

6 THE B.C. EDUCATION SYSTEM – AN INTRODUCTION FOR PARENTS OF STUDENTS WITH ASD

It is a major transition for parents of children with special needs to prepare their children for school entry. For parents who have children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or other invisible disabilities, it can be difficult to make this transition, because the needs of their children are not obvious to those who do not know them. However, gaining a better understanding of the British Columbia (B.C.) education system does help parents make informed choices that can greatly benefit their child and bring down stress levels for all concerned – including the child with ASD.

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Since all children with ASD have challenges that will impact their education to varying degrees, it is very important that communication between school personnel and parents happens in a consistent and meaningful way. Effective communication allows parents to be aware of what is happening at school and to become valued partners in their child's education through knowledge sharing and careful decision making. A key element in increasing the effectiveness of your participation in your child's education is your understanding of the province's education system. This chapter provides a framework to get you started.

These topics will be covered in this chapter:

1. Enrolling your Child in an Educational Program.
2. What Inclusion Means in British Columbia.
3. Types of Educational Settings.
4. Deciding on Your Child's Educational Program.
5. Starting Kindergarten.
6. Your Child is Enrolled in a Program ... Now What?

7. The *School Act* and Other Important Legislation.
8. The Players in the Game: Understanding Roles and Responsibilities.
9. Individual Education Plans.
10. Reporting Student Progress.
11. Graduation or School Completion—Important Issues to Consider.
12. Provincial Outreach Program for Autism and Related Disorders (POPARD).
13. Funding Special Education in British Columbia.

Like all children who live in British Columbia, school-aged children with ASD are required by the *School Act* to be enrolled and participate in an educational program. Under the *School Act*, school-aged children are considered to be from age 5 to 16 years of age.¹

There are a few other important points:

- Enrolment can be deferred until the first day of the year following the child's fifth birthday.
- Students must continue in an educational program at least until their 16th birthday.
- They may continue in an educational program to the end of the school term in which they turn 19 years old.

In Canada, the provinces have the responsibility to legislate educational law. In British Columbia, the provincial legislation that addresses public education is called The School Act. You can find the Act and its regulations at www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/stat/S/96412_00.htm. Every public school in B.C. has a copy that you can read by asking the principal.

Independent schools in B.C. are governed by the Independent School Act, which can be found at www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/stat/I/96216_01.htm.

ENROLLING YOUR CHILD IN AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Many children will have been identified as having ASD before it comes time for them to be enrolled in school. In this case, it is wise to contact the school district's special education department at least six months before the new school year begins. This allows time to plan for your child's entry to school. Bring your child's records, in particular the documents that confirm their ASD diagnosis, to the first meeting with the school or school district personnel. If your child is in a preschool program, some districts have personnel that visit preschool settings to observe an identified child as part of the planning process. This is to be encouraged as they are likely to have a better idea of your child's needs if they have actually seen them in a group setting.

If your child is awaiting assessment and has not yet been identified as having an ASD, you should register your child in his or her local school and advise the district that your child is awaiting an ASD assessment. Regardless of whether your child receives a diagnosis of ASD, the school district should be made aware of his or her needs.

In the case of a family moving from outside the province or from outside of Canada, please review Chapter 1, “The Diagnostic Process in British Columbia.” The diagnostic system is accepted by all government ministries in terms of accessing services for children with ASD. This means that if your child’s diagnosis of ASD has been accepted by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, it will also be accepted by the Ministry of Education.

WHAT DOES INCLUSION MEAN IN B.C.?

The B.C. Ministry of Education has a policy of inclusion for children with special needs, which is defined as:

The principle that all students are entitled to equitable access to learning, achievement and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their education. The practice of inclusion is not necessarily synonymous with integration and goes beyond placement to include meaningful participation and the promotion of interaction with others.²

This definition allows for a variety of different educational settings for students. For students with ASD, as for other students, placement possibilities can vary greatly. According to Ministerial Order #150/89, entitled “Students with Special Needs”:

A board must ensure that an (sic) principal, vice principal or director of instruction offers to consult with a parent of a student with special needs regarding the placement of that student in an educational program.³

When you enroll your child in school, you should be aware of this order, but do not assume that the only placement for your child will be in a “regular classroom,” even though the second part of the Ministerial Order states:

A board must provide a student with special needs with an educational program in a classroom where that student is integrated with other students who do not have special needs, unless the educational needs of the student with special needs or other students indicate that the educational program for the student with special needs should be provided otherwise.⁴

TYPES OF EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

There are a variety of educational settings available in school districts around B.C. The choice differs considerably depending on the educational philosophy of the school district, the size of the district, the resources available in the district, and what parents have requested be available. The following are some types of settings parents are likely to hear about. It is always a good idea to ask what the choices in your district are and to request to visit the settings that you are interested in.

