

The School System: FAQ

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The questions listed below, about children and the school system, are addressed regularly to Autism Ontario's staff. This document is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to helping your child navigate the school system; it is merely a tool to assist you in your journey.

For more information, please contact your local Autism Ontario Chapter office. See www.autismontario.com/Client/ASO/ao.nsf/web/OntarioMap to locate your local chapter. This document contains the answers to:

1. What websites should I review or familiarize myself with that will assist my child's integration and participation in the school system?
2. My child just received a diagnosis of an ASD. Where do I begin? What can I do to help my child succeed in school?
3. What are the key skills my child needs to develop and should be working towards before entering kindergarten?
4. What do I need to do before placing my child into JK or SK?
5. If my child is being bullied, where can I go for support?
6. What steps can I take to ensure that the communication between me and my child's school is effective and unobstructed?
7. When communicating with my child's school, what is the ideal relationship for ensuring a positive and productive working team?
8. Where can I get a copy of my child's school board's Special Education Plan?
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11. When is my child's IEP completed, and how many times is it reviewed?
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14. What is the OSR? Who has access to my child's file? If it contains information that is inaccurate or out of date, what can I do to have it removed?
15. Am I permitted to request an EA (Educational Assistant) for my child?
16. What happens if the school boundaries change and my child is scheduled to be in another catchment area next year, and has been asked to change schools?
17. How can I find out who my child's teacher will be for the next school year?

1. What websites should I review or familiarize myself with that will assist my child's integration and participation in the school system?

The following are some important websites to familiarize yourself with:

Overview of Special Education in Ontario: www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/speced.html.

Special Education Regulations in Ontario: www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/regs.html.

The most important regulation that you should be familiar with is the Education Act; it can be found at the following link: http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90e02_e.htm

Ontario Regulation 181/98 of the Education Act explains the steps taken by the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) to identify a student as exceptional and to decide on a placement for the exceptional student. It also describes the procedure for appealing the decisions made at the IPRC.

For a summary of this document, see "*Highlights of Regulation 181/98*":

Identification and Placements of Exceptional Pupils: www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/bilites.html.

Ontario Regulation 306 describes the Special Education Programs and Services. www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/regs/english/elaws_regs_900306_e.htm

Policy/Program Memorandum No. 81 outlines the provision of Health Support Services (Speech and Language therapy, Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy) in school settings. www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/81.html.

Policy/Program Memorandum No. 140 provides guidelines to Ontario schools for incorporating methods of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) into programs for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). www.edu.gov.on.ca/extra/eng/ppm/140.html.

The Ministry of Education has compiled lists of frequently asked questions, one for students with an ASD (www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/autism.html) and one for special needs in general (www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/Questions_and_Answers_Parents_English.pdf).

Your school board should have a Special Education Plan in place, which you should find on their website. Typically this is found under the section, "Parents," or the section labeled "Special Education". In many school boards, you will also find A Parent's Guide to Special Education, in this section. If you have difficulty finding these documents, contact your school board directly and they will be able to tell you where to find them.

2. My child just received a diagnosis of an ASD. Where do I begin? What can I do to help my child succeed in school?

- Realize that you will be your child's best advocate throughout his or her school years. It is important that you make yourself comfortable with the terminology used by educators, and that you have a good grasp of the regulations and practices guiding special education in your area.
- You should also realize that the information you gather over the years about your child, will be substantial. Below are a few tips on how to manage all the paperwork that will be coming your way:
- Keep a file / binder with all assessments, reports, diagnostic letters, therapy progress reports, IPRC and IEP documentation.
- Keep a notebook to document all your contacts with the school. If you attend a meeting, keep a written record of how you have interpreted the agreements made at that meeting. Doing this will provide clarity and prevent confusion later on. Also, be sure to date meetings, telephone conversations and note who was in attendance. With this information, you will be able to more easily advocate on behalf of your child.
- Ask for the school's minutes of the meeting. In almost all cases, the school will be documenting everything

that happens in a meeting, and every phone conversation. You are well within your rights to ask for a copy of these notes for your own records.

