

# Special Education

## *tips for parents*

All students will have times when they struggle with schoolwork or with school life. But some students may need extra support from a special education program.

Parents may be the first to notice that their son or daughter is having problems in school, or a teacher may suggest to a parent that their son or daughter might need extra and ongoing support.

### Some things to remember

- Some issues can be solved by the teacher in the classroom, so speak to the teacher first if you are worried about your child's progress.
- Needing Special Education support is not a bad thing—some students just learn differently or need extra support to succeed.
- Just because your child does not speak English, it does not mean that he/she needs Special Education help. Some problems are a normal part of adjusting to a new language and school. It may help to provide the principal with information about the student's academic skills in his or her first language.
- Some parts of the process for getting Special Education support can feel confusing and it may have many unfamiliar names. Always ask questions if there are things you don't understand.
- Parents play an important role in Special Education. It is alright to ask for support for your child and it is alright to be persistent.

### What is Special Education?

Special Education is a term used to describe a wide range of supports and programs for students who need different teaching methods or special equipment to allow them to be successful in school.

Sometimes Special Education support involves a different way of teaching; sometimes it means a student will get extra time for writing tests or special equipment to help them with their school work. In a Special Education program, students may be placed in separate classes for all or part of the day, or stay in their regular class with support from an educational assistant.

The most important thing to remember is that Special Education is intended to help your child succeed in school.

### What should you do if you think your child needs Special Education support?

#### Ask questions

- Ask your child if there are particular things that are consistently difficult at school.
- Ask the teacher if he or she thinks your son or daughter needs extra support and if the teacher can provide the extra help
- Some medical conditions may affect learning (e.g. hearing, vision etc.), so it might help to talk to your child's doctor.

#### Meet with the school staff

- If you think your son or daughter needs more help, ask the principal or vice-principal to hold meeting with other school staff (called a *School Team Meeting*) to talk about your child.
- Prepare for the meeting. Sometimes it helps to write down questions, such as:
  - What kinds of supports or programs would help my child succeed?
  - What is available in the school?
  - Would my son or daughter have to wait a long time to get into the right program?
- At the *School Team Meeting* the school staff may recommend one or more of the following options:
  - that the teacher continue to provide support in the classroom;
  - that the teacher develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for the student;
  - that a student be formally "assessed" to find out if he or she has special needs and what those needs are; **and/or**
  - that the school hold a more formal Special Education meeting, called an Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC).



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## What is a Special Education assessment?

A Special Education “assessment” is an evaluation of a student by a specialist to determine if a student has special needs and what those needs are. Your principal or vice principal can explain what you need to do to have your child assessed.

The board has specialists on staff who will assess students at no cost to parents, but there may be a waiting list.

## What is an IEP?

The Individual Education Plan, or IEP, describes what the school will do to help your child. The Plan should be developed *with* parents. **A student does not have to be formally assessed in order to have an IEP.**

The IEP should include:

- A list of the student’s strengths and needs;
- An outline of the special education services the student will receive, where and when the service will be provided, and who will provide it.
- A description of how the student’s progress will be measured and reviewed;
- A set of goals for the student and teacher to work toward over the year; and
- A list of any special equipment to be provided.

An IEP must be completed within 30 school days after your child has been placed in a special program and the principal must ensure that you receive a copy of it.

## What is an IPRC?

Sometimes the School Team will recommend the school hold an Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) - which is a meeting to officially identify a student’s special needs (often called “exceptionalities”).

An IPRC may be requested by the parents *or* the school. Once parents have made a request in writing, an IPRC must be held. The school must inform the parents about an IPRC, and **it is very important for parents to attend.** The IPRC will officially decide:

- if a student has special learning needs,
- what kind of learning needs the student has, and
- the best placement and program for the student.

## What happens at an IPRC, and do parents have a role?

The IPRC meeting usually includes the student’s teacher and/or guidance counsellor, the principal, a psychologist, a school board representative and the parents.

Using information from the staff **and** parents, the committee will recommend a program for the student, and the parents will be asked to sign a document agreeing to the committee’s recommendations. You may take the document home and think it over before deciding whether to sign it.

Some tips for your IPRC:

- You can bring a family member or friend who knows the child to the meeting.
- Bring any doctor’s notes or assessments about the student’s medical condition or about his or her learning skills.
- Take a photograph of your child to help the committee remember who they’re talking about.
- If a particular program is recommended, you may ask to visit it.
- If you disagree with the decision of the IPRC, you may appeal it, but there is a time limit for the appeal. Your principal can explain the process.
- The IPRC process may seem very formal, but it means that you and your child will have a right to request ongoing support, which will help him or her succeed in school.

## Will my child’s support change over time?

- Your child’s program will be reviewed at least once in every school year – you can always ask for changes or for more information when the review comes up.

## Where can parents go for help?

- Ask your teacher, principal or guidance counselor for information.
- People for Education has more information and links to special education organizations at <http://www.peopleforeducation.com/links/specialed>
- If you have a school settlement worker, they can help explain the Special Education process.
- Other parents can be a wonderful resource—talk to the parents in your school about how Special Education works or contact your school board’s Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) – they usually have open meetings once a month.

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This tip sheet was developed with the support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

It is an initiative of the People for Education Parent Inclusion Project. Advisory committee: Dilico Ojibway Child & Family Services, Thunder Bay; F.A.I.R., Family Service Association, Toronto; PERCS- Waterloo Region; parent/trustee representatives and Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS);

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