

Section

5

Identifying and Overcoming Challenges for Latinx Students



Identifying and Overcoming Challenges: Special Education

What Is “Special Education”?

All students require support from teachers, classmates, family, and friends in order to thrive and to gain the full benefit of their school experience. Some students have special needs that require supports beyond those ordinarily received in the school setting. In Ontario, students who have behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities, may have educational needs that cannot be met through regular instructional and assessment practices. These needs may be met through accommodations, and/or an educational program that is modified above or below the age-appropriate grade level expectations for a particular subject or course. Such students may be formally identified as exceptional pupils. The Ministry sets out definitions of exceptionalities that must be used by school boards after determining that a student is an “exceptional pupil”.

What should you do if you think your child needs special education support?

- Ask your child(ren) if there are particular things that are consistently difficult at school.
 - Ask the teacher if he or she thinks your son or daughter needs extra support and if the teacher can provide the extra help.
 - Some medical conditions may affect learning (e.g. hearing, vision, etc.) - it might help to talk to your child’s doctor.
 - What kinds of supports or programs would help my child succeed?
 - What is available in the school?
 - Would my child have to wait a long time to get into the right program?
- At the School Team Meeting the school staff may recommend one or more of the following options:

Actions to take, meeting with the school staff

- If you think your child needs more support, ask the principal or vice-principal to hold a meeting with other school staff (called a School Team Meeting) to talk about your child(ren).
- Prepare for the meeting. Sometimes it helps to write down questions, such as:
 - that the teacher continue to provide support in the classroom
 - that the teacher/team develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for the student
 - that a student be formally “assessed” to find out if he or she has special needs and what those needs are and/or – that the school hold a more formal Special Education meeting, called an Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC).



What is a Special Education Assessment?

A Special Education Assessment is an evaluation of a student by a specialist to determine if a student has special needs and what those needs are. Your principal or vice principal will explain what you need to do to have your child assessed. The board has specialists on staff who will assess students at no cost to parents, but there may be a waiting list.

What is an IEP?

The Individual Education Plan (IEP), describes what the school will do to help your child. The Plan must be developed in consultation with parents. A student does not have to be formally assessed to have an IEP.

The IEP should include:

- A list of the student's strengths and needs.
- An outline of the special education services the student will receive, where and when the service will be provided, and who will provide it.
- A description of how the student's progress will be measured and reviewed.
- A set of goals for the student and teacher to work toward over the year.
- A list of any special equipment to be provided.

An IEP must be completed within 30 school days after your child has been placed in a special placement and the principal must ensure that you receive a copy of it. The IEP must be reviewed in each reporting period.

What is an IPRC?

Sometimes the School Team will recommend the school hold an Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) – which is a meeting to officially identify a student's special needs (often called "exceptionalities").

An IPRC may be requested by the parents or the school. Once parents have made a request in writing, an IPRC must be held. The school must inform the parents about an IPRC, and it is very important for parents to attend. The IPRC will officially decide:

- If a student has special learning needs.
- What kind of learning needs the student has.
- The best placement and program for the student.

What happens at an IPRC, and do parents have a role?

The IPRC meeting usually includes the student's teacher and/or guidance counsellor, the principal, a psychologist, a school board representative and the parents. Using information from the staff and parents, the committee will recommend a placement for the student, and the parents will be asked to sign a document agreeing to the committee's recommendations. You may take the document home and think it over before deciding whether to sign it.

- Take a photograph of your child to help the committee remember who they're talking about.
- If a particular placement is recommended, you may ask to visit it.
- If you disagree with the decision of the IPRC, you may appeal it, but there is a time limit for the appeal. Your principal can explain the process.
- The IPRC process may seem very formal, but it means that you and your child will have a legal right to request ongoing support, which will help him or her succeed in school.

Some tips for your IPRC:

- You can bring a family member, a friend or someone from a support association to the meeting.
- Bring any doctor's notes or assessments about your child's medical condition or about his or her learning skills.

Will my child's support change over time?

Your child's placement will be reviewed at least once in every school year – you can always ask for changes or for more information at the review.



Where can parents go for help?

Ask your teacher, principal or guidance counsellor for more information:

- People for Education has more information and links to special education organizations at: <https://peopleforeducation.ca/topics/special-education/>
- Other parents can be a wonderful resource—talk to the parents in your school about how special education works or contact your school board's Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC).
- If you have a school settlement worker, they can help explain the special education process.
- At www.edu.gov.on.ca, you can find an IEP Resource Guide, an Educator's Guide to Special Education and the document, Education for All.



REMEMBER:

Some issues can be solved by the teacher in the classroom, so speak to the teacher first if you are worried about your child's progress.

- Needing special education support is not a bad thing—all students learn differently, some just need different kinds of support to succeed.
- Just because your child does not speak English as their first language, it does not mean that they will need special education help.
- Some problems are a normal part of adjusting to a new language and school. It may help to provide the principal with information about your child's academic skills in his or her first language.
- Some parts of the process for getting special education support can feel confusing and it may have many unfamiliar names. Always ask questions if there are things you don't understand or if you are not comfortable in English, ask for an interpreter
- Parents play an important role in special education... Don't give up! It is all right to ask for support for your child.

