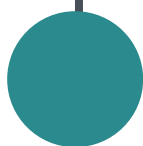


SPECIAL EDUCATION IN ONTARIO

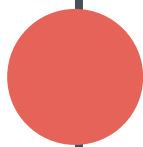
A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS AND CAREGIVERS



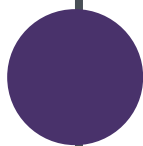
**Introduction to Special
Education in Ontario**



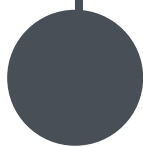
**The Identification,
Placement, and Review
Committee (IPRC)**





**Appealing the IPRC
Decision**



**The Individual Education
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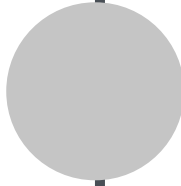
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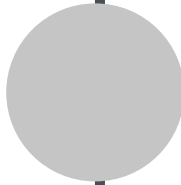
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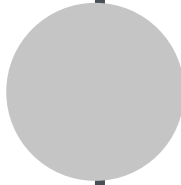
**Introduction to
Special Education in
Ontario**



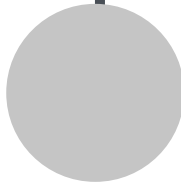
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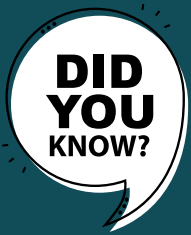


**The Individual
Education Plan (IEP)**



Glossary & Resources

Special Education



Ontario public schools are:

- ✓ Publicly-funded
- ✓ Regulated by the government

This guide is intended to support students, parents, caregivers, and community organizations in supporting students with special education needs to understand and navigate the Ontario special education system.

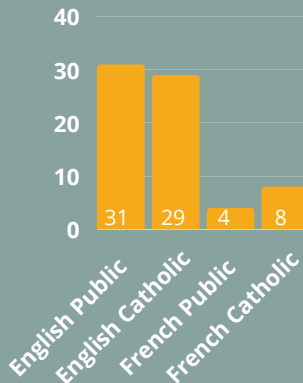
Having access to information to support your special education journey is very important, no matter what role you are in.

Every child in Ontario has the right to public education. Schools, school boards, educators, students, and parents and caregivers all have rights and responsibilities in the education system.

QUICK FACTS ABOUT PUBLICLY-FUNDED SCHOOLS IN ONTARIO



There are 72 publicly-funded school boards



2,056,058

students were enrolled in publicly-funded schools in the 2019-2020 school year

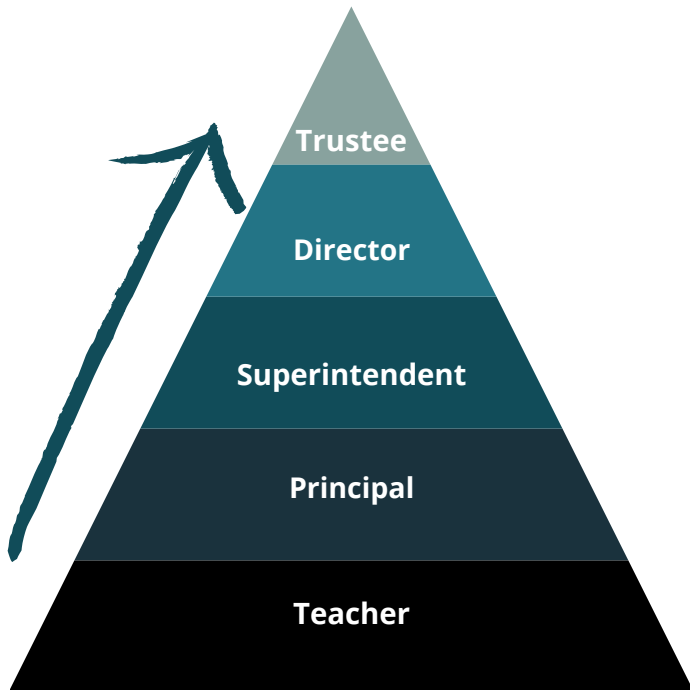
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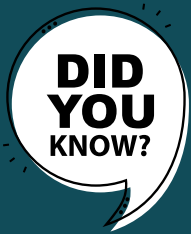
Understanding the key people who support students in their special education journey is important.

