

**Parents'
Guide**

to

**SPECIAL
EDUCATION**

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DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD OF NIAGARA
Achieving Success Together

Updated June, 2008

INTRODUCTION

The **District School Board of Niagara** (DSBN) is committed to ensuring the most enabling learning environment for each student. A student's needs can usually be met within the regular classroom program. Accommodations and/or modifications may need to be planned to facilitate learning for some students. As well, some students may have complex learning needs which can best be met by placement in a specialized program or class.

Regulation 181/98 is the provincial legislation which determines special education operating procedures in Ontario. The practices and procedures of the District School Board of Niagara reflect the intent of this Legislation.

The purpose of this Parents' Guide is to provide you with information about the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC). The procedures involved in identifying a student as "exceptional", deciding the student's placement, or appealing such decisions if you do not agree with the IPRC's decisions are described in this Guide.

The District School Board of Niagara is committed to providing a spectrum of service based on student need. This Guide also provides information about Special Education programs and services within the DSBN.

If, after reading this Guide, you require more information, please see the list of contacts enclosed in the document.

We encourage and welcome your active involvement in partnership with our efforts to meet the educational needs of your child.



Notes...

- 1. If you wish to receive this Parents' Guide in braille, large print or audio-cassette format, please contact the Board at the telephone number shown on the front of this Guide.*
- 2. When used in this Guide, the word "parent" includes guardian.*
- 3. The Ministry of Education provides school boards with much of the content and wording within the Parents' Guide.*

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WHERE DO I BEGIN?

When your child needs help in school the place to begin is with the classroom teacher. Call ahead to arrange a convenient time to meet.

Teachers can:

- assess student progress according to the curriculum expectations;
- work with parents to help meet student needs;
- make accommodations for students.

Each school has an **In-School Team** that meets regularly to help teachers plan for students.

The In-School Team:

- includes the principal/vice principal, LRT/SERT, other teachers and support staff;
- can suggest strategies;
- can work with parents and other agencies;
- can access other support staff and resources within the school board.

Each school has a Special Education teacher:

- Learning Resource Teacher, LRT (elementary);
- Special Education Resource Teacher, SERT (secondary).

The **LRT** or the **SERT** can:

- help with the assessment of learning needs;
- provide special resources;
- work directly with students;
- support classroom teachers in programming.

The Special Education Resource Staff includes administrators, consultants, resource teachers, psychological staff, speech-language pathologists, social workers, occupational therapists and educational assistants. There are also resource teachers for students who are deaf, blind, or who have other special needs.

The Special Education Resource Staff can:

- assist with planning;
- provide resources;
- complete assessments for improved programming;
- help problem solve.

Many informal processes can be put in place for your child as soon as concerns are brought to the staff's attention. Informal assessments can be completed by the classroom teacher and can include samples of daily work, teacher made tests, and behavioural observations. If significant modifications are required because the child is working on expectations that are far below grade level, school staff may develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP). You will be involved in the plan's development. When you have questions about your child's program or progress, please contact your child's classroom teacher.

INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN

I.E.P.

As of September 1st, 1998, Special Education Regulation 181/98 more clearly defined the process for writing an Individual Education Plan (I.E.P.).

■ WHAT IS AN INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN (I.E.P.)?

An I.E.P. defines a student's strengths and needs and identifies specific educational expectations from the Ontario Curriculum. It explains how the student's program has been modified and how the student's progress will be evaluated. An I.E.P. is a working document and as such, revisions and updates are to be expected. At the end of the school year the I.E.P. will be placed in your child's Ontario School Record (O.S.R.). During the school year, your child's teacher will likely have it close at hand to plan and monitor student progress. An I.E.P. is also a support document for the provincial report card. For exceptional students 14 years of age and older, (except for those identified as exceptional solely on the basis of giftedness) a transition plan must also be part of an I.E.P. This is a plan for transition to appropriate postsecondary school activities, such as work, further education, and community living.

■ WHO NEEDS AN INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN (I.E.P.)?

