

Ministry of Education

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**MEMORANDUM TO:**

Director of Education

CC:

Chairs of Special Education Advisory Committees

FROM:

Bruce Drewett, Director of Special Education Policy and Programs Branch

Sid Mensinga Manager (A) Toronto & Area Region

DATE:

June 25, 2007

SUBJECT:

Results of 2007 IEP Collaborative Review

As you know, over the past few months the Ministry of Education has conducted a collaborative review of school boards' practices and processes related to the development and implementation of Individual Education Plans (IEP). This review was conducted in response to recommendations made in the *Special Education Transformation Report*, released in May 2006, as well as a follow up to a memorandum issued by the Deputy Minister on October 12, 2006 regarding *Special Education Transformation Initiatives*. The review focussed on the connection between the student's IEP, the Ontario curriculum and the provincial report card to ensure that students and parents have a clear picture of how the student's progress is being assessed and reported during the school year by the classroom teacher. The review was collaborative in nature and engaged parent representatives, superintendents, and principals or special education coordinators/consultants from individual school boards, school authorities and Provincial and Demonstration Schools from across the province.

We are pleased to provide you with an individualized report based on the results of the review as well as a summary of provincial trends that were noted.

The ministry acknowledges the efforts of school boards to make the adjustments necessary to comply with the ministry's Individual Education Plan Standards (2000) and notes that many boards have demonstrated progress in their IEP practices and procedures since they were last reviewed by the ministry in either 2001, 2002 or 2003. However, as you will note in your report, it is clear that further work is required in order

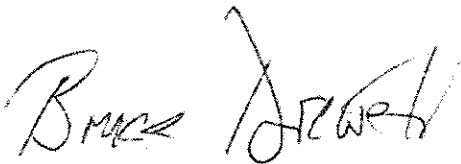
for IEPs to become a relevant and effective planning, communication and accountability tool, with connectivity to the report card.

Many school boards have indicated their intention to employ a methodology, similar to that used in the Collaborative Review, to examine and find ways to improve their own IEP practices and procedures with teachers, principals and other board staff. The ministry strongly encourages the use of this monitoring and quality assurance practice and requests that you involve your SEAC in this process.

In response to a request from many boards, the ministry is pursuing the development of an electronic IEP template that will be available to those boards that choose to use it. This template will be available for the 2007/08 school year. At the request of many boards, the ministry will also be developing sample IEPs that will supplement those that are already contained in the ministry's IEP Resource Guide (2004).

Boards are requested to share and discuss actions that will be taken to address observations and recommendations that are made in your individualized report. Should your board wish to have a further dialogue with the ministry concerning the individual report, you may contact Moira Sinclair at the ministry's Regional Office 416-325-6870/1-800-268-5755.

We wish to thank you for your commitment to working with students who have special education needs.



Original hard copy signed

Bruce Drewett
Director

Sid Mensinga
Manager(A)

Attachments: encl.

IEP Collaborative Review 2006-2007 Provincial Report: Common Trends

Introduction

In December 2006, the Special Education Policy and Programs Branch began a collaborative review of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and corresponding Provincial Report Cards submitted by all Ontario school boards, Provincial and Demonstration Schools, and several school authorities. Nine regional meetings took place across the province, with one meeting in each region (two each in the London and Barrie regions) and one provincial francophone session. Parent representatives and staff from each school board, Provincial and Demonstration School, and many school authorities participated in these meetings, and examined their own practices and procedures related to IEP development and implementation.

The Special Education Policy and Programs Branch conducted an intensive examination of the quality of IEPs and Provincial Report Cards submitted in relation to *Individual Education Plans: Standards for Development, Program Planning, and Implementation, 2000*. The following report is a summary of the findings of this examination with respect to eight key elements:

- Template
- Assessment Data
- Areas of Strength and Areas of Need
- Accommodations
- Program Section
- Transition Plan
- Parent Consultation
- Link to the Provincial Report Card.

Template

An appropriate template is the cornerstone of successful IEP development. The template must have the capacity to be populated with all the information required by the Ministry's Individual Education Plan Standards, and follow a logical sequence from assessment data through areas of strength and areas of need to the program section. The content of the IEP must be written in language that is easily understood by parents and older students, the key audience of this document.

The reviewers found that approximately one third of the IEPs submitted are on templates that fulfill the requirements. The other two thirds are problematic in that sections are missing, the IEP does not follow a logical sequence, and/or extraneous or redundant entries detract from clarity and readability. As a result, documentation of critical elements of the individual student's special education program is compromised.

A cohesive template will improve the content and flow of the IEP, and make it possible for teachers to efficiently provide the information required for the IEP to be a meaningful planning, communication and accountability tool.

