

TALKING ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION SERIES

VOLUME 4

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANS

INFORMATION BOOKLET



This pamphlet is one of a series of resources prepared by the First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) and First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) to share information about how to support all First Nations students, regardless of their needs.

FNSA MANDATE:

to collaborate with First Nation schools to create nurturing environments that develop learners' pride and competence in their First Nations language and heritage and equip them to realize their full potential within self-governing First Nations communities.

FNESC MANDATE:

to facilitate discussion about education matters affecting First Nations in BC by disseminating information to and soliciting input from First Nations. FNESC's primary goal is to promote and support the provision of a quality education to First Nations learners.

We hope that these pamphlets provide a useful overview of key special education topics, representing an introduction to issues that some people may want to investigate in more detail. Anyone who requires more information or has specific questions is welcome to contact the FNESC/FNSA special education staff.



Published 1998, Updated February 2018

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WHAT ARE INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANS?

All parents want their children to develop to their full potential and to become the best that they can be.

Parents and educators can work together to help children achieve this goal by ensuring that all children receive an education program that meets their needs as individuals.

For students with special needs, it is particularly important that parents and teachers understand and respond to each child's unique talents and challenges.

Children with special needs generally show one or more of the following characteristics:

- Differences in intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional, or behavioural functioning or performance;
- Specific types of learning difficulties; and/or

- Unique gifts or talents.

The fact that a child has a special need does not reflect any fault - not on the part of the student, parent, community, or school. Children have special needs for all kinds of reasons - some of them existing since birth. Blame has no place in discussions of special needs. Instead, the focus of everyone involved should always be on understanding what can be done to ensure that children with special needs succeed - in school, at home, in their community, and throughout their lives.

Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are an important part of understanding and responding to each child's special needs. They are, simply put, documents that summarize and record a student's specific education programs and services.

NOTE: in this pamphlet, we use the term "parent" for simplicity, but the information is intended to be inclusive of all family members/caregivers of students with special needs. FNECS and the FNSA respect and appreciate the invaluable contributions of everyone who works to support all First Nations students - regardless of their special talents, gifts, or challenges.

IEPs: What You Can Expect

If your child has been identified as having a special need, your school should contact you about the creation of an IEP. The IEP will be developed by a group of people who will combine their expertise, with your input, for the benefit of your child.

The result will be an IEP document that identifies any additions, changes, or adaptations to the regular school program that should be made so that your child has every opportunity for success - both within and outside of school.

Your child's IEP should be developed collaboratively, by a "Student Support Team" that is created especially for each individual student.

The exact membership of each Intervention Team may vary slightly, depending on the unique needs of each student, but in all cases parents / families must be consulted and should be involved as much as possible, and as much as they want to be.

Once written, an IEP - as its name implies - becomes the plan to help your child perform as well as possible in the classroom, and to transition smoothly

from one setting to another or from one grade to another.

An IEP should help you and the Intervention Team monitor your child's progress and growth. IEPs provide an ongoing record of what services have been provided for your child. This can help everyone track the services, make sure there is consistency over time, and determine whether the services are meeting your child's needs.

An IEP will ideally be a "working" document - one that is reviewed regularly throughout the school year and updated at scheduled reporting periods.

Your child's goals will be outlined in the IEP. The goals should be based on reliable information about your child's strengths, skills, challenges and performance, all of which can evolve over time. This means each IEP will likely need ongoing changes to keep it relevant and up-to-date.

Using the IEP, you and your school's staff can continue to combine your knowledge, experience, and commitment to work together in the best interests of your child.

Who Might Be On Your Child's Intervention Team?

- The **school principal** might be involved in planning your child's IEP, as the principal might lead the school's processes for identifying students who might have special needs, arranging needed assessments, and accessing people with the expertise needed to help your child.
- Your child's **teacher(s)** are key to understanding and meeting your child's learning needs, as they regularly observe your child in the classroom, use different kinds of assessments to track their needs and progress, and will implement many of the services and learning approaches planned to assist your child.
- **Educational Assistants** often work collaboratively with the school team, as they directly support children under the direction of a teacher.
- **Outside experts** may help design an IEP and attend meetings to support your child and the school staff who are working to help. Depending on your child's needs, outside experts might include a speech and language pathologist, an occupational or physical therapist, a psychologist, or a special education teacher who has relevant training and knowledge.
- **Students** are often included, if appropriate given their age and maturity.
- Perhaps most importantly, **parents** should be fully involved with the creation of an IEP. You know your child better than anyone else, and you should be meaningfully involved in the intervention planning process. No one is better than you when it comes to understanding and advocating for your child's needs.

Your Role in Planning the IEP

You have a wealth of knowledge and experience that will be invaluable when planning for your child's education. Some of the information you can share includes:

- Family history, medical history, and health care needs.
- Records of any assessments of your child (such as hearing or vision tests).
- A description of your child's strengths and challenges - what they do well and not as well.
- A description of what you want your child to learn, and their short and long-term goals.
- Samples of past school work.
- Successful ways you have for communicating with your child at home, and your recommendations for helping your child at school.

- Your opinions about strategies that might be appropriate and beneficial for your child.
- Information about other community services, caregivers, and activities that have an impact on your child's life.

Of course, you have a right to privacy about matters that are not relevant to your child's education. However, it will help for you to provide information that may have an impact on your child's health, safety and well-being while they are at school. If you have concerns, ask for assurance that any information you provide will be used only when necessary and only by people who need to know it. Your school can tell you more about how they will use all information about your child. That is your right.