All students identified as exceptional by an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (I.P.R.C.) must have an I.E.P. Students who have not been identified as exceptional, but have had their grade expectations modified also need an I.E.P. Within any classroom there is a range of grade expectations. However, any student whose grade expectations significantly differ from those outlined in the Ontario Curriculum for that grade needs an I.E.P. For example, if your child is in Grade 7 but working on some Grade 4 expectations in the area of Math or if the number of expectations have been significantly reduced, your child would have an I.E.P. in Math. Your child's Math expectations have been *modified* and you will be consulted and given an opportunity to provide input around your child's I.E.P. You will also be provided with a copy of your child's I.E.P.

What if a student is capable of doing their work at grade level but may need some accommodations? An accommodation is a strategy to assist a student in achieving within the range of grade expectations. These *accommodations* might include preferential seating, extra time to write tests, instructions repeated etc. When accommodations are made for non-exceptional students an I.E.P. is not necessary but teachers would make you aware of accommodations being provided for your child.

■ WHERE DO I BEGIN?

As always, if you have any questions about your child's program, the best place to start is with your child's teacher. At every school within the DSBN a Learning Resource Teacher (LRT) at the elementary level and a Special Education Resource Teacher (SERT) at the secondary level is available to assist in answering your questions about the I.E.P. process and Special Education. The LRT/SERT is a resource to all teachers, parents and students around the development and implementation of an I.E.P. and any accommodations needed for students. The Principal is responsible for the I.E.P. process. Schools are committed to working in partnership with parents in the I.E.P. process.

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The District School Board of Niagara is committed to providing a full spectrum of service based on student need. This includes:

- continuous informal assessment based on the curriculum;
- early intervention for all students who have difficulty;
- support services for at risk students;
- formal assessment (speech-language or psychological) when additional information is required;
- LRT/SERT support for students in regular classes;
- congregated classes and programs for students who would benefit from these placements.

Special placement options include:

- Behaviour;
- Communication (Autism Spectrum Disorder);
- Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing;
- Gifted - Part Time Program;
- Intensive Support Program (ISP);
- Multiple Exceptionalities (ME);
- Special Needs (SN).

WHAT IS A SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM?

A special education program is defined in the Education Act as an educational program that:

- is based on and modified by the results of continuous assessment and evaluation; and
- includes a plan (called an Individual Education Plan or IEP) containing specific objectives and an outline of special education services that meet the needs of the exceptional student.

WHAT ARE SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES?

Special Education Services are defined in the Education Act as the facilities and resources, including support personnel and equipment, necessary for developing and implementing a special education program.

THE DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD OF NIAGARA PROVIDES THESE SERVICES...

- An LRT or SERT is available in each school to provide assistance to students in regular classroom settings.
- Registered Speech-Language Pathologists provide consultation and assessment for students who are referred by the school with the consent of parents.
- Psychological Staff members provide in depth assessment for students who are referred by the school with written consent of the parent.
- Counsellors conduct individual and group counselling and provide liaison with appropriate social services for students with personal, social and emotional needs.
- Educational Assistants support students demonstrating a need for intensive support.
- Resource Teachers provide direct consultative support to the school team.
- Specialist Teachers for students who have specialized needs (ie., Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing, Blind).
- Social Workers provide support and recommendations to schools, students and their families.
- Occupational Therapists provide assessments and programming recommendations to schools.

What is an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC)?

What is an IPRC?

Regulation 181/98 requires that all school boards set up Identification, Placement and Review Committees. An IPRC is composed of at least 3 people, one of whom must be a principal or a supervisory officer of the board.

In the District School Board of Niagara, this three member committee is usually chaired by the Principal or Vice-Principal. The LRT and the student's teacher may be the other committee members. A Resource Teacher from the Don Reilly Resource Centre may also be a member.

Parents are invited and encouraged to attend their child's IPRC meeting. With parental permission the annual IPRC review may be dispensed with, if the student is placed in a regular class program or if there will be no change to a student's identification, placement and program.

