



LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION OF BC

# Fraser North Chapter

The right to learn, the power to succeed!

Fall 2009

## A Parent's Guide to Individual Education Plans

The Ministry of Education states: "All parents want their children to develop their individual potential, to become the best they can be. As parents and as a society, we help children achieve this goal through education that meets their needs as *individuals*, as the Ministry of Education, Skills and Training mission statement specifies.

- If children are gifted, or have special talents or abilities, their educational programs must ensure they continue to be challenged in their learning.
- If children have disabilities, their programs need to respond to their particular learning needs.

In this statement, the Ministry of Education recognizes that some children will need supports and accommodations in order to reach their potential. To ensure this happens, the Ministry requires school boards to make an educational program available to all children who live and enroll in schools in their school district. An *Individual Education Plan* (IEP) identifies any additions, changes and adaptations to the regular program that should be made for each individual child, to ensure that all students have an educational program that meets their specific needs.

The Individual Education Plan (IEP) process begins when your child has been identified as a student with extra learning and/or support needs. Most children with an IEP will have been identified in one of several categories of special education. There are, however, some children who may be entitled to an IEP even if they have not been formally identified in a special education category. For example, if your child receives 25 hours or more of services outside of his or her regular education classroom in a school year, he or she also qualifies to have an IEP. Examples of those additional services might include school-provided speech and language therapy, counseling, learning centre time (learning assistance or resource room), etc. If you believe your child will have 25 or more hours of such services but have not been notified that your child will have an IEP, contact the school principal to ask about establishing an IEP for your child this school year.

Children with learning disabilities are usually identified through a process that includes psycho-educational assessment which involves both achievement and intelligence testing. You would have been notified about such testing and have been required to sign a form giving permission for the testing to be done. You would also likely have been contacted to meet with

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the person who performed the assessment to be told about the results or the testing. If you are unsure about whether or not your child has been tested, ask the school principal. Some children may be in the early stages of the assessment process where the classroom teacher and the specialist teacher in the school are monitoring your child's progress as various instructional and support strategies are tried before a formal psycho-educational assessment is given. Again, if you are unsure if your child is at this initial stage of the assessment process, ask your child's principal. With or without formal assessment and identification, if your child qualifies for an IEP, then you are entitled to participate in the IEP planning process.

The Ministry of Education describes an Individual Education Plan as follows:

***Individual Education Plans** are specifically designed for students as soon as practical after they are identified by the school board as students with special needs. An IEP describes program adaptations and/or modifications and the special services that are to be provided for the student. It is reviewed regularly and updated at least annually. IEP includes one or more of the following:*

- *learning outcomes that are different from, or are additions to, the expected learning outcomes set out in the provincial curriculum guide for a course, or subject and grade;*
- *a list of support services required for the student to achieve the learning outcomes established for the student, either the outcomes set out in the prescribed curriculum or individualized outcomes set for the student; and/or*

- *a list of the adapted materials, or instructional or assessment methods required by the student to meet the learning outcomes established for the student.*

*An IEP will vary in length and complexity according to the severity of each student's special needs. A short IEP might be adequate for students who only require a change in the procedures for examinations and tests or for those who need support for note-taking. The IEP will be more complex and extensive for a student with multiple disabilities, and more people will be involved in planning it.*

We have already identified who is eligible for an IEP earlier and so, for the remainder of this article, we will explore the Individual Planning Process in more detail.

***When Should an IEP be Written?***

The Ministry expects that an IEP should be written for a student soon after they have been identified as a student with special needs. That may mean that the IEP could be written mid-school year if the child had been recently formally assessed using a psycho-educational assessment.

For children who have not been formally assessed, but who are anticipated to receive 25 hours or more of services during the school year, their IEPs would likely be written in the fall when services are scheduled and coordinated. So, for example, to calculate the hours, consider how much time your child is scheduled to attend the learning centre each week or how long your child is scheduled to visit with the Speech/Language Pathologist each week and multiply by the number of weeks in the school year.