Integrated Classroom

This type of setting means students with ASD are placed in a “typical” classroom with their peers. They are then to be provided with the appropriate supports to allow them to be educated in this environment. According to Ministerial Order #150/89 referred to above, this is the first option to be considered for students with special needs.

Resource Room

This setting is a classroom within a neighbourhood school that is specifically designated for students with special needs. Within this room many different programs may occur. These will vary from school to school depending on school and district policies and practices. In some schools resource rooms are settings where students spend their entire day and receive all their instruction. In other schools, resource rooms may be a part-time placement, with some time spent by students in “integrated” settings receiving instruction with their “typical” peers.

Specialized Classroom

In some school districts there are classrooms that are intended to meet the needs of a specific type of learner. For example, there are some school districts that have life skills classes, behavior classes, social development classes, etc. In these classes, students with similar challenges/problems are grouped together for instruction.

Distributed Learning

According to the Ministry of Education, “Distributed Learning (DL) gives both rural and urban students in British Columbia improved access, more choice, and flexibility to learn outside classroom schedules. Distributed Learning occurs when you are learning at a distance from your teacher, whether you are at home, at school or at another learning facility.”⁵ Certain school districts have responded more creatively than others to the needs of special needs students within their districts.

Under this program a student’s educational program remains the responsibility of a public or independent school and must meet provincial standards. A certified teacher is responsible for the delivery and supervision of the educational program, although a parent may be a facilitator.

Segregated School

In a few districts in the province there are schools that are specifically designated for students with special needs, usually those with developmental disabilities. Students who are placed in these schools receive their instruction in classrooms with other students with developmental disabilities.

Alternatives to the Public School

Independent School

Also known as private schools, independent schools offer an educational program for 10 or more students and are operated by an authority such as a not-for-profit society or a private business. The operations of an independent school are governed by the *Independent School Act*.⁶ These schools are funded in various ways, in part from the Ministry of Education, and from tuition fees paid for by parents.

Homeschooling

According to the Ministry of Education, homeschooled children are registered in a school within the school district where they live or are registered with a Francophone school or independent school. In a homeschool setting, the educational program is not only directed by the parent, but is also entirely the responsibility of the parent. They are not required to meet provincial standards, nor are they inspected by the government.

DECIDING ON YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATIONAL SETTING

To determine a setting that you and school district personnel agree is appropriate for your child, it is important to start discussions well in advance of the first day of school. Precedent has been set in Canadian courts that puts the emphasis in these decisions on meeting the needs of the child.

For example, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in the case of Emily Eaton that, despite her parents' desire to have her integrated into their neighborhood school, the child had to go to the segregated program that the school district had decided was in her best interest.⁷ Inclusion may be a philosophical imperative from the perspective of many parents of children with special needs, but it is not a right under the *School Act*.

Nevertheless, many school districts do place children in typical classrooms as the first choice. It should be up to you and your child's team, in discussion with the school district, to decide where your child is likely to do best for the initial transition into school.



STARTING KINDERGARTEN IN B.C.

Children usually start kindergarten the year they turn five. However, it is possible for a parent to delay enrollment of their child to the following school year. For most students, attendance is not full-time.

Children with autism and other special needs are eligible for full-time kindergarten according to “Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines”:

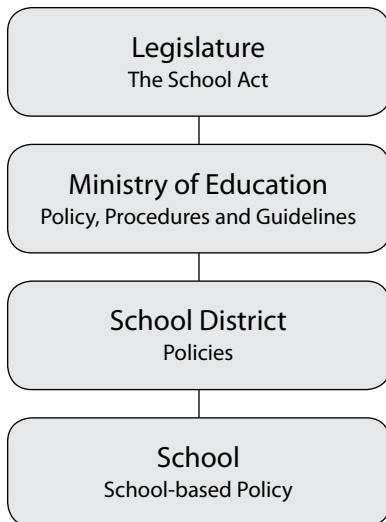
School districts may claim these students for full-day special education funding and report them to the Ministry of Education in September of the year in which they are admitted to school, providing that an appropriate Individual Education Plan has been developed to address their special educational needs. To ensure continuity when a child has been in a special needs preschool or child development centre program, districts are advised to co-ordinate the entry of the child to school and the planning of the kindergarten program with programs that have been offered in the preschool years. In some cases, school districts may elect to contract for services through a preschool or child development centre for some portion of the child’s educational program in the kindergarten year.⁸

YOUR CHILD IS ENROLLED IN A PROGRAM ... NOW WHAT?

While parents of typical children often can and do leave the education of their children up to their school, parents of children with special needs frequently find it is necessary to become more closely involved in their child’s education. Often it is the parent who provides the information that allows the student to transition successfully from year to year. Many parents become adept at providing additional resources and insights that they have found through attending training events and reading widely.