Understanding each person's role and responsibilities helps to make sure that you know who to talk to about any concerns you may have, and also helps you build good communication and relationships to best support a student's learning.

If you have a concern that needs to be addressed, it is best to start by talking with the teacher, and then if problems are not resolved you can speak to people with higher levels of responsibility, as needed.



Special Education



In addition to the school board-wide policies, individual schools can have their own policies, such as uniform requirements

Teachers must have a recognized teaching certificate to teach in the Ontario public education system. Teachers are often the most important individuals in a student's education. They work with the student every day, and have the ability to create safe and caring environments for the student. Their responsibilities include:

- Preparing and teaching lessons, evaluating progress
- Supervising student behaviour and maintaining classroom discipline
- Developing and implementing Individual Education Plans (IEPs)

Principals also create safe and caring environments. They manage individual schools, and have one or more **vice-principals** to help them. Their responsibilities include:

- Supervising all staff within the school
- Student admission and placement
- Administering the school budget and reporting
- Maintaining Ontario Student Records (OSR)
- Overseeing implementation of IEPs
- Implementing student discipline
- Working with the student and parent councils
- Implementing school board-wide policies and setting in-school policies

If you have concerns you can raise them first with the teacher. If your concerns are not getting resolved or you are not getting the help you need, you can contact the school principal

Special Education



Superintendents are people who work at the school board level. They are usually responsible for more than one school, within a specified district of their school board. They are responsible for the administration of those schools and often participate in suspension appeals, disciplinary meetings, and requests to transfer schools. Superintendents are sometimes assigned to oversee board-wide programs, such as special education, or equity and anti-oppression.

You can contact the school superintendent if you are not getting the help you need from the school principal



Directors oversee publicly funded school boards. They distribute funding, develop policies based on Ministry regulations, provide programs in schools, such as special education, and ensure schools follow the Education Act.

You can contact the school board director if you are not getting the help you need from the superintendent



Trustees are elected during municipal elections to represent community interests. Trustees take part in committees regarding student expulsions and are responsible for the school board's budget.

You can contact the school trustee if you are not getting the help you need from the school board director

Special Education



The Ministry of Education is responsible for overseeing all aspects of Ontario's public education system. The Ministry sets policies and guidelines for school boards, allocates funding to boards, develops province-wide curriculum, sets requirements for graduation, and approves textbooks and other resources.

The Minister of Education is an elected Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP), and is appointed Minister by the Premier.

For more, visit: www.edu.gov.on.ca

The Ontario College of Teachers regulates the teaching profession in Ontario. This includes establishing the requirements needed to be a certified teacher, overseeing qualified teachers, and investigating complaints against teachers.

For more, visit: www.oct.ca

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) is an independent government body, that oversees province-wide standardized testing.

These tests occur in grades 3, 6, 9, and 10.

Subjects include Reading, Writing, and Mathematics, and Literacy.

For more, visit: www.eqao.com

What is my role as a parent?

Special Education

Parents and educators both share a responsibility to support a student in reaching their learning goals. It is helpful to approach the relationship with the school as a partnership, where everyone collaborates to best support the student.

Parents/caregivers are experts about their child's strengths and needs, and the child's situation outside school. Parents should:

- Maintain open lines of communication with key staff in schools
- Read all reports and documents provided by the school

Great way for parents/caregivers to get involved!

Each school board must have a **Parent Involvement Committee (PIC)**, and each school is required to have a **Parent Council**. Getting involved on the council, or getting to know the parents on the council, is a great way to learn more about the school, advocate for supports, and make sure that parents are represented.

Speaking up when you have a concern can be scary. But, there are supports that can help you through challenging processes, or even just by talking to you about your situation and offering advice.

Research shows that the biggest predictor of student success is the extent to which families encourage learning and are involved in the student's education

See section "Glossary and Resources" for suggestions

Special Education

Consider joining your school's

Student Council

It's a great way to connect with other students, get involved in your school, and make sure that the student voice is heard



Students also have a role and a responsibility to take charge of their learning to whatever extent they can.