3. What are the key skills my child needs to develop and should be working towards before entering kindergarten?

The Toronto District School Board has developed a list of skills children will be required to demonstrate in kindergarten. This document can be found at the following link: www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/a4.pdf, and is summarized briefly below:

- **Choices:** provide opportunities for your child to make choices at home. For example, let them make choices about such things as clothing, activities, snacks, etc.
- **Sharing:** if your child is currently enrolled in a daycare or preschool program, they likely have multiple opportunities to practice sharing of toys, craft materials and space. Be sure to encourage sharing and turn-taking as much as possible.
- **New environments:** provide lots of opportunities for your child to adapt to new environments, and in particular, to learn the behaviour expected in those environments. For example, when at the library, where there are new people, a child must be quiet, and there are boundaries on where they can and cannot go, etc.
- **Independent dressing:** encourage your child to dress and undress themselves as independently as possible, including while they are in the washroom. Allow them to put pants on and off, coats, and cold-weather clothing. Keep a close eye on the items your child struggles with and provide extra opportunities to practice with these. Also, keep in mind that it may be best to avoid dressing them in the clothes they struggle with most during the first couple of weeks of school, at least not until they are feeling comfortable with their new environment.
- **Communicate needs:** provide many opportunities for your child to communicate their needs and wants to adults (both familiar and unfamiliar), as well as peers.

- **Identification of their name:** talk with your child about their name, and give them lots of opportunities to see it in print; discuss the letters, and encourage any attempts to write their name independently without help.
- **Exposure to the curriculum:** expose your child to numbers, shapes, patterns, sorting, estimating, and measuring. Talk about this in everyday life. For example, ask them how many chocolate chips are on their cookie, the shape of their ice cream cone, etc.
- **Encourage imagination:** provide opportunities for arts and crafts, imaginative play, and songs and rhymes. Also, provide exposure to a variety of materials and equipment such as play dough, balls, sand tables, water tables, etc.

4. What do I need to do before placing my child into a JK or SK?

The year before your child starts JK or SK, it would be best to do the following:

One year prior:

- Introduce yourself and your child to the school
- Discuss the needs of your child
- A friend, partner or advocate may attend for support

Registration

- Attend registration clinic for your school and pick up registration package
- Create a plan for your child. This should include the various members of the school your child will be interacting with, as well as the community services that your child requires

January / March

- Continue to build your plan for the child's school year with school staff and community partners
- Attend school information meetings
- Plan a time to visit the school with your child

April / May / June

- Visit the school to familiarize your child with the school environment, include the classroom as well as any other spaces your child will access (gym, playground, etc.).
- Visit www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/a1.pdf for steps to take before kindergarten.

- Source: Ministry of Education. "Effective Planning for Children with Special Needs." *Planning Entry to School: A Resource Guide*. 2005. Government of Ontario. August 18, 2010. www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/specialneeds.pdf.

5. If my child is being bullied, where can I go for support?

- As soon as possible, talk with the school staff
- As part of the school's bullying-prevention program, teachers should discuss bullying openly in class and help students understand the importance of respect, caring about the feelings of others, and friendship
- Ask to see the school's code of conduct. It sets out how students, teachers, and other members of the school community should behave towards one another
- Ask to see the school's bullying-prevention policy. The policy outlines what the school staff can and should do to solve the problem
- If, after a reasonable amount of time, you are not satisfied with the school's response, contact the school board's supervisory officer

Source: Ministry of Education. "Bullying: We Can All Help Stop It." 2009. Government of Ontario. August 18, 2010. www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/bullying.pdf.

6. What steps can I take to ensure that the communication between me and my child's school is effective and unobstructed?

Effective communication is a key component to setting your child up for success. Providing information up front, such as recent assessment

reports, will give the educators better insight into your child, and how best to interact with him or her. It is also important to communicate any additional information, as it will help educators develop and implement the educational program. Ensure you discuss talents and skills that you see in the home or community, as well as likes, dislikes, preferred learning styles, and reactions to various situations.