The B.C. Ministry of Education also has some good resources available on its website, providing details related to the education system, its policies and suggested practices. The portion of the website that gives specific information related to “special” education can be found at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/. A careful review of relevant sections of this website is recommended.

Keep in mind that the stated goal of the B.C. school system is to “support the intellectual development of all students, including those with special needs. Enabling all students to achieve the goals of human, social and career development is a responsibility shared by schools, families and the community.”



THE SCHOOL ACT AND OTHER IMPORTANT LEGISLATION

While reading legislation may be a tedious job, policy is derived from legislation, and it is important for you to know where to find the final word regarding education in British Columbia. You may not wish to read legislation now, but someday you may need to. According to a relevant article in the *Canadian Association for the Practical Study of Law in Education*, “Only Acts and Regulations create enforceable legal rights.”⁹ In plain language, that means there is no remedy in the courts if and when the government or school districts fail to apply or follow their own policies unless the policies are clearly stated in law, such as in the *School Act*. When you have a concern, you will need to know what legislation, if any, addresses the issues related to your concern.

In Canada, the provinces have the responsibility to enact educational law. In B.C., the provincial legislation that addresses public education is called the *School Act*. You can find the Act and its Regulations at www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/stat/S/96412_00.htm. Independent schools in B.C. are governed by the *Independent School Act*, which can be found at www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/stat/I/96216_01.htm.

An organizational chart may assist you in visualizing the hierarchy of policy in the public education system.

THE PLAYERS IN THE GAME: UNDERSTANDING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

It is helpful to gain an understanding of who’s who within the education system in general and your school district specifically. The names of positions may vary. The information that follows focuses on the roles and responsibilities of the different players, according to the *School Act*.

Parental Rights

According to the *School Act*, the parent has the right:

- To be informed about a student’s attendance, behavior and progress in school.
- To be provided information, on request, about the school plan for the school and the accountability contract for the school district. You can find the accountability contract for your school district on the ministry website: www.bced.gov.bc.ca/schools/sdinfo/acc_contracts/2008/.

- To belong to the parents' advisory council.
- To provide volunteer services, subject to regulations and any rules of the Board.
- On request and, in the company of the principal or designate, to examine all student records kept by a board pertaining to that student, and receive a copy of any student record pertaining to that student (fee may be charged).
- To appeal to the school board a decision of an employee of the board if the decision significantly affects the education, health or safety of a student, provided this is done within a reasonable time frame from the date the parent or student was informed of the decision.

Parental Responsibilities

According to the *School Act*, the parent has these responsibilities:

- To register the student on or before September 30th of each year at a school of the parents' choice.
- At the request of school personnel, parents must consult with school personnel about the student's educational program.

Teacher Responsibilities

According to the *School Act*, the teacher has the responsibility for:

- Designing, supervising and assessing educational programs.
- Instructing, assessing and evaluating individual students and groups of students.
- Performing duties that are outlined in the Regulations that accompany the *School Act*.

In addition to the classroom teacher, a school may have a resource teacher who provides support to teaching staff who work with students with special needs and acts as case manager for students with special needs. These teachers are often responsible for coordinating the Individual Education Plan. This teacher may also work directly with identified students, at times, for specific support outside the classroom. They are called non-enrolling teachers since they do not have responsibility for a specific classroom of students. They do not supervise classroom teachers.

Teacher Assistant Responsibilities

According to the *School Act*, the responsibilities of a teacher assistant include:

- Working under the general supervision of a teacher, principal or director of instruction.
- Assisting a teacher in carrying out their responsibilities and duties.

Teaching Assistants may be given different titles in different school districts, for example, Teacher Aide, Educational Assistant, Special Education Assistant or Classroom Support Worker.

Clarifying the Differing Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers and Teacher Assistants

According to the *School Act*, a teacher assistant should not design or implement programs or assess or evaluate student progress. This remains the responsibility of the teacher.

A very helpful guide has been developed by the B.C. Teachers Federation and the Canadian Union of Public Employees of British Columbia, “The Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers and Teacher Assistants.” The guide outlines general responsibilities of teachers and teacher assistants working together as well as their specific responsibilities. Many teachers and teacher assistants may not be aware of this book’s existence. It can be found online at <http://bctf.ca/IssuesInEducation.aspx?id=5920>.

The Responsibility of the School Principal

According to the *School Act*, although it is a teacher who develops and implements the Individual Education Plan (IEP), the principal bears the ultimate responsibility of IEP development and implementation. The principal is also the person responsible for the supervision of school staff and for the overall management of the school. It is often said that the principal sets the tone of the school in terms of staff relationships with parents, particularly parents of children with special needs.

