

# PARENT'S GUIDE

to  
Individual Education Planning



Step by Step  
Roles in Planning  
Making it Work

# IEP

British Columbia School Superintendents' Association

British Columbia Ministry of Education

***“The purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy.”***

–Mission Statement  
Ministry of Education and  
Minister Responsible for Multiculturalism and Human Rights  
1993-6-1 (B.C. Reg. 190/93)

### **Parent’s Guide to Individual Education Planning**

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**NOTE** | In an effort to be gender-neutral and yet retain ease of reading by avoiding “he/she” and similar constructs, this publication has adopted the growing practice of alternating gender pronouns throughout the text.

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## Definitions

### of some terms used in this guide

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#### Individual Education Plan (IEP)

The *Individual Education Plan Order*, a Ministerial Order<sup>1</sup>, requires school boards to design, review and implement individual education plans for students with special needs.

**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. An 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.

#### Educational Program

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.”

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<sup>1</sup> Order of the Minister of Education, Ministry of Education, Province of British Columbia. *Individual Education Plan Order*, M638/95. Victoria, BC.

## Learning Outcomes

The standards of achievement for a course, or subject and grade, are set out as **learning outcomes** in the provincial curriculum guide for that course or subject.

## Adaptations

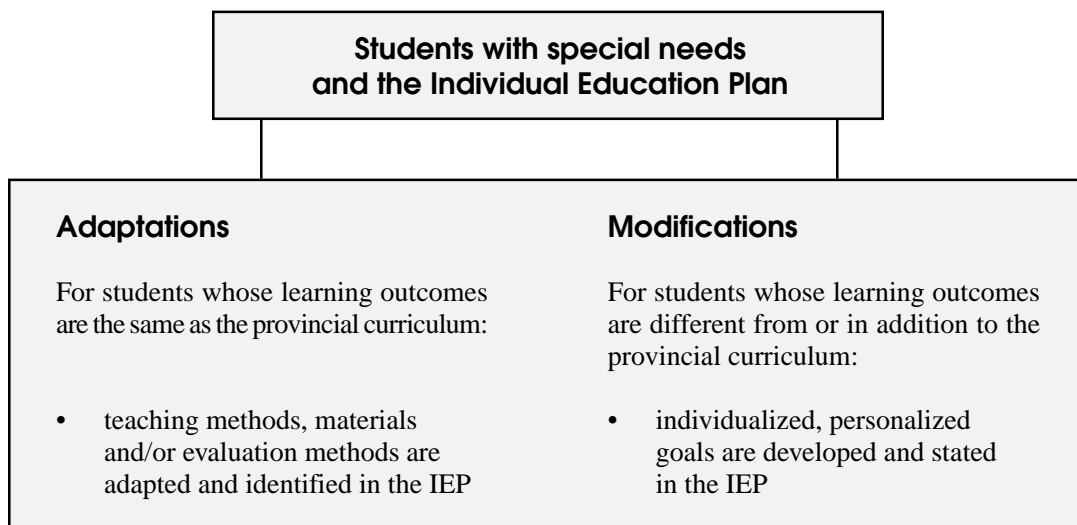
Many students with special needs are capable of achieving the prescribed learning outcomes of the curriculum, but require some changes to the ways they are taught or their learning assessed. They will have an Individual Education Plan with the necessary **adaptations** outlined. Different types of adaptations include examples such as the following:

- different formats for resources to enable students to receive instruction or information, such as Braille or 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.

Teachers who determine that adaptations are appropriate make those decisions to enable students to achieve the same learning outcomes as those prescribed in the provincial curriculum.

## Modifications

Some students may need learning outcomes that are different from, or in addition to, the ones set out in the provincial curriculum guide. These **modifications** to the learning outcomes are specifically developed to meet the student's particular needs.



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# I. Introduction

## The Individual Learner's Potential

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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 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.

The B.C. *School Act*<sup>2</sup> requires a school board to make an educational program available to all persons of school age who live and enroll in schools in the 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.

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<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Education. *School Act*. Province of British Columbia. Victoria, BC. 1995.

## Students with special needs

A student with special needs<sup>3</sup> has one or more of the following:

- a disability of an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional or behavioural nature;
- a learning disability; or
- exceptional gifts or talents.

