are.

Alternative Program (abbreviated as **ALT in your child's IEP**)

- An Alternative Program is essentially a **program that does not align with the curriculum. Except for limited purposes**, such as teaching self-advocacy skills or social development needs, IAO recommends parents and caregivers do not use alternative programs. Alternative programs, if relied on heavily or



exclusively, mean your student's future potential pathways will be extremely limited.

More on Accommodations

The accommodations section of your child's IEP contains classroom accommodations that your child's teacher has made to help ensure their success while learning and support their needs. Accommodations can belong to one of three groups:

- **Instructional Accommodations** are specific **accommodations** the teacher makes **while teaching and instructing** that will help better support your child's needs. Examples of these accommodations can include rephrasing of information, chunking (which is when larger assignments are broken down into smaller sections for your child to work on, each section having its own separate deadline), using alternative or augmentative communication methods, or providing extra breaks while learning.
- **Environmental Accommodations** are **alterations** the teacher makes relating to the **physical environment of the classroom** to better support your child's learning and participation in the class. An example of this would be having strategic seating, so that your child could sit closer to the teacher or board for better engagement and supervision. Sensory needs may also need accommodations, for example, harsh lighting or noise from fans may need to be addressed.
- **Assessment Accommodations** are specific **accommodations** the teacher makes for your child **during assessments**. These can include changes in the format of a test or how a test is delivered to better support your child's needs. For example, a written test could be replaced by an oral conference.

If there is an Alternative Program

If an Alternative Program has been designed for your child, your child's IEP will also include a page containing the **Alternative Curriculum** for that program. The Alternative Curriculum is basically a section in your child's IEP **outlining the goals that the classroom teacher wants your child to achieve** as part of the Alternative Program (listed under **Learning Expectations**), how the classroom teacher will **help your child achieve** these goals (listed under the category of **Teaching Strategies**), and how the teacher **will assess** how well your child has achieved these goals throughout the school year (listed under the category of **Assessment Methods**).

There will also be a section known as **Achievement of Alternative Expectations**, which is essentially an outline of **how your child has progressed** in achieving the **goals** of the Alternative Program at different points in the school year.

Transition Plan

The transition plan section of your child's IEP is essentially a **summary** of what your child's classroom teachers will do to **support** your child **during different transitions**. These transitions can be moving between one subject and another within a school day, transitioning between **two different grade levels**, moving from elementary school to secondary school, and **many other potential transitions** they may experience in their educational journey.

Specific ways that teachers can support student transitions include **tracking** the student's individualized equipment to ensure it gets transferred to the correct area, **providing** the student with **organizational tools** to support their transition, and much more.

Where can I learn more?

IAO's website has many resources about special education, the Human Rights Code, and advocacy for your child.

Please visit us at <http://inclusionactionontario.ca>.

References

Government of Ontario. (n.d.). *Transition planning | part C: Early identification, assessment and transition planning | ontario.ca*.
Www.Ontario.Ca. <https://www.ontario.ca/document/special-education-ontario-policy-and-resource-guide-kindergarten-grade-12/transition#section-4>

Government of Ontario. (2021). *Glossary | special education in Ontario kindergarten to grade 12 – policy and resource guide*. Ontario.Ca.
<https://www.ontario.ca/document/special-education-ontario-policy-and-resource-guide-kindergarten-grade-12/glossary>

Ontario Teachers' Federation. (2019). *Alternative IEP programming | teach special education*. Teachspeced.Ca. <https://www.teachspeced.ca/alternative-iep-programming>

Toronto District School Board. (n.d.). *Specialized Health Support Services in school settings*.[https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/0/docs/Special Education/Section%20L%20-%20Specialized%20Health%20Support%20Services%20in%20School%20Settings.pdf](https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Portals/0/docs/Special_Education/Section%20L%20-%20Specialized%20Health%20Support%20Services%20in%20School%20Settings.pdf)

Waterloo Region District School Board. (2024). *Individual education plan (IEP) guide for families*. Waterloo Region District School Board.
<https://www.wrdsb.ca/learning/programs/special-education/individual-education-plan-iep-guide-for-families/>

York Region District School Board. (n.d.). *A family's guide to special equipment amount (SEA) funding for students with special education needs*.
<https://www2.yrdsb.ca/sites/default/files/2021-03/SS-ParentGuide-SEA.pdf>

York Region District School Board. (2021, June 15). *2.5 Educational and other assessments | York Region District School Board*. YRDSB. York Region District School Board. <https://www2.yrdsb.ca/student-support/special-education/special-education-plan/2-5-Educational-and-Other-Assessments>

Image Credits: Google Images