School District Staff Responsibilities

Superintendent

According to the *School Act*, all school districts must employ a Superintendent who has responsibility for the general supervision and direction of all district and school staff and is responsible for the district's general organization, administration, supervision and for the evaluation of all educational programs and the operation of schools in the district.

Assistant Superintendents

According to the *School Act*, Assistant Superintendents may also be employed. They perform duties assigned by the Superintendent.

Secretary Treasurer

According to the Act, a secretary treasurer must be appointed by the Board of Trustees.

Other District Staff

All other district staff who are employed by the District are not specifically mentioned under the *School Act*, so their roles and responsibilities will vary and are determined by the Superintendent.

As for district personnel who work in the area of special education, it is not uncommon to have a Director or Principal in charge of special education, although their specific title will vary depending on the school district.

Districts may also employ or contract with school psychologists, speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists and other professionals. Speech language pathologists, occupational therapists and physical therapists, in most districts, focus their work on consulting with school staff regarding strategies and approaches related to their area of expertise that will help support the student in question. Critical budget limitations impact the amount of direct, one to one, treatment for individual students.

School districts may have district resource teachers and other staff who act as resource persons to schools and consult on issues related to supporting students with special needs. These personnel are usually itinerant staff, meaning that they travel to schools throughout the district.

Some school districts have Autism Teams who provide specific consultative services to teachers who have students with ASD in their classrooms, and sometimes they provide direct services to the student with ASD.

Board of Trustees/Board of Education

Trustees are elected officials who run for office at the same time that municipal elections are held. According to the *School Act*, trustees are responsible for:

- Enrolment in an educational program.
- Provision of an educational program.
- Conduct of staff in terms of secular and non-sectarian principles, and without corporal punishment.
- Class size and organization.
- School calendar.
- Student records.

The Ministry of Education

The Minister of Education is an elected member of government assigned to his position by the Premier of B.C. The *School Act* requires that the Ministry of Education (MOE) employ a Deputy Minister and staff to conduct the business of the Ministry.

The *School Act* specifies that the Minister can make orders in many areas including:

- Governing the provision of educational programs.
- Determining the general requirements for graduation from an educational program.
- Determining the general nature of educational programs for use in schools.
- Preparing a process for the assessment of the effectiveness of educational programs.
- Preparing a process for measuring individual student performance.
- Governing educational resource materials in support of educational programs.

INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANS

According to the Ministry of Education, “An IEP is a documented plan developed for a student with special needs that describes individualized goals, adaptations, modifications, the services to be provided, and includes measures for tracking achievement.”¹⁰

A common misconception is that the IEP is a legal document. This is not the case, rather it is a tool used to support effective planning so that a student can expect positive delivery of an educational program and thereby demonstrate progress towards identified goals.

The Ministry of Education states the purpose of an IEP as follows:

- It formalizes planning decisions and processes, linking assessment with programming.
- It provides teachers, parents, and students with a record of the educational program for an individual student with special needs, and serves as the basis for reporting the student’s progress.
- It serves as a tool for tracking individual student learning in terms of agreed-upon goals and objectives.
- It documents the relationships between any support services being provided and the student’s educational program.
- It provides parents and students with a mechanism for input into the individualized planning process.¹¹

The IEP document itself can provide evidence that:

- The parent and, where appropriate, the student were consulted in the process.
- The student is receiving an educational program based on their identified needs.
- A review of the IEP is happening at a minimum of once per school year.

Although it is not MOE policy, for a student with Autism Spectrum Disorder, good educational practice necessitates more frequent review of an IEP to ensure that progress is made in meeting objectives that lead to a goal.

It should be noted that there is also the need for the IEP to identify additional services that are beyond the regular program, that may not necessarily be an adaptation or modification. These may include provision of social skills instruction and coaching, language therapy, counseling services, and behavioral coaching. These could all occur in addition to the regular curriculum, and are not considered an adaptation or modification of the regular curriculum.

Adapted Programs

The Ministry's definition of adapted program is as follows:

An education program with adaptations **retains the learning outcomes of the regular curriculum**, and is provided so the student can fully participate in the program. Adaptations are teaching and assessment strategies made to accommodate a student's special needs, and may include alternate formats (e.g., Braille, books-on-tape), instructional strategies (e.g., use of interpreters, visual cues and aids) and assessment procedures (e.g., oral exams, additional time, assistive technologies). **Students with education programs that include adaptations are assessed using the standards for the course/program and can receive credit toward a Dogwood certificate for their work.**¹² (author's emphasis)

Modified Programs

A modified program is described as having:

...**learning outcomes that are substantially different from the regular curriculum, and specifically selected to meet the student's special needs.** For example, a Grade 9 student in a modified math program could be focusing on functional computational skills in the context of handling money and personal budgeting. Or, in language arts, a Grade 5 student could be working on recognizing common signs and using the phone. In these examples the learning outcomes are substantially different from those of the curriculum for most other students. **To enable achievement, a student's program may include some courses that are modified and others that have adaptations.**¹³ (author's emphasis)

A helpful booklet, "Parent's Guide to Individual Education Planning," is published by the B.C. School Superintendent's Association and B.C. Ministry of Education. It provides a simple overview of IEP planning. This booklet can be found online at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/iep/. You may request a copy by calling (604) 687-0590.