Students know themselves best and are experts about their own experiences, and can also be the best source of information about what can help them learn. We know that when students are included in decision making processes they become better at identifying their needs.

Students should be given every opportunity and be encouraged to:

- Be engaged in their learning
- Share their strengths and needs with teachers
- Talk about their concerns when learning strategies are not working
- Know their education rights

Speaking up when you have a concern can be scary. You have a right to education, which means that you have a right to have your education delivered to you in a way that allows you to reach your full potential. If something is not working in the classroom or school setting, you can talk to someone you trust and tell them what is happening for you.

There are supports that can help you through challenging processes, or even just talking with you about your situation and offering advice.

See section "Glossary and Resources" for suggestions

Special Education



If you need translation for meetings, the school should be able to help

Ask the Principal or Guidance Counsellor for support in accessing these services

Parents/caregivers are **partners** with educators in supporting students and are encouraged to take an active role. Keeping open communication with the teacher and school is one of the most important things that a parent/caregiver can do to support a student.

You do not need to have an issue to communicate with the school.

Keeping the lines of communication open from the beginning can help if challenges come up



Tips for Communicating with the School

- Attend parent-teacher meetings
- Schedule regular check-ins in ways that work for both you and the teacher, such as through phone calls, emails, or in-person
- Write notes ahead of a meeting or phone call to organize your thoughts and prepare
- Take notes during meetings
- Plan classroom visits in advance with the school/teacher
- Write notes in the student agenda/notebook to communicate with the teacher
- If you are able to, look for opportunities to get involved, such as in extracurricular activities

Special Education

We all learn differently. Special education helps students who have different learning needs to reach their educational goals in a supportive and inclusive environment.

Every school board in Ontario must provide special education programs and services to students who have special education needs. Students who have these needs have a right to accommodation to enable them to succeed in their education. They may also be formally identified with a specific exceptionality to help boards meet these needs.

We sometimes refer to these students who have been identified as "exceptional" students.



If a school board does not have their own special education programs and services, they must arrange for a student to access services and programs at another school board, and to pay for them.

This ensures that all students can succeed and benefit fully from their school experience.

Special Education

Special Education Programs are set up to support the learning goals of students with unique learning needs. The program is based on ongoing assessment and evaluation, and modified as needed to meet changing needs.

Special Education Services refer to specific resources, equipment, and specialized support people. They are there to support the overall program and needs of the student.

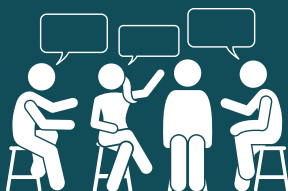
The Individual Education Plan (IEP) is the written plan that outlines the special education programs and services being put in place to support the student.

Some students access special education services after being formally identified as having an exceptionality, through a process called the **Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC)**.

See section on IPRC for further information

Other students access special education services without going through the **IPRC**.

An **IEP** may be developed without an IPRC process when a teacher has noticed that a student has special learning needs that can be supported, but the learning need has not been formally addressed through the IPRC process, or the need is not so great that the student would be identified as exceptional if an IPRC meeting were held.



Special Education

Of all the students receiving special education supports in Ontario, **only 52% have been identified as exceptional through the formal process** of an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC).

That means that almost half of the students getting special education supports have not gone through a formal process, and may have been introduced to what special education means in ways that may not have answered all of their questions.

This is because going through a formal IPRC process requires schools to provide information on special education in Ontario, however the same requirement is not in place for those that are not formally identified as exceptional.

Only **52%** of students receiving special education services have been formally identified through an IPRC



We often think of special learning needs, or exceptionalities, as a problem to be managed. Instead, we should think of them as needs that make each of us unique, and an opportunity to provide learning experiences that are different from traditional teaching methods.

We are all different: in our strengths, in our perceptions, and in our upbringings. Education should meet the different human needs of each of us - being different is exactly what makes us human!