What is the role of an IPRC?

The IPRC will:

- decide whether or not your child should be identified as exceptional;
- identify the areas of your child's exceptionality, according to the categories and definitions of exceptionalities provided by the Ministry of Education;
- decide an appropriate placement for your child (*see previous page for the range of placement options that include regular and special class placements offered by the District School Board of Niagara*); and
- review the identification and placement at least once in each school year unless the parent(s) have agreed to dispense with the review.

Who is identified as an exceptional student?

The Education Act defines an exceptional pupil as "a pupil whose behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he or she is considered to need placement in a special education program...." Students are identified according to the categories and definitions of exceptionalities provided by the Ministry of Education.

What is an IEP?

Once identified as an exceptional student, an IEP must be developed for your child, in consultation with you. It must include:

- specific educational expectations;
- an outline of the special education program and services that will be received;
- a statement about the methods by which your child's progress will be reviewed; and
- for students 14 years and older (except those identified as exceptional solely on the basis of giftedness), a plan for transition to appropriate postsecondary school activities, such as work, further education, and community living.

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

How is an IPRC meeting requested?

The principal of your child's school:

- must convene an IPRC meeting for your child, upon receiving your written request;
- may, with written notice to you, refer your child to an IPRC when the principal and the child's teacher or teachers believe that your child may benefit from a special education program.

Within 15 days of receiving your request, or giving you notice, the principal must provide you with a copy of this Guide and a written statement of approximately when the IPRC will meet.

May parents attend the IPRC meeting?

Regulation 181/98 entitles parents and pupils 16 years of age or older:

- to be present at and participate in all committee discussions about your child; and
- to be present when the committee's identification and placement decision is made.

Who else may attend an IPRC meeting?

- the principal of your child's school;
- other resource people such as your child's teacher, special education staff, board support staff, or the

representative of an agency, who may provide further information or clarification;

- your representative – that is, a person who may support you or speak on behalf of you or your child; and
- an interpreter, if one is required. (You may request the services of an interpreter through the principal of your child’s school.)

Who may request that they attend?

Either you or the principal of your child’s school may make a request for the attendance of others at the IPRC meeting. As a courtesy, the chairperson of the IPRC should be notified in advance of any representative or additional resource personnel invited to attend.

What information will parents receive about the IPRC meeting?

At least 10 days in advance of the meeting, the chair of the IPRC will provide you with written notification of the meeting and an invitation to attend as an important partner in considering your child’s placement. This letter will notify you of the date, time, and place of the meeting, and it will ask you to indicate whether you will attend.

Before the IPRC meeting occurs, you will receive a written copy of any information about your child that the chair of the IPRC has received. This may include the results of assessments or a summary of information.

What if parents are unable to make the scheduled meeting?

If you are unable to make the scheduled meeting, you may:

- contact the school principal to arrange an alternative date or time; or
- let the school principal know you will not be attending. As soon as possible after the meeting, the principal will forward to you, for your consideration and signature, the IPRC’s written statement of decision noting the decision of identification and placement and any recommendations regarding special education programs and services.

What happens at an IPRC meeting?

- The chair introduces everyone and explains the purpose of the meeting.
- The IPRC will review all available information about your child. The members will:

- consider an educational assessment of your child;
 - consider, subject to the provisions of the Health Care Consent Act, 1996, a health or psychological assessment of your child conducted by a qualified practitioner, if they feel that such an assessment is required to make a correct identification or placement decision;
 - interview your child, with your consent if your child is less than 16 years of age, if they feel it would be useful to do so; and
 - consider any information that you submit about your child or that your child submits if he or she is 16 years of age or older.
- The committee may discuss any proposal that has been made about a special education program or special education services for the child. Committee members will discuss any such proposal at your request or at the request of your child, if the child is 16 years of age or older.
 - You are encouraged to ask questions and join in the discussion.
 - Following the discussion, after all the information has been presented and considered, the committee will make its decision.

What will the IPRC consider in making its placement decision?