Provide opportunities to work on skills that are being taught in the classroom in the home environment as well, and offer feedback on progress to the educators - remember that without your help, educators can't know if skills taught in the classroom are transferring to your child's home or community experiences.

Frequent, open communication is important. You can accomplish this by coordinating regular meetings between yourself and your child's school team. You can also accomplish this by using a daily communication log that travels between home and school. This provides teachers with the opportunity to record comments about a child's progress, as well as, any areas of concern. It also provides the parent(s) with the opportunity to write any new information about their child, such as a bad start to the day, or how they might be feeling, and so on. Talk to other parents about communication logs that they may have used as there is no "set style." You need to find what works best for you, your child and the teacher.

Source: Ministry of Education. "The Individual Education Plan (IEP)." *A Resource Guide*. 2004. Government of Ontario. August 18, 2010. www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/guide/resource/iepresguid.pdf.

7. When communicating with my child's school, what is the ideal relationship that should be struck to form a positive and productive working team?

- Maintain regular and open communication, using plain language (no jargon).
- Connect with the school team, as necessary, to clarify information, ensuring that you and the child

understand the IEP, its connection to the Provincial Report Card, and the IEP process.

- Request written and telephone communication notifying you of meetings of the IEP team.
- Ask to be informed of the topics that are to be discussed at IEP meetings, and who will be in attendance
- Confirm, in advance, that you will be given the opportunity to become involved during the development of the IEP, and to be able to specify how you'd like to be involved, and to what degree.
- Insist that you and your child be given the opportunity for meaningful input when developing the IEP.
- Make arrangements to be provided with a copy of the IEP, and for your child to receive a copy, if he or she is 16 years of age or older, as this is required under Regulation 181/98.
- Get assurance that the school will check regularly with you regarding concerns that you or your child may have, or that the school may have, and ask questions if necessary to gain understanding or to get clarification.

If this is not the relationship you have come to know with your child's school team, speak to them about what you can do to help facilitate this. If necessary, ask community agencies, resource workers, advocates, friends, or other experienced parents to attend meetings and help you develop and foster this relationship. It will make a world of difference for you and your child.

Source: Ministry of Education. "The Individual Education Plan (IEP)." A Resource Guide. 2004. Government of Ontario. August 18, 2010. www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/guide/resource/iepresguid.pdf.

8. Where can I get a copy of my child's school board's Special Education Plan?

The following link will take you to a Ministry of Education document providing information about

each school board in Ontario, including their Special Education Plan and Special Education Guide for parents. www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/School_Board_SEPs_and_Parent_Guides_English.pdf

9. Where can I find a template for an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and other resources?

The following link will take you to a Ministry of Education website that provides a brief overview of the IEP as well as sample IEPs for a number of different exceptionalities, including Autism. www.ontariodirectors.ca/IEP-PEI/en.html

This is an additional link from the Ministry of Education regarding sample IEPs, and will actually demonstrate what the creation of your child's IEP looks like. You will need a user name and password to access. The username is IEPDemo and the password demo. <https://iep.edu.gov.on.ca/IEPWeb>.

10. What is the difference between an IPRC, an IEP and an SRT?

An Identification and Placement Review Committee (IPRC) is composed of at least 3 people, one of whom must be a principal or a supervisory officer of the school board. The role of the IPRC is to decide whether or not a student should be identified as exceptional, to identify this exceptionality, to decide on an appropriate placement for the student, and to review the identification and placement at least once in each school year.

Parents, and students 16 years of age or older, may be present at and participate in all committee discussions about the student. Other people who may attend an IPRC meeting are: the principal of the student's school; teaching staff, such as teachers and resource teacher; a representative of the parent or student who is 16 years of age or older, to speak on their behalf and provide support; and an interpreter if required.

In writing to the principal, parents can request an IPRC. They should receive acknowledgement of this request within 15 days.