JOURNEY THROUGH SPECIAL EDUCATION

Need Identified

Realizing there is a learning need that is not being met, by teacher, student, or parent

Collect and share data in advance when possible. Helpful examples include psychoeducational assessments, reports, and behaviour logs



START

Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) Request

Make a written request

Within 15 days, will receive: written notice of approximate date of the IPRC meeting, and school board's guide to special education



Identification

Categories of exceptionalities:

- Behaviour
- Communication
- Intellectual
- Physical
- Multiple



Placement

- Regular class with either indirect support, resource assistance, or withdrawal assistance, *or*
- Special education class with partial integration *or*
- Full-time special education class

Student will be placed in a regular class, except when this will not meet their learning needs

IPRC Meeting

Identification and Placement decision is made

Participants: minimum of three school staff including Principal and/or Superintendent, Parent(s), students 16+, and support person/friend



If you disagree with the IPRC decision, you can appeal

Individual Education Plan (IEP)

Sets out specific learning expectations and outline of educational services



Special Education



School board-funded testing often does not take place until after Grade 3, as students will often have resolved any early learning concerns by that time

How are learning needs identified?

Learning needs can be identified in a variety of ways, such as:

- feedback from the student
- feedback from caregivers
- report cards and teacher observations
- doctor reports
- psychoeducational assessments

Psychoeducational assessments

evaluate a student's cognitive or academic profile, identify abilities, educational achievement levels and underlying causes of any academic difficulty.



The psychoeducational assessment is completed by a psychologist. It is a thorough assessment and **report** on the student's strengths, needs, academic capacity, and recommendations for teaching and learning strategies.

The **report** includes six sections:

- 1) Referral and background
- 2) Assessment process or method
- 3) Behavioural observations and impressions
- 4) Test results and interpretations
- 5) Summary and formulation
- 6) Recommendations

Special Education



A psychoeducational assessment can cost as much as \$5,000 from a private practice

You can get a psychoeducational assessment for a student in a few ways:

School Board

Talk with your school about seeing a psychologist who works with the school board. This is paid for by the school, if the Principal approves the request.

Private Practice

Work with a Psychologist through their private practice. This can be costly. Some insurance plans may cover some of this cost.

University Psychology Programs

Obtain an assessment through a psychology teaching program at a university. These assessments are done by psychology students who are being supervised by a professor. They may have sliding scale payment options, however there is often an application process and lengthy wait times.

School boards are **not** required to provide psychoeducational assessments.

If your school board does provide these services, there may still be wait lists (from a few months to a few years!), and assessments are allocated based on need.

Special Education



What about OHIP?

These assessments are not usually covered by the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP)

If you have group medical insurance through an employer, you can see if the assessment is covered, and to what amount

You will likely need a referral from a medical doctor to get coverage

Some teaching programs that offer sliding scale assessments are included below:

Bayridge Counselling Services

- For students 6-15 years old
- Set rate of \$2,799

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)

- \$2,300. Accepts applications for fee subsidization based on annual net family income
- Rates may go as low as \$500

Queen's University Regional Assessment and Resource Center

- For students who have not had assessments in the prior two years
- \$2000 with flexible payment plans

University of Guelph Assessment Services

- Costs \$2600-\$3000

University of Waterloo Centre for Mental Health Research and Treatment

- \$500-\$2,200, based on annual net family income

This list is not complete. More regularly updated information is available on the www.ementalhealth.ca website, which includes suggestions on programs and private practice psychologists

Special Education

Students who do not fit into one of the five categories can still be accommodated

A formal identification as "Exceptional" is not required to access special education services

Exceptionalities are categories of special needs that can affect how a student learns. Students are identified so they can be supported in meeting their full potential. Exceptionalities can include giftedness, disability, and other needs.

Students with exceptionalities have unique learning needs, and school boards are required to support these needs. Support can be provided through accommodations and/or modifications, to support student learning.

There are five different categories of exceptionality in Ontario's Education Act:

Behaviour refers to challenges over a period of time, and to such a degree, that it impacts a student's learning.

For example: compulsive reactions, excessive fears, anxiety, difficulties with social interactions

Communication refers to challenges that impact a student receiving or relaying information.

For example: Autism Spectrum Disorder, Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing, Language or Speech Impairment, Learning Disabilities (such as AD/HD, reading, writing, numbers, processing, fine motor skills)

Special Education

Physical refers to a condition that affects the body, where help is needed to support the student's educational achievement.