Before the IPRC can consider placing your child in a special education class, it must consider whether placement in a regular class with appropriate special education services will:

- meet your child’s needs; and
- be consistent with your preferences.

If, after considering all of the information presented to it, the IPRC is satisfied that placement in a regular class will meet your child’s needs and that such a decision is consistent with your preferences, the committee will decide in favour of placement in a regular class with appropriate special education services.

If the committee decides that your child should be placed in a special education class, it must state the reasons for that decision in its written statement of decision.

What will the IPRC’s written statement of decision include?

The IPRC’s written statement of decision will state:

- whether the IPRC has identified your child as exceptional;

- where the IPRC has identified your child as exceptional,
 - the categories and definitions of any exceptionalities identified, as they are defined by the Ministry of Education;
 - the IPRC's description of your child's strengths and needs;
 - the IPRC's placement decision; and
 - the IPRC's recommendations regarding a special education program and special education services;
- where the IPRC has decided that your child should be placed in a special education class, the reasons for that decision.

What happens after the IPRC has made its decision?

- If you **agree** with the IPRC decision, you will be asked to indicate, by signing your name, that you agree with the identification and placement decisions made by the IPRC.
- If the IPRC has identified your child as an exceptional pupil and if you **agree** with the IPRC identification and placement decisions, the board will promptly notify the appropriate personnel in the school of the need to develop or update the Individual Education Plan.

Once a child has been placed in a special education program, can the placement be reviewed?

- A review IPRC meeting will be held within the school year, unless the principal of the school at which the special education program is being provided receives written notice from you, the parent, dispensing with the annual review.
- You may request a review IPRC meeting any time after your child has been identified or has been in a special education program for 3 months.

What does a review IPRC consider and decide?

- With your written permission, the IPRC conducting the review will consider the progress your child has made in relation to the IEP. It will consider the same type of information that was originally considered by the IPRC, as well as any new information.
- The IPRC will review the placement and identification decisions and decide whether they should be continued or whether a different decision should now be made.

What can parents do if they disagree with the IPRC decision?

- If you **do not agree** with either the identification or

the placement decision made by the IPRC, you may:

- within 15 days of receipt of the decision, request that the IPRC hold a second meeting to discuss your concerns; or
- within 30 days of receipt of the decision, file a notice of appeal with the Secretary of the District School Board of Niagara, 191 Carlton St., St. Catharines, ON, L2R 7P4.
- If you **do not agree** with the decision after the second meeting, you may file a notice of appeal within 15 days of your receipt of the decision.

If you do not consent to the IPRC decision but you do not appeal it, the board will instruct the principal to implement the IPRC decision.

How do I appeal an IPRC decision?

- If you disagree with the IPRC's identification of your child as exceptional or with the placement decision of the IPRC, you may, within 30 days of receipt of the original decision or within 15 days of receipt of the decision from the second meeting described above, give written notification of your intention to appeal the decision to the Secretary of the District School Board of Niagara, 191 Carlton St., St. Catharines, ON, L2R 7P4.

The notice of appeal must:

- indicate the decision with which you disagree; and
- include a statement that sets out your reasons for disagreeing.

What happens in the appeal process?

The appeal process involves the following steps:

- The board will establish a special education appeal board to hear your appeal. The appeal board will be composed of three persons who have no prior knowledge of the matter under appeal, one of whom is to be selected by you, the parent.
- The chair of the appeal board will arrange a meeting to take place at a convenient time and place, but no later than 30 days after he or she has been selected (unless parents and board provide written consent to a later date).
- The appeal board will receive the material reviewed by the IPRC and may interview any persons who may be able to contribute information about the matter under appeal.
- You, the parent, and your child, if he or she is 16 years old or over, are entitled to be present at, and to participate in, all discussions.