Essential Elements of an IEP

According to the Ministry of Education, an IEP **must** include one or more of the following:

- The individualized goals for that student which are different from the prescribed curriculum outcomes for the course or subject;
- A list of the support services required by the student, which might include a description of the time and setting for the special program, names and roles of individuals who will be involved, or the strategies and/or teaching methods to be used; and/or
- A list of the adaptations and strategies planned to help the student meet the outcomes established for him. These may be the prescribed curriculum outcomes or individualized outcomes modified to meet the student's special needs.¹⁴

Possible Elements of an IEP

The Ministry also states that an IEP may contain the following:

- Information from teachers, parents, or related service providers concerning the student's academic, social and behavioral needs.
- A description of the student's current learning and information on strengths and needs from formal assessment results.
- Appropriate intellectual, social, emotional and career/work goals for the student.
- Target dates for progress toward those goals with a review date to look at the progress made by the student.
- Short-term objectives which will provide direction and indicators of the student's progress toward those goals.
- A description of how the student's progress will be measured and how the student will be evaluated.
- Plans for transitions to the next setting.¹⁵

An effective and meaningful IEP usually includes all of the points from both the possible and essential categories detailed above. For more information on developing effective and meaningful IEP's see the section on "Smart IEP's" below.

Parental Role in the IEP

It is not uncommon for parental involvement in the IEP process to consist of the teacher providing the parent with a completed IEP document for review and signature. This may be considered to be consultation from the school's perspective. For many parents this is not acceptable. Ideally parents and the school personnel work collaboratively to develop an IEP that appropriately addresses the student's needs. You have a right to be consulted in this process.

Preparing for Meaningful Consultation

If your child has been involved in an autism treatment program as a preschooler, it is likely that much of the work needed to prepare for an IEP is in progress. Here's a list of things you can do to prepare for the IEP:

- Review your child's Behavior Plan of Intervention with your child's home team and focus on clarifying it as the basis of an IEP. Behavior consultants, speech language pathologists and occupational therapists are usually experienced in this transition and should be able to help you with this process.
- Think about the goals you have for your child as parents, and, as far as you can identify them, what your child's own goals are.
- Identify, with the support of the home team, the specific areas in which your child requires extra support or a specialized approach. For example, does your child bolt? Will they require constant supervision because of safety considerations? What will be the requirements of the Teaching Assistant who works with your child—will they need specialized training?
- Make a list of topics that you want to discuss with the school team with whom you will work on planning the IEP.
- Be prepared to raise questions and concerns to the other planners on the team.
- Remember, you are a team member. You have expert knowledge about your child that others do not. Chapter 3, "The Role of the Parent in Developing the Treatment Team," is very relevant to review at this point.

The BC Council of Administrators of Special Education recently published a helpful resource, a brochure entitled "Supporting Meaningful Consultation with Parents" that can be found on ACT's website at www.sd5.bc.ca/pdfs/4.22SUPPORTINGMEANINGFULCONSULTATIONWITH-PARENTS.pdf.

Contact Your Child’s Case Manager

When you have completed this first stage of the work you should then contact your child’s case manager. This person is the teacher who is responsible for coordinating the IEP. In most cases this is not the student’s classroom teacher. The case manager is usually a school-based resource teacher or a district itinerant resource teacher. Spend some time speaking with the case manager about your child’s needs based on the points above. This discussion should happen before the child starts the school year. For a child entering kindergarten, this should happen in the spring prior to school beginning.

This is an important step prior to the actual IEP meeting. If your child’s case manager says this is more appropriately done with the whole school-based team, then ask the case manager to ensure that sufficient meeting time is allotted—this can easily take two hours.

The School–Based Team/IEP Team

The team, according to MOE, can consist of the following people:

- Classroom teacher(s).
- School administrator.
- Parents or legal guardians.
- The student (discretionary).
- Other school-based and/or district support staff.

In some schools the teacher assistant may attend the meeting, but in many schools this does not happen. It is usually an excellent idea to have him or her present, as the teaching assistant can frequently offer important insights; however, some districts will not pay for the teaching assistant’s time to attend the meeting.