For those children who have already been identified as a student with special needs, their IEPs are usually

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written in the fall of each new school year.

It is important to note that the Ministry does identify any specific deadlines for when the writing of IEPs must be completed. However, some school districts have set their own policies regarding when the writing of IEPs should be completed. Parents can contact their local School Board Office to ask about their school district's special education policies. In fact, it is best for parents to request a copy of these policies and keep them in a binder along with their child's past and present IEPs along with any assessment reports and report cards.

***Who Is Involved In Developing the Plan?***

Typically, it is the specialist teacher in the school that coordinates the writing of the plan (learning assistance or resource teacher). However, the child's classroom teacher(s), school administrators, district specialists and others can also be involved. These professionals come together to form the school based team and contribute to the planning. The Ministry of Education describes School Based Teams in their publication: ***"A Parent's Guide to Individual Education Plans"*** as follows:

***The school-based team***

*Most schools in British Columbia have a structure in place for the purpose of solving problems and finding solutions related to the special needs of students. The school-based team is usually responsible for the following:*

- *planning and coordinating services in the school for students with special needs,*
- *providing opportunities for consultation on possible classroom strategies,*
- *supporting teachers in providing appropriate support for students,*
- *providing access to additional school, district, community or regional services, and*

- *assisting with problem-solving, referral and liaison with other agencies.*

*If your child needs assistance beyond that which the classroom teacher can provide, a referral will probably be made to the school-based team. Parents should be involved in this consultation and planning process. The school-based team usually includes the following:*

- *a school administrator,*
- *the classroom teacher,*
- *a learning assistance teacher or resource teacher,*
- *other specialists, such as a counselor,*
- *district resource staff, and representatives from community services or other ministries as needed, and other individuals who have experience with the student.*

According to the Ministry of Education, parents must be consulted regarding their child's educational program. The Ministry defines an educational program as follows:

***An educational program*** is defined in the School Act as the organized set of learning activities that, in the opinion of the board of education, is designed to enable learners "to develop their potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society with a prosperous and sustainable economy."

Note that the Ministry uses the term "consulted" which can be defined by various districts to mean differing levels of participation by parents. Typically, parents are invited to attend a meeting where the IEP is reviewed and parents are asked to contribute their

## Fall Programs and Services

### **Two Orton Gillingham Group Tutoring Programs:**

Literacy-based software and Orton Gillingham Group Tutoring are the foundation of this innovative program. Small group instruction, individual activities, and game play are designed to develop better learning skills and strategies. For children ages 6 to 14. Mondays and Wednesdays OR Tuesdays and Thursdays. Limited to 5 children in each class. Three month minimum commitment is required. Payment Plan available.

### **Programs for Girls aged 6 to 15:**

The Program focuses on making friends, handling peer pressure, learning appropriate behaviour, etc. Crafts and activities just for girls. October through December on Wednesdays.

### **Programs for Boys Ages 7 to 15**

These program focus on developing new social skills through making eye contact, developing better communication skills, learning conflict resolution, enhancing listening skills, developing personal boundaries, and understanding safety issues. Group activities and outdoor events included with these programs. October through March on Thursdays.

### **Life Skills Co-Ed Program:**

For youth ages 13 and up. In this program your teenager will be coached to learn to prepare for their future. Activities include: budgeting, personal grooming habits, preparing meals, etc. October through December on Mondays.

### **Theatre Club and Improv**

For children aged 7 to 15. These two programs will introduce theatre games, improvisation, set design, script writing, props and other theatre activities to your children. October through December on Tuesdays.

### **Parents' Sharing Evening:**

Get this year off to a good start! Join us for an evening of sharing and discussion about Special Education facilitated by Cathie Camley, author of Know Your Rights for Parents. Bring your Questions and Concerns.

September 22nd, 7:00 to 9:00 pm  
Drop in, fee by donation at the door.