Preparing for the IEP Meeting

Some parents find it helpful to prepare for IEP meetings by making notes about some or all of the following.

- A list of topics you would like to review.
- Questions you have, both for your child and about your own role.
- What you want for your child's learning, in the short-term and in the future.
- Any issues that are causing you concern.
- Things your child does well, and approaches you think will help with your child's learning and behaviour.

OTHER TIPS

- Ask a family member or friend to go to IEP meetings with you if that would make you feel more comfortable.
- Bring your list, friend, and some paper and a pen.
- Bring any medical records or evaluations you have for your child.
- Listen and ask questions to be sure you understand.
- Talk about your dreams for your child, what your child can do, as well as what help your child needs.
- Share your thoughts about educational goals you think are right for your child.
- Don't feel rushed. Take the time you need to feel good about the meeting, and to reach an IEP that you believe reflects your child's strengths and will help your child reach his or her full potential. But remember - IEPs can change. Don't feel like you have to solve everything at once.

What Can I Expect to See in an IEP?

- The IEP will include a brief summary of any formal and informal assessments completed with your child, with relevant dates, the name of the assessment, a brief review of your child's strengths and needs as determined through the assessment, as well as any recommendations.
 - Formal Assessments are completed by professionals such as Psychologists, Speech Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, and doctors.
 - Informal Assessments are completed by teachers and other educators. They outline a student's current skills.
- The IEP will list your child's strengths in all areas of life – at school, at home, and in the community. You can help create that list.
- The IEP will list words and short phrases that team members would use to describe your child. You can provide invaluable input into this part of the document.
- Information about factors that will support your child's learning is critical. The IEP will include suggestions such as "works best in a quiet environment, in a small group setting, with visual supports, with structure and consistency, etc."
- Medical information that the team needs to support your child in school, such as medications, allergies, etc., will be noted.
- Information about your child's grade placement (grades skipped/retained), school transfers, attendance, etc. is useful to include in an IEP.
- The IEP will identify your child's areas of need, usually using just words or short phrases.

- Developing an IEP can help you and your child think about and establish a long term dream and/or goal. Your child will ideally be a key participant in this process, if that is possible. Examples: graduate from Grade 12; get a driver's licence; become an artist/carver, a lawyer, a teacher, etc. Remember - IEPs can change over time, and so can the goals included within the document. Don't feel "locked in" to a goal set at one specific time. Circumstances will evolve, and so will the IEP.
- The IEP team can brainstorm and list in the IEP what everyone hopes your child will accomplish by the end of the school year. This will be put in a "What do we want [student name] to accomplish?" section. Examples include: complete the Grade One Reading Program by June; increase attendance; etc.
- One or more of the short-term goals the team identifies will be selected and stated in the IEP using a SMART format (Strategic, Measureable, Attainable, Results-Based, and Time-Bound). Remember that the IEP will not encompass everything relevant for your child. Key goals can be included and changed over time.
- For each selected goal, the IEP will include information about strategies and team responsibilities, measures to track changes over time, as well as actual progress being achieved by your child.
- Review dates for the team to meet and review your child's progress towards his or her goals will be established. The dates are typically 8-10 weeks apart, or just before each report card date.
- The role of each participant will be documented.

The IEP May List

Adaptations or Modifications

BE AWARE OF POSSIBLE DIFFERENCES!

IEPs often describe accommodations that will be made to help your child succeed in the classroom.

Accommodations include things such as a different approach to setting goals, more flexible types of instruction, having more choice about what materials or media will be used with your child, and perhaps different methods of assessment. Accommodations allow teachers to respond to the unique needs of each child.

Adaptations and/or modifications are each a form of accommodation.

- **ADAPTATIONS** are teaching and assessment strategies especially designed to meet students' unique needs so that they can follow the regular curriculum. Adaptations can be made to the learning environment (such as classroom arrangements, controls for sound level or distractions, etc), instructional methods (such as more individual practice etc.), assessment practices (such as more time on tests or more verbal rather than written assessments), or the depth of content learned (such as letting students learn more or less about certain topics than other students). **Students whose education programs include adaptations can receive credits toward a Dogwood Diploma.**

- **MODIFICATIONS and modified programs** are developed for students whose special needs make them unable to access the regular curriculum. Some examples of students who may require modified programs include children with limited awareness of their surroundings, with very fragile mental / physical health, and / or with multiple medical and other challenges. **Modifications can mean that students may not be able to access the Dogwood Diploma.**

You have a right to know if and how any accommodations will potentially affect your child's graduation.

Always ask questions to find out what changes might mean for your child's future.

If you don't feel comfortable asking questions, something about the Intervention Team is not working the way that it should. Talk to someone you trust – such as the school principal or teacher – and ask for their help so you are comfortable asking any questions you have.

The IEP process is meant to help you and, most importantly, your child. It is important to ask for anything you need to make the IEP development process work as well as possible for your family.

OTHER VOLUMES AVAILABLE IN THE
TALKING ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION SERIES:

VOLUME 1: AN OVERVIEW

VOLUME 2: AN INTRODUCTION FOR PARENTS / FAMILIES

VOLUME 3: INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANS

VOLUME 4: A PARENT'S GUIDE TO INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANS

VOLUME 5: SPEECH AND LANGUAGE ISSUES

VOLUME 6: ATTENTION DEFICIT / ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVE
DISORDER

VOLUME 7: FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDERS

VOLUME 8: AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

VOLUME 9: GIFTED EDUCATION

FOR MORE INFORMATION:



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