Many students with special needs will be able to meet the standards set out in the provincial curriculum with adaptations to the way they are taught or their learning is assessed. For some students, the prescribed curriculum outcomes are modified to meet the students' special needs. Both adaptations and modifications must be outlined in the IEP.

The IEP is developed to meet the student's educational needs. It becomes, as its name suggests, a plan to enable the student to develop her individual potential.

## Identifying special needs

Your child may be identified as having special needs prior to entering school. If your child has been in a preschool program, information about that program can give the school a head start in planning. Contact the school well in advance to begin planning for your child's educational program.

Sometimes special needs are not identified until children have been in school for a while and teachers have had a chance to work with them. Teachers or specialist personnel at the school may conduct an assessment to better understand your child's strengths and needs. An assessment report may be written and shared with parents, teachers, and perhaps the student. Then, if appropriate, the school will develop an IEP for your child in consultation with you.

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<sup>3</sup> Order of the Minister of Education. Province of British Columbia. *Ministerial Order M397/95*. Formerly 150/89. Amended effective September 1, 1995.

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## II. Contents of the IEP

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### What do IEPs include?

IEPs for students with special needs 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.

In addition to the above, IEPs may contain the following:

- information from teachers, parents, or related service providers concerning the student's academic, social and behavioural 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; and
- plans for transitions to the next setting.

### Making transitions easier

The IEP should outline plans to help students with special needs move from one setting to another or from one grade to another. The following transitions can be challenging for students with special needs: from home to kindergarten; elementary to secondary levels; school to school; and school to adulthood. Through careful planning, the IEP should support students and their families through these transitions.



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## III. The IEP: Step by Step

### Who is Involved?

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#### 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.

#### Involving others

The teacher may need to enlist help to plan an appropriate program for your child. There are others in the school district who may be available to assist in this planning: learning assistance and/or resource teacher; principal or vice-principal; school counsellor; or district-based resource personnel. Involving the school principal is particularly important.

## 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:

- the principal or vice-principal;
- the classroom teacher;
- a learning assistance teacher or resource teacher;
- other specialist, such as a counsellor;
- district resource staff, and representatives from community services or other ministries as needed; and
- other individuals who have experience with the student.

### Parents may want to ask...

- *Who are the members of the school-based team?*
- *What are their individual roles on the team?*
- *What kinds of assistance does each of them provide?*
- *Who is responsible for coordinating my child's program?*
- *When and how often will we meet?*
- *What is my role at the team meeting?*
- *How will I be notified of planning meetings?*

## **The IEP team**

In many schools, a group of people is appointed by the school-based team to actually plan the IEP for an individual student. In some schools, this is carried out by the school-based team itself. The membership of the group who develops the IEP will vary depending on the needs of the student. A person may be appointed the case manager of the IEP and that person will coordinate and record the IEP planning and monitor its progress. This is often the classroom teacher but may be anyone appropriate for a particular student, such as a resource teacher or learning assistance teacher.

## **The school-based / IEP teams: roles and responsibilities**

### **Principal**

Under the *School Act*, the principal is responsible for administering and supervising the school, overseeing the educational programs 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.

### **Teacher**

Teachers are responsible for the educational programs for all students assigned to them.

- For most students, questions about achievement or behaviour arise from teachers' observations.
- Teachers communicate about the student's progress and behaviour with the parent/guardian and, as appropriate, the student.
- Teachers will first address differences in student learning and behaviour by trying a variety of strategies and materials. If necessary, they will then consult and collaborate with school-based resource personnel, such as a learning assistance or resource teacher.
- If students' needs are still not met, the teachers will approach the school-based team or in-school special education personnel for consultation and possibly further assessment.
- Teachers may have the support of the school-based team to develop strategies or provide services to enable them to meet the special needs of students.

### **Learning Assistance and Resource Teachers**

Learning assistance teachers and resource teachers are members of the teaching staff who are specialists with the training or experience to provide student and teacher support for students with special needs. These supporting teachers, located in most schools, work cooperatively with all school personnel and assist in some of the following ways:

- suggesting strategies to the school and family for working with the child who requires assistance;

- consulting with the school-based team to review student needs and assisting in problem-solving;
- providing school-based resource services to support classroom teachers and their students, including student instruction and assessment, if required; and
- helping organize, maintain and integrate services in the school and providing access to support services available at the district level.