- The appeal board must make its recommendation within 3 days of the meeting's ending. It may:
 - agree with the IPRC and recommend that the decision be implemented; or
 - disagree with the IPRC and make a recommendation to the board about your child's identification or placement or both.
- The appeal board will report its recommendations in writing, to you and to the school board, providing the reasons for its recommendations.
- Within 30 days of receiving the appeal board's written statement, the school board will decide what action it will take with respect to the recommendations (boards are not required to follow the appeal board recommendation).
- You may accept the decision of the school board or you may appeal to a Special Education Tribunal. You may request a hearing by writing to the secretary of the Special Education Tribunal. Information about making an application to the tribunal will be included with the appeal board's decision.

What organizations are available to assist parents?

Many parent organizations/associations are available to provide information and support to parents of exceptional children.

DSBN, like all school boards in Ontario has a Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) that participates in the board's annual review of its Special Education Plan and makes recommendations to the board around other matters pertaining to Special Education. The members of SEAC include representatives of local associations and members of the school board.

The following is a list of Associations on the Special Education Advisory Committee (S.E.A.C.) for the District School Board of Niagara:

- Community Living
- Autism Ontario - Niagara Chapter
- C.N.I.B. - Parent's Association of Blind & Visually Impaired
- Down Syndrome Caring Parents (Niagara)
- Learning Disabilities Association of Niagara
- Voice for Hearing Impaired Children
- Niagara Support Services
- Niagara Centre for Youth Care
- Niagara Regional Native Centre

What are the Ministry's Provincial and Demonstration Schools?

The Ministry operates Provincial and Demonstration Schools throughout Ontario for students who are deaf, blind, deaf-blind, and severely learning-disabled including students with learning disabilities associated with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Residential programs are offered at the schools Monday to Friday, for students who live too far from school to travel daily.

Demonstration Schools for English-speaking students with severe learning disabilities, including learning disabilities associated with ADHD.

Amethyst School

1090 Highbury Avenue • London ON • N5Y 4V9
Telephone: (519) 453-4408

Sagonaska School

350 Dundas Street West • Belleville ON • K8P 1B2
Telephone: (613) 967-2830

Trillium School

347 Ontario Street South • Milton ON • L9T 3X9
Telephone: (905) 878-2851

Schools for the Deaf

Ernest C. Drury School

255 Ontario Street South • Milton ON • L9T 2M5
Telephone: (905) 878-2851
TTY: (905) 878-7195

Robarts School

1090 Highbury Avenue
Box 7360, Station "E" • London ON • N5Y 4V9
Telephone and TTY: (519) 453-4400

Sir James Whitney School

350 Dundas Street West • Belleville ON • K8P 1B2
Telephone and TTY: (613) 967-2823

School for the Blind and Deaf-blind

W. Ross Macdonald School

350 Brant Avenue • Brantford ON • N3T 3J9
Telephone: (519) 759-0730

Where can parents obtain additional information?

Additional information can be obtained from

- the school Principal,
- Administrator of Special Education Services,

Don Reilly Resource Centre
13227 Lundy's Lane, Allanburg, L0S 1A0
905-227-5551 ext.2201

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Be prepared to share information about your child with your child's teacher. Keep notes about such things as allergies, medical problems, changes in the family, interests, sleeping and eating habits, which may affect your child's ability to learn. For students with intensive needs, encourage health professionals to document and report your child's needs clearly.
- Keep a file at home that contains school information about your child. Report cards, Individual Education Plans, assessments, and IPRC forms should be kept in this file.
- Feel free to call the school to arrange a time to speak to your child's teacher when you have questions or information to share. Arranging to meet together will support ongoing planning to address your child's needs.
- Make yourself available for meetings and parent interviews.
- Ask for definitions or explanations when necessary. School staff want you to understand and will be glad to explain.
- The goal of the partnership between the home and the school is to develop your child's full potential. Positive, realistic and open discussions about your child facilitate achieving this goal.
- Write down your questions or the information you wish to share before you go to a meeting with the teacher.
- If you have made every attempt to address your concerns by talking to the teacher, and you are not satisfied with the response, it is appropriate to contact the principal and arrange to meet again with the principal present.
- If you have questions about parent support groups, please consult the list of Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) members.
- Ongoing communications and partnership with your child's teacher supports your child's success.