In response to a request from many boards during the regional meetings, the Ministry is developing an electronic IEP template that will be available to boards.

Assessment Data

Current and relevant assessment information by psycho-educational, behavioural and medical/therapy professionals, among others, should complement educational testing by classroom and resource teachers in this section of the IEP.

The reviewers found that the quality of assessment data in the IEPs submitted is variable. Many IEPs provide the source and date of assessment, but the summary of results is limited to a diagnosis, e.g., Autism Spectrum Disorder. Additional information vital for program planning, such as the manifestations of autism, the nature of a learning disability, or the severity of hearing loss is frequently not recorded. Some assessment information is dated, and may lack relevance to the student's present situation. There is a notable absence of current information from educational testing that classroom and resource teachers have undertaken in creating an individual learning profile.

It is helpful to parents when assessment results are recorded in plain language, e.g., 'well below grade level in reading comprehension', rather than in percentiles or scaled test scores. A succinct summary of current and relevant assessment information will set the stage for the individual student's special education program and/or services that follow in the IEP.

Areas of Strength and Areas of Need

Areas of strength and areas of need should flow logically from assessment data and reflect parents' knowledge about their child, as well as teacher observation. Areas of strength should focus on preferred learning style/modality, processing skills and/or previously acquired learning skills on which the teacher can build when planning the special education program. Areas of need should focus on broad cognitive and/or processing challenges, and skill deficits that make clear the reasons the student requires a special education program and/or services.

The reviewers found that a significant number of boards appropriately delineate areas of strength and areas of need. However, this section is sometimes a 'catch-all' of numerous entries such as personality traits, what the student enjoys, and what he/she may need in terms of program, accommodations, equipment and support personnel.

Accommodations

Accommodations include special teaching and assessment strategies, individualized equipment and technology that help the student learn and/or demonstrate learning. Accommodations should follow logically from the student's identified areas of strength and need.

The reviewers found that accommodations are frequently too numerous, generic or redundant, especially when they are listed in more than one place on the template. The IEP should include only those strategies and supports that differ from what is normally provided during classroom instruction. It is helpful to list accommodations once in a dedicated section of the IEP under the following headings: instructional, environmental and assessment.

Several boards include a dedicated box in the program section of the IEP for each subject/course that is accommodated only. This is not necessary, nor is it advisable, as there is no change to the provincial teaching expectations for the grade. It suffices to list accommodated subjects/courses in the program summary section of the IEP.

Sixty-three percent of secondary IEPs are for students whose courses are accommodated only. This is concerning when a significant number includes students with severe developmental disabilities, multiple exceptionalities or severe autism.

IEPs do not consistently record either exemption from or permitted accommodations for EQAO testing during a provincial assessment year. This information is critical for students with special learning needs. It is helpful to parents when the IEP clearly indicates whether or not it is a provincial assessment year.

It is important that the accommodations listed in the IEP are determined, in collaboration with parents, by all teachers who have contact with the student, that they are regularly implemented, and that they are understood by receiving teachers, especially at critical transition points in the student's academic career.

Program Section

a) Current Level of Achievement

The current level of achievement comes from the report card of the previous June. The exception to this occurs when a special education program begins during the school year. The current level of achievement remains unchanged for the duration of the IEP, that is, for the school year or semester.

The reviewers found that all too often the current level of achievement is not appropriately recorded. In many IEPs, it is either omitted or it is incorrectly stated. The current level of achievement is necessary to provide parents and students with a clear starting point or benchmark from which future progress can be measured for each subject/course and/or alternative skill area

in the IEP.

b) Annual Program Goals

Annual program goals describe what the student can reasonably be expected to accomplish by the end of the school year or semester. Annual program goals must be stated in observable and measurable terms for language, mathematics and alternative skill areas, and in terms of observable achievement for other subjects/courses.

A few boards appropriately articulate annual program goals. However, in most cases, annual program goals are an area of concern. In the majority of IEPs, annual program goals are general statements that are neither observable nor measurable. School board staff involved in the collaborative review indicated the need for further professional development for teachers in writing effective annual program goals.

c) Learning Expectations

Learning expectations are the core of the IEP. They are the performance tasks on which the teacher will assess the student, and on which the letter grades/marks/anecdotal comments on the report card for each term will be based. In the vast majority of cases, the student will be assessed on his/her ability to complete these tasks independently. Learning expectations must be expressed in very specific terms that are measurable.