At least 10 days before the IPRC meeting, the parents will receive an invitation to attend and a written copy

of all the information about the student that the chair of the IPRC has received.

In addressing the IPRC, the parents should prepare to make a case for their child. It should include the child's strengths as well as areas of need.

Addressing the IPRC can be overwhelming and emotional, as speaking about one's child in front of a large group of people is not a common occurrence for most parents. Solid preparation will help you overcome the uneasy feelings and increase your chances of receiving what your child needs.

An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is a plan outlining individual educational information, strategies and goals that must be prepared for a student within 30 school days after the student has been placed in the program or after the beginning of the new school year. Parents must be consulted in this process. An IEP will include the student's strengths and areas of need (be sure to prepare your own list), results of any assessments done by school personnel or reports shared by the parents, current levels of achievement, specific educational expectations (goals will be set every reporting period, some goals will run over a longer period of time), details about specific special education programs and services, accommodations and modifications that the student will receive, and a transition plan can be included.

A School Resource Team (SRT) meeting is a meeting between school staff. This school resource team is usually comprised of the principal, the teacher, the special education resource teacher and at times, the educational assistant. Services available at the board level, such as the ABA consultant, the speech and language pathologist (SLP), and psycho-educational consultant can be asked to join the school resource team. The goal of an SRT could be to prepare for an IPRC, or to discuss a purchase of equipment through a SEA (special equipment amount) claim. Parents should be invited to all SRT meetings about their child, but it has been our experience that unless the parent specifically requests to attend, invitations have not always been forthcoming.

11. When is my child's IEP completed, and how many times is it reviewed?

An IEP should be reviewed and updated a minimum of once per reporting period (that is, between each report card), and whenever necessary.

An IEP should be considered a working document. Changes to program goals, expectations, strategies, equipment, and support are to be recorded as they occur and communicated with the parents and student.

If the IEP contains only learning expectations for the first reporting period, the educator teaching that subject is responsible for recording the learning expectations being assessed in the second reporting period in the IEP; new expectations are to be communicated to the child and parents/guardians at the beginning of the second reporting period. This also applies to the third reporting period in elementary school, as well as to non-semester secondary schools.

Source: Ministry of Education. "The Individual Education Plan (IEP)." A Resource Guide. 2004. Government of Ontario. August 18, 2010. www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/lelemsec/speced/guide/resource/iepresguid.pdf.

12. Who develops my child's IEP? What information or documents are included? Am I allowed to attend this meeting?

Who develops my child's IEP?

The IEP is developed by the teacher, the Special Education Resource Teacher and the parent. Input can be obtained from therapy providers, specialists, etc.

What information or documents are included?

The IEP documents:

- Strengths and needs of the student
- Relevant medical diagnoses and health information
- Relevant assessment data
- The student's current level of achievement

- Accommodations needed
- Modifications to the curriculum
- Alternative programming
- Annual program goals and specific learning expectations for each of the goals
- Special education and related services provided to the student
- Assessment strategies to measure progress toward goals
- Documentation on parent consultation
- For students 14 and over, a transition plan should be included.
- Within 15 days of receipt of the IPRC decision, request a second meeting with the IPRC
- Within 30 days of the IPRC's decision and in writing, appeal the decision(s) to an Appeal Board set up by the school board through the secretary of the board (who is usually the director of education)
- If the parent does not agree with the decision after the second meeting, he or she may file a notice of appeal within 15 days of receipt of the decision.
- And then, if desired, further appeal to the Ontario Special Education Tribunal

Source: Ministry of Education. "Resolving Identification and Placement Issues" Procedures for Parent(s) / Guardian(s). June 27, 2007. Government of Ontario. August 18, 2010. www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/issues.html.

Am I allowed to attend the IEP meeting?

Parents should attend the IEP meeting and be actively involved in the process of developing the IEP, and not just be presented with the IEP, having had no input. They should prepare a needs statement about their child, and formulate some educational goals they want to see the school work on.