IF PROBLEMS ARISE, HERE ARE THE STEPS TO FOLLOW

- **Write down your questions and concerns.**
- **Contact your child's teacher to arrange an opportunity to talk.**
- **If your questions remain unanswered, arrange to meet with the school principal.**

SOME COMMON QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

What are accommodations and what are modifications?

An accommodation is a strategy that addresses the *how, when and where* of program delivery without changing the curriculum expectations. Preferential seating, or writing a test in a quiet area are examples of accommodations.

A modification refers to *what* is being taught and significantly changes the curriculum expectations for that grade level or significantly decreases the number of expectations. For example, working on reading or mathematics curriculum expectations from a much earlier grade level are modifications.

What is an educational assessment?

An educational assessment refers to the set of observations and tests which have been assembled in the student's record to assist with education planning. Assessment is ongoing. Informal assessment by teachers includes observation and curriculum based assessment. Formal assessment refers to assessments which require written informed consent from parents such as psychological assessments and speech-language assessments. The results and recommendations are presented to the parent and will be used by school staff to improve programming for the student.

How do children get the support of an educational assistant?

Students who demonstrate a need for intense support due to significant physical, behavioural or extremely complex learning needs may qualify for access to an educational assistant. Educational assistants are allocated to schools based on student need as determined by the Educational Assistant Allocation Committee.

Can my child be placed in a special education program without my consent?

Before the IPRC can consider placing your child in a special education class, it must consider whether placement in a regular class with appropriate special education services will:

- meet your child's needs; and
- be consistent with your preferences.

If the IPRC is satisfied that placement in a regular class will meet your child's needs and that such a decision is consistent with your preferences, the committee will decide in favour of placement in a regular class with appropriate special education services.

When the committee is considering a special class placement for your child they will:

- make every attempt to reach consensus with you;
- give the reasons for the decision to place the child in a special class in its written statement of decision.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Accommodations	Strategies to assist a student in achieving within the curriculum expectations for that grade. Preferential seating, extra time to write tests and photocopied notes are examples of accommodations.
Modifications	Significant changes to the curriculum expectations for that grade level by reaching well below or well above grade level or significantly reducing the number of expectations. For example, a Grade 7 student working on Grade 3 mathematics expectations would have a modified math program as outlined in his/her Individual Education Plan (IEP).
Expectations	Statements that describe the knowledge and skills that students should be able to develop or demonstrate.
In-School Team	A group of teachers/support staff led by a school administrator who meet regularly to discuss the strengths, needs, progress and plans for students, who are experiencing learning difficulties and need support within the school.
Educational Assessment	An ongoing process used to measure student progress and to improve programming. It may include samples of a student's daily work, teacher observations, results of curriculum based assessments and diagnostic tests. Formal assessments that include a psychological assessment and/or a speech-language assessment require written parental consent and may be part of an educational assessment.
Exceptionalities	There are 5 categories of exceptionalities described by the Provincial Ministry of Education and Training. They are as follows: Behaviour Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Autism• Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing• Language Impairment• Speech Impairment• Learning Disability Intellectual <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Giftedness• Mild Intellectual Disability• Developmental Disability Physical <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physical Disability• Blind and Low Vision Multiple <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multiple Exceptionalities
Placement	The program or service provided to your child: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Special Education class full-time;• Special Education class with partial integration;• Regular class with withdrawal assistance;• Regular class with resource assistance;• Regular class with indirect support.
Appeal	The legal process followed when parents disagree with an IPRC decision.
Liaison	The sharing of information from one agency to another in order to provide the best support for the child.
Transition Plan	A plan for transition to appropriate postsecondary activities, such as work, further education, and/or community living, for exceptional students 14 years of age or older (except for those identified as exceptional solely on the basis of giftedness), that is part of their Individual Education Plan.
Interpreter	A person who interprets/facilitates communication on behalf of a deaf or hard of hearing student.
Intervenor	A person who helps interpret the world on behalf of a deaf/blind student.