The reviewers found learning expectations to be the most problematic section of the IEP. This finding is consistent with the feedback from school board staff involved in the collaborative review with reference to the board's own IEPs. Learning expectations for modified subjects/courses are often quoted from Ontario curriculum documents, and are not stated as measurable performance tasks. Teachers need to distill the learning expectations found in curriculum guides, and make them measurable performance tasks. Learning expectations for alternative skill areas are often general statements that are expressed in such a way that the student and parents cannot understand exactly what the student must know or be able to do. Lack of measurability weakens the capacity to assess achievement and to report progress to parents.

The learning expectations listed in the IEP should represent what a student can reasonably be expected to achieve during each reporting period. This will demonstrate to parents the cumulative progress of the student toward the achievement of the annual program goal. It is particularly important for the parents of students with significant challenges that even small progressive steps are evident.

There is inconsistent evidence of revision of learning expectations by term in the IEPs reviewed, and the grade level of modified learning expectations is not always recorded, resulting in lack of clarity for parents.

School board staff involved in the collaborative review indicated the need for further professional development for teachers in writing measurable learning expectations. At the request of many boards, the Ministry will be developing sample IEPs to supplement those in *The Individual Education Plan (IEP): A Resource Guide, 2004*.

d) Teaching Strategies

Only those teaching strategies that relate to a particular learning expectation and differ from the strategies used with other students should be recorded. If there are no unique teaching strategies, it is acceptable to leave the corresponding space blank. When provided, teaching strategies should be aligned with the particular learning expectation.

The reviewers found that in the vast majority of IEPs, too many generic teaching strategies are included, adding unnecessary work for the teacher who is writing the IEP. Furthermore, they are inconsistently aligned with the particular learning expectation, resulting in lack of clarity for parents.

e) Assessment Methods

Teachers are expected to use a variety of assessment methods on an ongoing basis to monitor and assess student achievement of the learning expectations in the IEP.

The reviewers found that varied assessment methods are generally included. However, they are inconsistently aligned with each learning expectation. When aligned, as is the case for a number of boards, it is clear to parents how achievement of the learning expectation will be assessed, and the critical link to the report card is strengthened.

Transition Plan

An IEP must include a transition plan for all students 14 years of age or older who are not solely identified as gifted. An effective transition plan guides the parent(s), the student and the school in developing the necessary linkages to postsecondary institutions, outside agencies and community partners that will be involved in the student's transition to postsecondary activities. An IEP transition plan is expected to be a long-range plan that is reviewed annually as each new IEP is developed.

The reviewers found that transition plans are provided for most students who require them. However, plans usually contain few entries, address activities in secondary school, and/or are generic in nature. They do not provide student specific information, as outlined in *Transition Planning: A Resource Guide, 2002*. Of particular concern is the lack of evidence of detailed transition planning for older students with a developmental disability, multiple exceptionalities or severe autism.

Parent Consultation

Parent engagement in the IEP development process is important. Many parents involved in the collaborative review indicated that they were routinely consulted in the development of their child's IEP. Their feedback, however, is not noted in the log of parent/student consultation, as required. Other parents involved in the collaborative review indicated that they were unaware that they had a significant role to play in the development of their child's IEP.

The reviewers found that the vast majority of IEPs do not include a parent/student consultation log, or if included, it contains minimal entries that seldom document the outcome of consultation with parents. In the few cases where parental consultation outcomes are recorded, amendments to the IEP are appropriately noted.

The importance of collaboration with parents in the development of the IEP figures prominently in *Special Education Transformation, 2006*. Parent collaboration strengthens the IEP, and should be carefully documented by IEP developers.

Link to the Provincial Report Card

The IEP and the Provincial Report Card are interrelated documents in that achievement of the learning expectations set out in the IEP should be clearly recorded on the Provincial Report Card.

The reviewers found the link between the IEP and the Provincial Report Card to be variable. In most cases, the IEP box on the report card is checked, and the required statement from the Provincial Report Card guide is included for modified subjects. The comments on the report card in some cases reflect achievement of the learning expectations in the IEP.

A significant number of school boards provide an alternative report card to document achievement in alternative skill areas. For other school boards, it is unclear how achievement in alternative skill areas is reported to parents.

It should be noted that according to Ministry direction (November 2004), it is not necessary, nor is it advisable, to check the IEP box on the report card or to note the provision of accommodations for subjects/courses that are accommodated only in the IEP.

Conclusion

The reviewers found that many school boards have demonstrated improvement in IEP

development since the time of the previous IEP reviews in 2001, 2002 and 2003. Other boards continue to experience significant challenges in moving forward. It is important for school boards to recognize the key role the principal plays in guiding his/her staff in the development and implementation of IEPs for students with special needs. In all cases, the principal's signature should signify that the IEP meets the Individual Education Plan Standards, that it plans for the student's progress through the Ontario curriculum and alternative skill areas, and that it is an accountability tool for parents.