### **Teacher Assistant**

Teacher assistants may be assigned by the school district to help the teacher in carrying out her responsibilities. Under the general supervision of a teacher, principal or vice-principal, they may be assigned to the following duties:

- providing direct services to students, ranging from personal care to assisting with instructional programs;
- assisting in implementing the educational programs; and/or
- performing health-related procedures for which they must be given child-specific training by a qualified health professional.<sup>4</sup>

### **Other Special Education Personnel**

Other personnel accessed through the school, district or community by the school-based team may include personnel in these areas:

- counselling in schools;
- school psychology services;
- speech-language pathology services;
- physiotherapy/occupational therapy services;
- hospital education services; and
- homebound education services.

Their involvement will vary in type and intensity according to the needs identified in the individual student's IEP.

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<sup>4</sup> *Inter-Ministerial Protocols for the Provision of Support Services to Schools.*  
Victoria: Province of British Columbia. October 1989.

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## IV. The Parent's Role in Planning the IEP

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### What are parents' rights and responsibilities in their child's education?

Before the IEP planning takes place, you may find it helpful to know the legislation that governs the role of parents in IEP planning.

#### Parent's rights in the School Act

B.C. *School Act*, section 7 states

- (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, behaviour and progress in school;
  - to examine records;
  - to be consulted regarding student placement;
  - to be consulted in preparation of the student's IEP;
  - 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.

#### Parent's right to appeal decisions made by an employee of a school board

B.C. *School Act*, section 11 states

- (1) In subsections (2) and (4), "decision" includes the failure of an employee to make a decision.
- (2) If a decision of an employee of a board significantly affects the education, health or safety of a student, the parent of the student or the student may, within reasonable time from the date that the parent or student was informed of the decision, appeal that decision to the board.
- (3) For the purpose of hearing appeals under this section, a board must, by bylaw, establish an appeal procedure.

## The obligations of school boards

The *Special Needs Order* states

- (2) A board must ensure that an administrative officer offers to consult with a parent of a student with special needs regarding the placement of that student in an educational program.

The *Individual Education Plan Order* states

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
    - a) the student with special needs requires no adaptation or only minor adaptations to educational materials or instructional or assessment methods;
    - b) the expected learning outcomes established by the applicable educational program guide have not been modified for the student with special needs; and
    - c) 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 can parents support IEP planning?

You have a wealth of knowledge and experience with your child which is valuable in developing IEPs. This knowledge will assist in answering a fundamental question: *What skills are most important for my child to develop in order to enhance his life now and in the future?*<sup>5</sup>

Once all the assessment information about a student has been gathered from parents, teachers and others who have observed and assessed the student, the development of the IEP begins. You can contribute valuable information to support the planning process:

- family history, medical history, and health care needs;
- a description of your child's strengths, needs, and wants, including all social, educational, physical and emotional aspects;
- a description of what you want your child to learn, outlining short-term and long-term goals;
- supporting documents that might be helpful, including photographs that demonstrate your child's home life showing skills or interests, or samples of past school work;
- methods that have been successful for communicating with your child at home, or ideas for the strategies that could help support the teacher in the school setting;
- comments and feelings about any strategies or situations you think are appropriate and beneficial for your child;
- comments and feelings about those strategies and situations you think are questionable or problematical for your child; or
- information about other community services or after-school and other caregivers which impact on your child's life.

Families have a right to privacy about matters that have no bearing on the child at school. However, it is important that parents provide information that is likely to impact on the health, safety, or well-being of their child while he is at school. It could help school personnel to understand and better support him as he learns and develops positive feelings about himself and others. You can also be instrumental in helping your child understand that the IEP also involves student responsibility and cooperation. You have a right to expect that any information they provide will be shared on a need-to-know basis only.

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<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Education, Province of British Columbia.  
*Students with Intellectual Disabilities: A Resource Guide for Students.*

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## V. The Parent's Role in Making the IEP Work

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### How can parents prepare for a school-based or IEP team meeting?