### **Parent Advocacy Training Program:**

This two-evening course covers the basics of how to advocate for your child within the education system. Learn about your rights and responsibilities as well as those of the education system. Be better prepared to contribute to IEP planning and for those parent teacher meetings.

Wednesday, September 30th and  
Wednesday October 13th  
7:00 to 9:00 pm  
Fee: \$75.00

### **Individual Education Plan (IEP) Workshop**

Get the best plan in place for your child this year. Join us for a one night workshop to learn the ins and outs of IEPs.

Tuesday, October 13th, 7:00 to 9:00 pm  
Fee: \$10.00

**All the programs listed are held at the Family Resource Centre, Westwood Elementary School, Room 14, 3610 Hastings Street, Port Coquitlam.**

**To register for any of the programs on this page, please contact the LDA Fraser North Chapter at:**

**604- 464-1187**

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thoughts and suggestions about it as well as encouraged to contribute their expertise about their child's needs.

In "**Parent's Guide to Individual Education Planning,**" the Ministry offers the following information to parents about being involved in the process:

**Talking with the Teacher**

*Ideally, you and the school work together in creating an educational program to meet your child's needs. Don't be afraid to approach the school from the start so that you can establish a collaborative relationship with the educators who work with your child. Parents, the school, and most importantly, your child benefit from good communication. Often, when issues arise at the classroom or school level, they are the result of miscommunication. It makes sense to address issues immediately, so they do not escalate into problems. Try to solve issues at the school level first.*

- *If you have concerns, but are uncertain about how to direct them, your first meeting to discuss your child should be with the teacher.*
- *Bring notes you've made about schoolwork, significant events, even hunches about your child's educational program to refer to at the meeting.*
- *Explain to the teacher what you hope to get out of the meeting. Ask yourself these questions:*
  - *Do I need to be heard and have my views recognized and validated? Or...*
  - *Am I dissatisfied and want to see changes for my child?*
  - *What action do I want taken?*

- *Am I wanting more information about my child's program or progress?*
- *Keep an open mind about the reasons for the actions and responses of others involved with the child at school.*
- *At the parent-teacher meeting, listen carefully and take notes.*

The following section of the BC School Act describes a parent's entitlements:

*(1) A parent of a student of school age attending a school is entitled:*

- *to be informed, in accordance with the orders of the Minister, of the student's attendance, behavior and progress in school,*
- *to examine records,*
- *to be consulted regarding student placement,*
- *to be consulted in preparation of the student's IEP,*
- *to appeal decisions made by an employee of the board which significantly affect the education, health, or safety of a student (school boards are required to establish an appeal process),*
- *on request, to annual reports respecting general effectiveness of educational programs in the school district, and*
- *to belong to a parents' advisory council established in accordance with the School Act.*

*(2) A parent of a student of school age attending a school may, and at the request of a teacher or administrative officer is required to, consult with the teacher or administrative officer with respect to the student's educational program.*

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You child should also be involved in the planning as well. Of course the degree of his or her participation will depend on their age. For young children, their participation can be brief and general. As children grow, so should their participation so by the time they are in Grade 12, they should be integrally involved. After all, they will be responsible for advocating for themselves at post-secondary or in the work world.

Given the above, it is then important that your child become familiar with their strengths and areas of support. Even at a young age the vast majority of children with learning disabilities are aware of their disability. Parents should help to demystify the reasons for their struggles at an age appropriate level. As the child matures, so should the depth of their understanding. In this way, children are better able to advocate for themselves and feel more confident about their abilities.

#### ***Who is Responsible/Accountable?***

The Ministry of Education offers the following information about administrative responsibility:

*Under the School Act , the school principal is ultimately responsible for administering and supervising the school, overseeing the educational program for the students in the school, placing students, assigning the staff, and making sure that parents are regularly provided with reports of the students' progress. The principal is responsible for ensuring that the IEP is developed, implemented, and reviewed with appropriate revisions.*

#### ***Adaptations Verses Modifications***

The vast majority of students with learning disabilities are quite capable of achieving the same learning outcomes as their same grade peers as long as certain accommodations are made for their learning style. This can include how they are taught and/or how their learning is assessed. These adaptations and accommodations should be listed in their IEP.