13. What do I do if I am unhappy with my child's IPRC? Is there any recourse?

While school boards and parent(s)/guardian(s) may agree on special education programs and services for a student without the assistance of an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC), the formal IPRC process provides a good framework for both, parent(s)/guardian(s), and school board, to ensure that the needs of the student are fully considered. In the event of an issue arising as to whether or not a student is exceptional, or which program placement is most appropriate for the student, the first step parent(s)/guardian(s) and school officials should take, is to request an IPRC meeting, as set out in Regulation 181/98 (Section 14).

If a parent/guardian is not satisfied with the identification or placement decision regarding their child, as determined by the IPRC, there are three steps that may be followed. The parent/guardian may:

14. What is the OSR? Who has access to my child's file? And if there is information that is inaccurate or out of date, what can I do to have it removed?

The Ontario Student Record (OSR) is the record of a student's educational progress throughout schools in Ontario. A child's report card and personal information are stored in the OSR, which is kept at the home school office.

If your child has an identification of an exceptionality, and therefore an IEP, this information will also be included in the OSR. Additionally, any relevant assessments and medical (e.g. a diagnosis) and health related information (e.g. progress reports from occupational or physiotherapy) are stored there.

Teachers involved with your child have access to the OSR so they can learn about your child's exceptionality, his needs and strengths, and his or her learning style. Also, with a consent form signed by the parent, psycho-educational consultants and other board staff, can have access to the OSR. At the time when a parent signs the consent form, the length of time that these identified people have access to the file will be determined. Typically, it is for one year.

Annually and in writing, a parent should schedule an appointment with the principal to obtain access to the

OSR to verify if all documentation is present, current and relevant. If a parent feels old documentation (e.g. a psycho-educational assessment that is older than three years, or a diagnosis that has been changed,) should be removed, it must be requested in writing to the principal. If documents are missing (e.g. decision statement from the IPRC), a parent should, likewise, request that it be added. It is important that this file is up to date before the new school year starts, so the new teacher can have access to the latest educational information about your child. It is therefore suggested that the OSR files be “cleaned out” annually in early June.

Ontario Student Record Guidelines from the Ministry of Education can be found at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/osr/osr.html.

15. Am I permitted to request an EA (Educational Assistant) for my child?

A parent cannot request an EA for their child, however, they can list the various needs their child has. Having the support of an Educational Assistant is one way to address the needs a student has. Parents should share these needs with the SRT before the IPRC meets, and again at the IPRC meeting so that the placement recommendation can consider this information and make decisions appropriately. Other ways to address the needs of the student can be through accommodations, modifications, school volunteers, classroom or upper level peers, a college student, and the Special Education Resource Teacher.

16. What happens if the school boundaries change and my child is scheduled to be in another catchment area next year, and has been asked to change schools?

Once aware of this change, a parent should fill out an optional attendance form for the current school, and provide the reasons why your child would

benefit from staying at the current school. Optional attendance is only possible if the school has spaces available, and will be considered on an individual basis. If optional attendance is not an option, then ask for a timely transition meeting between the current and the receiving staff and yourself, and organize for your child to visit the new class/school/teacher before the new school year starts.

17. How can I find out who my child’s teacher will be for the next school year?

Schools are able to give you a tentative name of the teacher for next year, usually by mid-June. The current teacher or SERT, should go over this information with your child as part of the transition plan. A picture of the new teacher can be taken, a visit arranged, and a Social Story developed. This can be sent home, so that over the summer a parent can work with their child, which can facilitate the transition from one grade to the next.

DISCLAIMER: *This document reflects the views of the author. It is Autism Ontario’s intent to inform and educate. Every situation is unique and while we hope this information is useful, it should be used in the context of broader considerations for each person. Please contact Autism Ontario at info@autismontario.com or 416-246-9592 for permission to reproduce this material for any purpose other than personal use. © 2012 Autism Ontario 416.246.9592 www.autismontario.com*