The team may also include personnel who provide educational and related services outside the school, such as various therapists and consultants. More and more schools accept including the behavior consultant who supports the home-based program, as well as private therapists such as occupational therapists and/or speech language therapists involved with the team. It is important to realize, however, that you are unlikely to have your home-based program fully duplicated in the school. There should, however, be continuity between the home-based program and the school program.

The IEP Meeting

The IEP is the formal meeting where the team reviews the child's needs and works to develop a plan to address these needs. You should attend this meeting, listen carefully and contribute to the discussion in areas of your concern. IEP meetings for a student with Autism Spectrum Disorder can be lengthy due to the complexity of their needs.

Once the meeting is complete the final document is drafted and circulated for review. During the review necessary changes are made and everyone on the team signs off and receives a copy of the IEP. According to MOE policy, the parent is not compelled to sign the IEP if they do not wish to do so.

How Can I Be Sure the IEP is Going to Be Effective?

Using the model called SMART IEPs can be a wonderful aide in determining the value of an IEP. An excellent chapter from a book entitled *From Emotions to Advocacy*, second edition, can be found online at www.wrightslaw.com/bks/feta2/ch12.ieps.pdf.

Please note that this chapter makes references to U.S. education law and regulations which are not relevant to British Columbia, but the concept of SMART IEPs is nonetheless brilliantly explained in this article. If you do not have access to a computer or a printer, call ACT and we will send you this chapter as well as other resources.

Also included in this manual is information on how to advocate for your child within the school system in Chapter 9, "The Role of Advocacy in Navigating the School System."

What is a SMART IEP?

SMART stands for **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ction Words are used, **R**elevant & **R**ealistic, and **T**ime-limited.

- **Specific** – A clear description of target areas of achievement should be specified. For example, "Bob will cut properly with scissors" is not specific. "Bob will cut a paper along marked lines that are 2 inches apart with accuracy four out of five times" is specific.
- **Measurable** – An objective measure of whether the goals have been attained should be included. For example, "Sam will improve his math skills" has no measurement included. "Sam will demonstrate math skills with a minimum mark of 65% at grade two level using the XYZ test" provides a specific way to measure progress.

- **Action Words** – Using “action words” supports the notion that the IEP is a dynamic document rather than a static one. It expresses movement towards a goal. For example, “Johnny will spell two out of five spelling words correctly each week on a written test with 90% accuracy.”
- **Realistic and Relevant** – It is critical that the IEP be realistic and relevant. It should address the child’s unique needs and not focus only on curriculum or external standards. For example, it would not be relevant for any grade 4 student to have “learning how to fill in a job application form” included in their IEP, particularly if that student has limited communication, reading and writing skills.
- **Time-limited** – The IEP should contain goals & objectives that can be measured at regular intervals, with specific start, interval, and end points. For example: “In September Justin reads grade 4 level reading material at 75 words per minute with 5 to 8 errors. (This is considered the baseline.) After 10 weeks Justin will read grade 4 level reading material at the rate of 90 words per minute with no more than 4 errors. After 20 weeks Justin will read grade 4 reading materials at the rate of 100 words per minute with no more than 1 to 3 errors. By the end of June Justin will read a grade 4 level short story at 125 words per minute with only random errors.” If Justin does not meet the objective at any interval when measurement is taken, a review must happen and any necessary IEP adjustments must be made.

Goals and Objectives in SMART IEPs

- Start with a description of the student’s present level of performance: what the student does now. This is based on the most recent evaluation and observation.
- A goal is the target for the skill to be developed. Goals should be set at high but attainable levels, according to the MOE.
- An objective is something towards which effort is directed, the set of skills required to achieve the goal.
- A benchmark is an interval of time that serves as a reference point for measuring progress. The benchmarks that schools have set for all students are known as reporting periods. At the end of each reporting period, the parent receives their child’s report card.

Examples of goals, objectives and benchmarks

Johnny will learn to count to 100 (goal). Johnny can count to 20 (current level of performance). By November (benchmark), Johnny will count to 40 (objective). By February (benchmark), Johnny will count to 70 (objective). By June (final benchmark), Johnny will count to 100 (GOAL!!!).

What is missing in this example, of course, are the ways progress will be measured, what materials and resources will be used to teach, who will teach, where the teaching will happen, and who will keep data. All these specifics must be included in a SMART IEP.

Summary

Goals, objectives and benchmarks are written in precise, behavioral terms using action words and generally include:

1. Direction of behavior – increase, decrease.
2. Behavior to be addressed – what child will do.
3. What child can do now – present level of performance.
4. A timeline with amount of change expected and benchmarks set for expected performance level at specific times during the year.
5. What strategies and resources will be used – methods, materials, human resources, who does what.
6. What is the evaluation procedure – the tool used to evaluate performance.