The IEP typically begins with a team meeting. You may find it helpful to prepare for the meeting by writing out notes to take to the meeting. It may be useful to include the following:

- a list of topics you would like to see included in the meeting;
- questions to raise, both for your child and for yourself;
- what you want to see accomplished and what you believe your child wants;
- realistic goals for your child, for the school year and for the future; or
- a statement on any area that might be giving you concern.

If English is not your first language, you may wish to bring someone who could assist you in communicating your concerns or who could take notes or talk to you about impressions of the meeting afterwards.

### How can parents be effective participants in meetings?

- ✓ Make sure you are introduced to everyone present and that you know what each member can contribute to your child's educational program.
- ✓ Know the purpose of the meeting and what the team expects as a result of the meeting.
- ✓ Be aware of the meeting's time constraints.
- ✓ Ask who is responsible for keeping a record of the meeting and request a copy of the record.
- ✓ Recognize that children often react differently in different circumstances. Your child's behaviour at home may be different than at school.
- ✓ Share your concerns directly, and openly share information that might help in planning for your child.
- ✓ If you don't understand something, ask for clarification.
- ✓ If you need time to reflect or to collect more information on a topic, ask to have that discussion postponed.
- ✓ Summarize the meeting, from your perspective, aloud to the other members.
- ✓ Know when the next meeting will be and what steps will take place before then.



## **What are the key issues in an IEP meeting from a parent's perspective?**

As the meeting concludes, you will find it helpful to ensure that there is a common understanding in these areas:

- The name of the key person responsible for the implementation of the IEP and record-keeping needs to be clear (often called a case manager).
- The goals in the IEP are practical, realistic, and clearly stated, including program options and extra-curricular opportunities, and who is responsible for each goal.
- The IEP for your child is fully understood and supported by those involved, including your child. (This can be particularly critical in secondary school where a number of teachers are involved, and students may have significant autonomy.)
- All the resources suggested in the IEP are indeed available.
- The method for evaluating your child's progress and the person or persons responsible for the evaluation have been clearly decided.
- A date has been set to review your child's IEP.

## **How can parents help their child in the IEP process?**

A key role for parents is to set out clearly for their child what her own responsibilities are in the IEP process. The extent of responsibilities will naturally depend on your child's age and type of special need, but you can help her understand that the process will only work if she takes an interest in making it work. This message can most effectively be transmitted to her by seeking her ideas and help in the process, and making her feel important and valued.

A child's intellectual progress depends to a large extent on personal and social development, self-esteem, and the ability to work cooperatively and communicate effectively. To support this social development, parents can help their child achieve his goals in several ways:

- encouraging interaction between your child and schoolmates in a variety of ways, and structuring activities to encourage friendship with other children;
- keeping in touch with teachers and asking them about potential friendships that appear in the classroom; and
- watching for activities that will give your child opportunities to work towards his personal goals.

## **How can parents help the school support their children?**

The more that parents, teachers, the principal/vice-principal and resource personnel work together in open communication and cooperation, the more successful the child's education will be.

Parents can help by doing several things:

- ✓ Provide learning experiences in everyday life that will reinforce the formal learning taking place in the school system;
- ✓ Talk with your child about school, discussing both learning and social activities;
- ✓ Support the teacher's expectations and the classroom routines and expectations by reinforcing such behaviour at home;
- ✓ Communicate regularly with teachers, particularly if there is concern about your child's progress; and
- ✓ Participate in the parent volunteer program at the school by offering assistance with school activities.

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## VI. How Learning is Assessed, Evaluated and Reported

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### What kind of reports can parents expect from the school?

Students with special needs are provided with progress reports on the same schedule as their classmates.

When a student with special needs is expected to achieve or surpass the learning outcomes set out in the provincial curriculum, regular grading practices and reporting procedures are followed.

