

The IPRC Process

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In 1980, the Ontario Government passed amendments to the Education Act which guaranteed the right of all children to be enrolled in publicly-funded schools. (Note that private schools still do not have to enroll exceptional students or provide programs for them.)

The bill required school boards to provide special education programs and services for all pupils identified as exceptional by a committee known as an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC). Although the amendments are now part of the Education Act, they are sometimes called Bill 82 amendments.

Children are entitled to services from junior kindergarten until graduation from high school (or age 21). Deaf and hard-of-hearing children can begin to receive services from the age of two, since this is a crucial age for learning language.

If parents request an IPRC by writing to the principal, by law one must be granted. If the school wishes to hold an IPRC, the principal must notify the parents in writing. Many school boards will have a pamphlet explaining the IPRC process.

School staff must complete an educational assessment of the child prior to the meeting. Parents are entitled to see this, but in some cases they will have to ask for it. This assessment will give a good idea of the school's plan for the child.

A child can be exceptional in five ways. He or she may have a behavioural, communication, intellectual, physical, or multiple exceptionality. Under the five categories are the following 12 possible diagnoses: autism, behavioural exceptionality, educable retardation, giftedness, hearing impairment, language impairment, learning disability, multi-handicap, orthopaedic and/or physical handicap, speech impairment, trainable retardation, and visual impairment.

Before you go to an IPRC meeting, you would be well advised to know exactly what you want for your child.

Here is what will happen at the meeting. First, the group will have to decide whether or not the child is an exceptional learner. Then, the

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school officials will want to consider “placement” — should the child be in a special class and if so which type and for what period of the day? If the IPRC committee insists on treating a secondary problem (such as a behaviour problem which has been caused by non-treatment of a primary problem), then the child is going to be no further ahead.

When you go to the meeting, you will usually find a minimum of six educators present. You should consider taking along at least one other person, because it is easy to become emotional during the IPRC. Learning disability associations and some gifted associations have trained advocates who will go in with you to help you.

Bring along any evidence you need to establish your position, e.g. private assessments, research, etc. If you think that your child needs something different from what the school is recommending, be prepared for strong resistance — e.g., a school board psychologist who will argue that your child is not really gifted, despite his high IQ. After all, if the educators really wished to give you what you want, they would have done so by now!

Once placement has been agreed on, the education plan should be discussed. Usually at this point, however, the educators get quite uncomfortable and want to play things by ear. But if your child doesn't get what he needs in the special classroom, why bother putting him there in the first place?

Schools in Ontario are required to prepare an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for each child who is IPRC'd, and a copy of it must be forwarded to the parents. Because the IEP part of the process cannot be appealed, it is crucial to ensure that your ideas are reflected there. If your school board is one of those which chooses not to prepare IEP's, you should notify the Special Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Training.

If you are not happy with the decision rendered by the IPRC committee, take it home and think about it before signing it. You do not have to sign it at the meeting.

The IPRC decision must be reviewed every year. You will be notified in writing about the date for a review. The definition of exceptionality and the placement decision can be appealed by either party. Parents must give 15 days' written notice to the secretary of the board (generally the director of education) to appeal a decision.

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