Goals that are expressed in ways that aren't measurable

From time to time, school personnel may express concern about a student's behavior or attitude. For example, Shelly's grade 8 teacher may say, "Shelly needs to have better behavior" and identify this as an IEP goal. This goal, as you can see, is not measurable. What can you do to make this SMART?

The book *From Emotions to Advocacy* recommends using the "Columbo Strategy." Columbo was a famous television plain clothes police detective who appeared disorganized and in shambles. He was excessively eager to please, asked questions that often seemed completely irrelevant, and often the criminal underestimated Columbo's ability. At the end of every episode, the crime was solved with amazing analysis and precision.



The Columbo Strategy consists of asking a series of questions: 5 Ws + H + E (Who, What, Where, When, How and Explain). In the example of Shelly, who needs to have better behavior, you would explain to the teacher that you need to ask what may seem to be stupid questions to figure this out. You then ask questions like: What is Shelly doing? How frequently does she do this? When does she do this?

As the teacher answers your questions you conscientiously write down the comments that amount to a list of the problem behaviors, where and when they occur, and how frequently. The teacher will be describing to you specific evidence of the behaviors in question. Finally the teacher will likely have stated the behavior issue specifically and with data.

For example, Shelly hugs the teacher at least three times an hour. This is the present level of performance. You then ask the teacher what change in this behavior that the teacher would like to see. The teacher may say “Shelly should never hug the teacher.” This would be your long-term goal. Eventually you can move to developing a short-term goal like, “In the next three weeks, Shelly will hug her teacher no more than once every two hours.” This is a goal that can be measured.

Of course, a plan must be made to specifically determine the strategies and resources required to achieve this goal.

REPORTING STUDENT PROGRESS

The Ministry of Education’s “Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines” advises that progress reports for students with special needs should be provided on the same schedule as for all other students in the school, although other more informal reporting processes such as daily communication books may be necessary.

According to MOE regulations, three formal written report cards must be on a Ministry form or a form approved by the Minister or school board and provided to parents each school year. One of these formal reports must be made at the end of the school year. These formal reports go in the Permanent Student Record file. In addition to the formal reports, at least two informal reports must be provided to parents every school year. How these reports look is a decision made by school personnel.

What Must Be in a Formal Report Card

Ministerial Order 191/94, the Student Progress Report Order¹⁶ outlines what is required in formal report cards. More detail about this can also be found in a helpful book developed for educators called “Reporting Student Progress: Policy and Practice.” It can be found online at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/classroom_assessment/09_report_student_prog.pdf.

Report cards for all students, including those with ASD, must address the following areas: intellectual, social, human, and career development. Students in primary grades, K through grade 4, receive anecdotal reports rather than letter grades; these outline the student’s level of performance in relation to the expected learning outcomes set out in the provincial curriculum for each subject and grade for those students following the regular curriculum, including those who have an adapted program.

Students on a modified curriculum—in other words, working on a curriculum developed specifically for them that differs substantially from the regular curriculum—will have structured written comments in the report card instead of letter grades and percentages. The report card should reflect the level of success the student has had in achieving the goals and objectives described in the IEP. If a student is on a modified curriculum but he or she is doing a course in which the requirements of the regular curriculum are being met, he or she is entitled to be graded like typical students.

Professionals other than the regular classroom teacher who provide part of a student’s education program, such as a speech language pathologist or occupational therapist, should provide written reports describing progress in these areas for inclusion with the classroom teacher’s report.

Courses that have been modified must be identified on report cards as per Ministerial Order 191/94, the Student Progress Order. There is no requirement that types of adaptations or the fact that a student is on an adapted program be identified on report cards. The MOE advises teachers that, when written consent is given, this information should be communicated to post-secondary institutions or community agencies providing adult services.

GRADUATION OR SCHOOL COMPLETION— IMPORTANT ISSUES TO CONSIDER

Long before your child is ready to graduate or complete school it is important for you to discuss with educators decisions made regarding the need to adapt or modify your child's educational program. Such decisions must be made carefully based on your child's abilities, strengths and challenges as well as teaching strategies made available to address your child's special needs.

The decision to modify a student's program may be very appropriate. However, some students, although challenging to educate, do possess the ability to complete the regular curriculum with appropriate adaptations and supports. The rush to modify curriculum must be carefully examined, as this could result in a student losing the opportunity to complete the Grade 12 curriculum. Educational programming decisions should be made based on the student's strengths and challenges rather than those of the educational system. The short- and long-term implications of such decisions should be fully discussed before the decision is made.

Students who successfully complete their Grade 12 year with a regular curriculum and have met the requirements set out by Ministerial Order 205/95, the Graduation Requirements Order are provided with a Dogwood Certificate. The Dogwood Certificate is issued by the Ministry of Education.