If your child is not capable of achieving the learning outcomes set out in the provincial curriculum, substantial modifications may be necessary. In these instances, individual goals and objectives will be set for him as part of the IEP planning. Structured written comments will be used instead of letter grades to report on his success in achieving these goals and objectives. The *Student Progress Report Order*<sup>6</sup> requires that student progress reports in these circumstances must contain written comments describing:

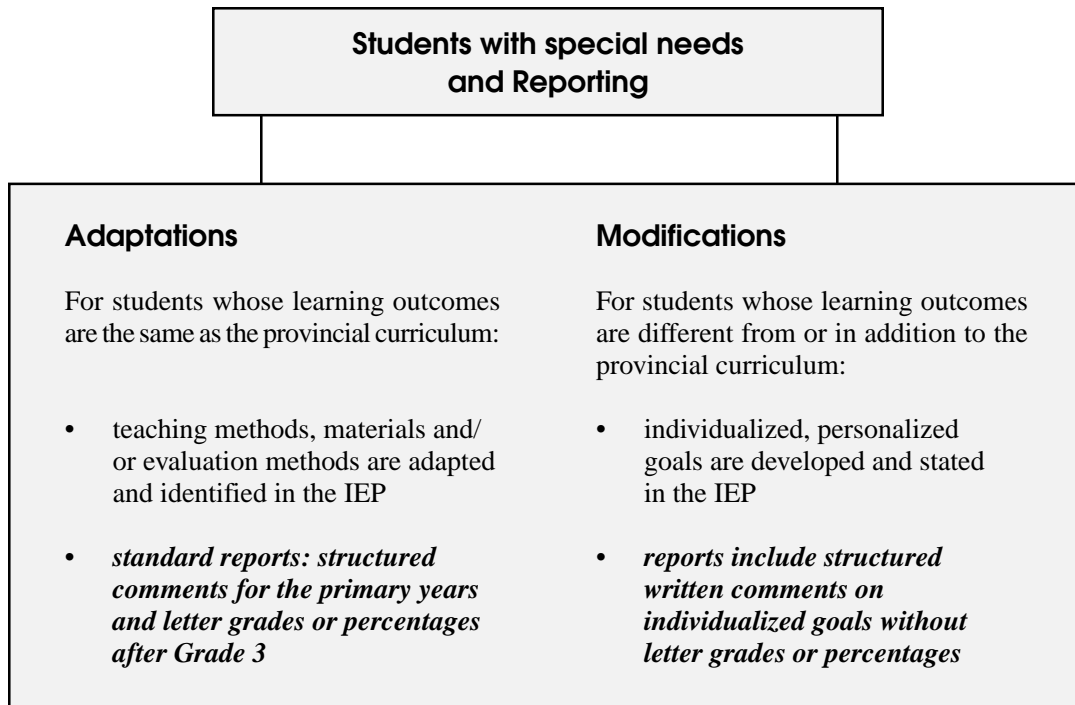
- (a) what the student is able to do;
- (b) the areas in which the student requires further attention or development; and
- (c) ways of supporting the student in her learning, in relation to the expected learning outcomes set out in her IEP.

Individualized goals may be set beyond the prescribed outcomes for a student's grade level for students who are gifted. Reporting should include structured written comments on the student's progress on these additional goals, in addition to the regular reporting procedures.

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.

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<sup>6</sup> Order of the Minister of Education, Province of British Columbia.  
*Ministerial Order 191/94 (M191/94)*. Amended by M19/00. Effective January 26, 2000.