For example: a physical disability, Blind and Low Vision

Intellectual refers to differences in general mental or cognitive abilities - higher or lower - that may affect:

- intellectual functioning, such as learning, problem solving, judgment, or
- adaptive functioning (activities in daily life), such as communication, or independent living

For example: Giftedness, Mild Intellectual Disability, Developmental Disability

Multiple refers to when a student's needs are in two or more categories of exceptionality.

For example: a student with Autism Spectrum Disorder, who is also gifted, would be identified as living with multiple exceptionalities.

No two brains are exactly alike - it is normal for all of us to learn differently



Once identified as having an exceptionality, the IPRC will determine what type of placement is best suited for the student.

Placements refer to what type of educational setting would best meet the needs of an exceptional student.

There are five types of special education placements:

Regular class with indirect support

- The student attends a regular classroom for the entire school day
- The teacher receives support from a special education teacher

Regular class with resource assistance

- The student attends a regular classroom for the entire school day
- The student will get help from a special education teacher, either individually or in a small group

Regular class with withdrawal assistance

- The student attends a regular classroom for more than half of the school day
- The student will get help from a special education teacher outside of the regular classroom for part of the day

The student should always be placed in a regular classroom, except when this placement would not be able to meet their needs. Under these circumstances, the IPRC decision must explain the reason for the special education classroom placement.

Special Education

Teachers in a special education classroom must have specific qualifications

If an exceptional student is placed in a **special education class**, the IPRC **must** provide written reasons for doing so

Special education class with partial integration

- The student will be in a regular classroom less than half of the school day
- The remaining part of the school day, the student will receive instruction outside the classroom from a special education teacher

Full-time special education class

- The student will spend the entire day in a special education class

Maximum class sizes for full-time special education classes differ, based on the level of need. For student with severe learning disabilities, the maximum is eight students in one class, with a qualified special education teacher. Mixed exceptionality classes may have up to 16 students with one teacher.

For more information on special education classroom placements, see Regulation 298 of the Education Act, section 31

In addition to the five placement options, the IPRC can also refer the student to one of the **Provincial and Demonstration Schools**.

Students must meet eligibility requirements for admission to either:

- a provincial school for the blind, deaf, or deaf-blind, or
- a provincial demonstration school for students with severe learning disabilities

Learn more at www.pdsbnet.ca

Accommodations, modifications, and alternative programs

Special Education

Accommodations, modifications and alternative programs support student success and achievement

This includes graduation and post-secondary readiness

The Individual Education Plan (IEP) will include information about any accommodations, modifications or alternative programs that are put in place to support the student.



Accommodations are the teaching and assessment strategies, supports, or equipment used to meet a student's learning need. They change how the curriculum is delivered.



Modifications are the changes made to the grade level learning expectations for a subject or course. They change what the student will be learning.



Alternative programs, or alternative skill areas, are developed to support students in acquiring knowledge and skills outside of the Ontario school curriculum.

See section "Individual Education Plan (IEP)"

How are students identified as exceptional?

Special Education

The purpose of the IPRC meeting is to:

document the student's strengths and needs



and to make decisions about identification and placement



Students with exceptionalities require special education programs or services to meet their learning needs.

They are identified as exceptional through the **Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC)**.

I = Identification

Deciding if the student is "exceptional"

P = Placement

Deciding the best placement for the student

R = Review

Review on whether the Identification & Placement are still appropriate

C = Committee

The Principal (or Superintendent) & two other school staff

The **IPRC** identifies any of the exceptionalities a student has, and places them in the appropriate special education program or with the appropriate special education service, if needed.

Placements are meant to be the least intrusive option available while still meeting the unique learning needs of the student.

See section "Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC)"



Justice for Children and Youth (JFCY) is a non-profit legal aid clinic that provides select legal representation to low-income children and youth in Ontario.

If you have a legal problem or have questions, contact us: 416-960-1633 or 1-866-999-5329 (toll-free in Ontario) www.jfcy.org

Enhancing Access to Special Education (EASE)

A project by JFCY, designed to support students and families of students with special education needs to understand and navigate special education processes

 [@jfcy.ease](https://www.instagram.com/jfcy.ease)

JFCY would like to thank the numerous students, parents, caregivers, community supports, educators, and advocates that met with us and shared their experiences and expertise.

EASE was generously funded
by the Ontario Ministry of Education