Students who complete their public school education and have been on a modified program may receive a British Columbia School Completion Certificate.

To receive the British Columbia School Completion Certificate, the principal, in consultation with teachers, should ensure that the student has met the goals of his or her educational program, or other criteria established by the school board.¹⁷

The certificate is issued by the School District although transcript data must be submitted to MOE for all students who received the B.C. School Completion Certificate. Detailed policy called the Student Credential Policy can be found at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/student_credentials.htm.

PROVINCIAL OUTREACH PROGRAM FOR AUTISM AND RELATED DISORDERS

The Provincial Outreach Program for Autism and Related Disorders (POPARD) is an important Ministry of Education service that provides support to both public and private schools in British Columbia. Their consultants work together with school based personnel and/or District Autism Teams to develop educational and behavioral programs for students on the autism spectrum. They provide student specific consultations and help teams develop educational and behavioral programs. They also provide in-service training within school districts as well as credit and non-credit courses on ASD at their Delta base throughout the year.

POPARD services are funded by the Ministry of Education. How many days of service a year each school district receives from POPARD is determined by a formula that includes the number of students with ASD in the district, and its size and geographical location. The Ministry of Education requires that the majority of time allocated to districts is now to be used for a range of “capacity building” activities, with a smaller portion of time allocated to individual student consultation.

POPARD can provide a range of preventative supports such as training, mentoring of teachers, and proactive transition planning or student consultation.

POPARD advises each district of the number of consultation and capacity building days they are assigned. In consultation with the POPARD consultant assigned to it, districts determine which students will be referred for POPARD consultation as well as the type of capacity building activities they would prefer. Capacity building may include workshops, courses, teacher or team mentoring and modeling of effective practices for students with ASD.

Each school district has an employee who acts as the POPARD District Partner and coordinates referrals to POPARD for students in their district. You can contact your local school district office to obtain the name of the POPARD District Partner. The role of the District Partner is to help to prioritize the students who will be seen, and to follow up on supporting district staff in the implementation of any POPARD recommendations. When a specific student will be seen by the POPARD consultant, it is the role of the District Partner to advise the parents of when the POPARD consultant will be in the district, and to ensure that the parents have been invited to the team meeting where the POPARD observations and recommendations will be shared.

While POPARD consultants are often called in to advise during a crisis, it does not require a crisis for POPARD to provide consultation. Not all

classroom teachers are aware that the POPARD program exists. If school district staff members are struggling to understand the needs of a particular student and the POPARD consultant is fully committed, additional time may be requested by the school district on a fee for service contract basis with POPARD.

If a parent would like to have their child referred to POPARD this should be discussed with the child's case manager at school. It may help for the parent to put the request in writing with the reason the consultation is being requested. Copying the request to the District Partner is also useful as they organize the consultant's caseload for the district. You may contact POPARD or the District Partner for POPARD if you would like to know more about what they do.

For additional information on POPARD, visit www.autismoutreach.ca/index.php.

FUNDING SPECIAL EDUCATION IN B.C.

The Ministry of Education provides funds to school districts to operate and deliver educational programs to students enrolled in the district. These funds are distributed in many ways through various funding processes, many of which are very complex. The MOE provides a basic per student grant that is given to the District based on enrollment figures. These funds are pooled and dispersed for operations and program delivery.

In addition to various operational grants and the basic per-student grant, students with identified special needs such as ASD generate supplemental funds that go to the school district. School personnel may tell you that your child with ASD qualifies for Level 2 funding. This is the category in which children with ASD requiring extra support with an IEP have been designated.

Full-time students with ASD who have an IEP generate supplemental dollars in the amount of \$16,000 per year for the district. These supplemental funds are pooled and dispersed throughout the district. It is important to recognize that these funds are not targeted solely to special education nor are they targeted to any individual student. This system of non-targeting, where funds are not targeted to specific students or specific program areas, was implemented in March 2002. According to MOE, "Though the funding system changed, the obligations placed on school boards to address the special needs of students did not."¹⁸

References

1. See Section 3 (1) of the School Act, www.bclaws.ca/Recon/document/freeside/-%20S%20--/School%20Act%20%20RSBC%201996%20%20c.%20412/00_Act/96412_00.htm. The government of British Columbia has announced that pre-school education will also become the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. As yet there has been no change in the School Act to reflect a change in the definition of school age.
2. www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/ppandg/glossary.htm
3. www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/e/m150-89.pdf
4. www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/e/m150-89.pdf
5. www.bced.gov.bc.ca/dist_learning/
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7. <http://scc.lexum.umontreal.ca/en/1997/1997rcs1-241/1997rcs1-241.html>
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