## What about credentials in the graduation years?

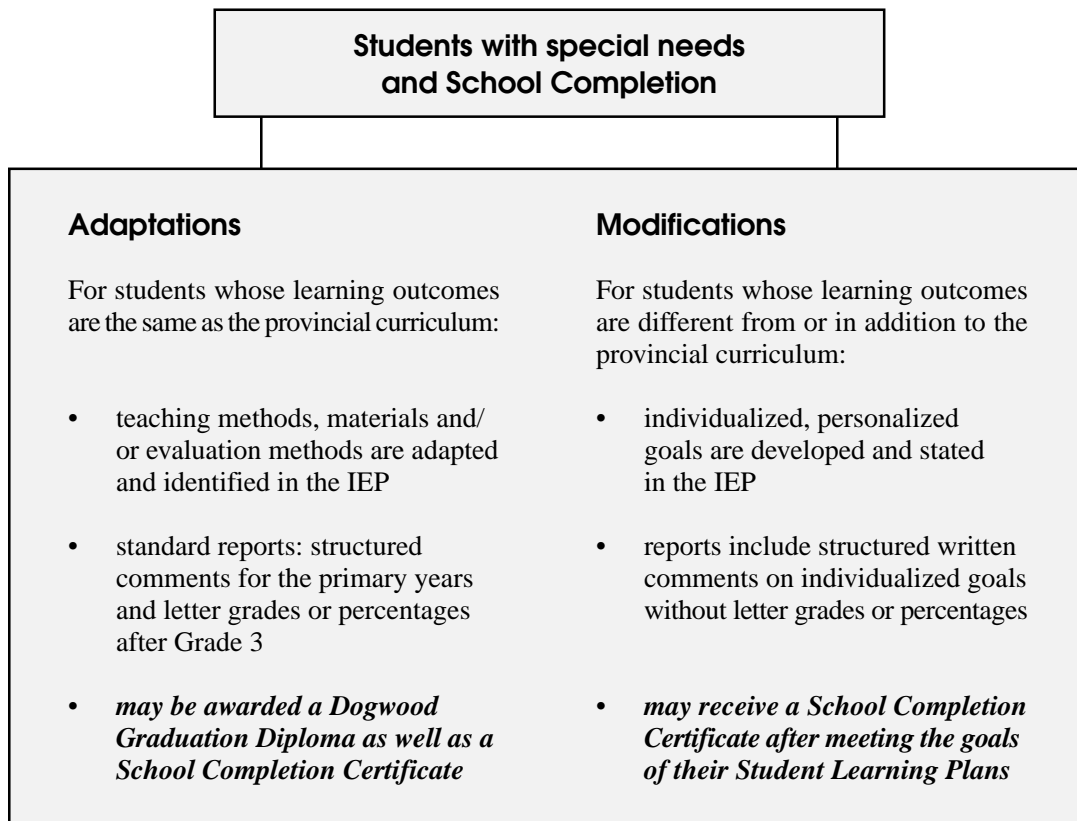
The *Dogwood Diploma* is awarded to all students upon the successful completion of prescribed provincial graduation requirements. Students with special needs whose programs include adaptations to allow them to achieve the prescribed learning outcomes of the established curriculum are eligible to receive the Dogwood Diploma.

The *British Columbia School Completion Certificate* is issued to all students who have met the goals and objectives stated in their Student Learning Plans, as agreed upon by the student, parent and school representative. Most graduating students will be awarded a School Completion Certificate, but students do not need to graduate in order to qualify. If your child has been working on modified curriculum goals, her efforts will be recognized with a British Columbia School Completion Certificate.

At the end of a student's final school year, the student receives a *Transcript of Grades*, including all Grade 11 and Grade 12 courses successfully completed, achievement levels, and whether or not graduation requirements have been met. The Ministry issues transcripts to all Grade 12 students following completion of their school year, regardless of graduation status. The student's school is the official holder of student records, and may subsequently issue transcripts upon request.

## Are adaptations extended to provincial exams?

All students, including those with special needs, who are following the provincial curriculum are required to write provincial examinations in certain subjects offered in Grades 11 and 12. Some students are unable to demonstrate their learning unless examination procedures are adjusted to accommodate their special needs. The adjudication process enables those students to write Provincial Exams by adapting the exam conditions. The content of exams is not altered in this process. Eligible students may be allowed extra time, may receive an adapted exam format and/or may use alternate means of recording their responses to exam questions. Adjudication requests are reviewed and considered individually. Appropriate documentation must be provided by the school to the Ministry of Education. The school principal is responsible for submitting an application for permission to allow adjudicated examinations and must provide appropriate documentation to the Ministry of Education.



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## VII. The IEP: Summing Up

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The purpose of the school system is to enable all students to reach their individual potential. Most students' needs will be met within the regular school program. Should students require support because of special needs, the first and perhaps the only necessary step may be for the teacher and parent to work together to develop strategies for meeting the child's needs.

Should a student be assessed as needing help beyond this support, the teacher will often work as part of a team to develop additional interventions. Parents will be consulted as part of this process. The school will ensure that the student has access to resources with an Individual Education Plan tailored to meet individual needs. Addressing those individual needs is a key step to fulfilling individual potential.

This book has attempted to describe the IEP process. If you have further questions about an IEP or would like more information, you should contact your child's school or the school board office in your school district.

Additional information about Individual Education Plans and students with various types of special needs can be found on the Ministry of Education's Web site at

**[www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/docs/](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/docs/)**