The Ministry of Education provides the following examples of adaptations:

Different types of adaptations include examples such as the following:

- different formats for resources to enable students to receive instruction or information, such as books-on-tape;
- different teaching strategies, such as visual cues or breaking tasks into smaller parts; and/or
- different ways of demonstrating learning, such as oral exams or extra time.

Some students with learning disabilities may not be able to keep up with their peers. This may be for a short period of time or for longer depending on their progress. It may also be that they are able to keep pace in some subjects but not in others. In the case where students are working on curriculum that is substantially different than their peers, their course-work is modified to meet the child's particular needs. All modified goals and objectives should be outlined in the child's IEP.

#### ***What Information Must an IEP Contain?***

The Ministry of Education's Individual Education Plan Order states the following about the contents of an IEP:

2. (1) A board must ensure that an IEP is designed for a student with special needs as soon as practical after the student is so identified by the board.
- (2) Subsection (1) does not apply where the student with special needs requires no adaptation or only minor adaptations to educational materials, or instructional or assessment methods,

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the expected learning outcomes established by the applicable educational program guide have not been modified for the student with special needs, and

the student with special needs requires in a school year, 25 hours or less remedial instruction, by a person other than the classroom teacher, in order for the student to meet the expected learning outcomes referred to in paragraph (b).

5. Where a board is required to provide an IEP for a student under Section 2..., the board must offer each student with special needs ... learning activities in accordance with the IEP designed for that student.

### ***How Will I Know About the Progress My Child Is Making?***

All students receive progress reports. Those who have adapted programs can expect the regular grading and reporting procedures. Those students who follow modified programs, and have their individualized goals and objectives outlined in their IEPs, can expect structured written comments instead of letter grades. The Ministry describes structured comments as follows:

*The Student Progress Report Order 7 requires that student progress reports in these circumstances must contain written comments describing*

*what the student is able to do, the areas in which the student requires further attention or development, and*

*ways of supporting the student in her learning, in relation to the expected learning outcomes set out in her IEP.*

In addition, they add:

*When a professional support person other than the classroom teacher is responsible for providing some portion of your child's educational program (e.g. speech/language pathologists, orientation and mobility instructors), this person usually provides a written report to parents on the student's progress, for inclusion with the report of the classroom teacher.*

### ***How To Check on Your Child's Progress?***

It is important for parents to ensure their child is making progress and the most important tool for doing so for students who have individualized programs is through the IEP reporting process. Parents should know how much progress their child is making towards the goals and objectives outlined in the IEP. This is more specific information than: "Bobby is working on long division in the learning centre twice a week with Ms. Smith." It should include objective measurements of progress. These evaluations should be reported at regular reporting times (e.g., report cards, scheduled parent teacher meetings, and when you feel the need to know).

The Ministry also requires that the IEP be reviewed at least once a year. Parents and students can, and should be, be a part of this review process.

### ***Where Can I Get More Information?***

Contact your local School Board office and ask for "Parent's Guide to Individual Education Planning." In addition to Ministry of Education policy for IEPs, many school districts have also developed local policy. Ask for a copy of your school district's policies for Individual Education Plans as well.

Many LDA Chapters also host IEP information meetings and workshops early in the fall. Contact your local chapter for more information.

*Written by Cathie Camley, author of:  
Know Your Rights for Guardians and  
Know Your Rights for Students.*

# Your Chapter Executive



|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
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### *Mission Statement:*

*To advance the education, employment, social development, legal rights and general well-being of people with learning disabilities. We do this by promoting the early recognition, diagnosis and treatment of learning disabilities, and developing or sponsoring appropriate programs and resources for the benefit of people with learning disabilities and/or their families.*