**IDENTIFICATION PLACEMENT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE (IPRC)
TIMELINES AS OUTLINED IN REGULATION 181/98 IPRC**

Process	Time Frame	Actions
IPRC Meeting is Requested by Parent in Writing	Within 15 days of request	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal sends letter of acknowledgement (IPRCcom) • Letter indicates approximate date of IPRC • Parent Guide to Special Education must be sent (IPRCcom)
IPRC Meeting is Requested by Principal Recommendation of School Support Team	Within 15 days of request by principal to the Special Education Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal sends letter to inform parent that Principal has requested an IPRC (IPRCcom) • Letter indicates approximate date of IPRC • Parent Guide to Special Education must be sent (IPRCcom)
IPRC Meeting is Scheduled	Special Education Department informs school of IPRC meeting schedule approximately 2–3 weeks prior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Education Department notifies the school principal about the schedule of students from that school
Parent is Informed of IPRC Meeting	Parent must be in receipt of the invitation at least 10 days prior to the IPRC meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School sends letter of invitation to parent (IPRCcom) • Parent Guide to Special Education is again sent (IPRCcom) • All IPRC documentation is included with invitation for parental review prior to meeting
IPRC Meeting is Held	Generally 30 minutes scheduled for an initial IPRC/20 minutes for a Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair explains purpose of IPRC • Student's strengths and needs are documented • Decisions about exceptionality and placement are determined • Categories and definitions of exceptionalities are identified • Recommendations about program and services are documented on Page 2 • Statement of Decision is reviewed and given to the parent

Parent Agrees with IPRC Decisions	Either at IPRC meeting or subsequent to meeting Upon student's placement in special education program Within 30 school days of placement in program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent completes and signs Statement of Decision and subsequently potentially an Offer of Program Placement • School seeks parental input for the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) • School completes the IEP and provides the parent with a copy
Parent Wishes Further Discussion	Within 15 days of receipt of the Statement of Decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents requests a second meeting of the IPRC • Generally new information is available or the parent wishes the Committee to consider previous information in a different light
Special Education Department Arranges Reconvening of the IPRC	As soon as possible, keeping in mind that the parent has 30 days after receiving the decision of the IPRC to file an appeal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The original Committee must be reconstituted • The parents are given an opportunity to outline their reasons for asking the committee to reconsider its decisions • A new Statement of Decision is produced which may reflect the same or revised decisions
Parent Disagrees with Decisions of the IPRC	Within 30 days of receipt of the IPRC Statement of Decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent files notice of appeal with Secretary of the Board (Director)
Notice of Appeal	Within 15 days of notice received Within 15 days of selections made Within 30 days of selection of Chair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School board and parent each select one member of Appeal Board • The two identified members select a Chair • Appeal Board meeting is held (unless both parties consent in writing to a later date)
Special Education Appeal Board (SEAB)	Within 3 days of SEAB meeting Within 30 days of receipt of recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEAB recommendations sent to relevant parties • School board considers recommendations and sends statement of its decision to parties
Board's Decision	Within 30 days of receipt After 30 days and with no notice of appeal from parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent appeal to Special Education Tribunal • Board implements its decision

Identifying and Overcoming Challenges: Mental Health

What Is Mental Health?

Mental health is part of our overall well-being and relates to our ability to enjoy life, maintain fulfilling relationships, and cope with adversity and stress. It gives us a sense of spiritual, social and emotional well-being. There may be times, however, when we experience mental health problems in which our thinking, mood, and behaviour limit our ability to function successfully in parts of our daily lives. Some mental health problems are mild and temporary. Others can be more serious, last longer, and require specialized and intensive treatment. Mental health problems can affect anyone, regardless of age, education, or social position. The first signs often appear in childhood or adolescence.

What do students learn about mental health at school?

Throughout the curriculum, students are taught living skills that provide a strong base for their future mental and physical well-being. These are skills that give a person a positive sense of self, that help them form and maintain healthy relationships, think critically and creatively, solve problems, and make wise decisions. Learning and talking about mental health can increase understanding of mental health issues and reduce the stigma associated with mental health problems. Key things that students learn across the curriculum include:

- understanding mind-body connections and the role of physical activity in supporting mental health and overall well-being
- understanding factors that contribute to emotional well-being, recognizing sources of stress, and developing the adaptive, management, and coping skills needed to deal with adversity and stress
- developing self-awareness and the ability to recognize warning signs of emotional difficulty, and understanding how to respond to them and seek support
- developing communication and social skills and the ability to identify and build healthy relationships
- understanding possible connections between substance abuse, addictions, and mental health, and knowing how to get help
- understanding the causes and nature of mental illness and ways of reducing the stigma and stereotypes associated with it

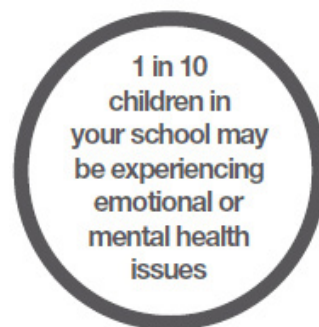
What elementary students learn in school

Students in Grades 1-3 learn to describe their emotions, appreciate the benefits of healthy active living for their mental well-being, and understand the importance of positive relationships with other children and adults. Learning in these areas helps students develop self-awareness and also includes strategies for seeking help.

In Grades 4-8, students learn strategies for maintaining mental well-being, coping with stress, and asking for help when they feel worried or sad. Topics that require greater sensitivity or maturity – managing anger, preventing bullying, and using social media responsibly, for example – are also introduced gradually at this time. In addition, students learn basic information about some common mental health and substance use problems, about ways of reducing the stigma associated with mental illness, and about supporting friends with mental health problems. One of the most important things students learn at this stage is that seeking help is a skill, not a weakness, and that students should talk with a caring adult if they need assistance with their thoughts and feelings.

What secondary students learn in school

Secondary school students learn more about the signs and symptoms of mental health problems as well as ways of checking the accuracy of on-line health information and finding sources of support. They also cover complex topics like substance use and other harmful behaviours, cyberbullying, responding to stress and peer pressure, and suicide prevention. Teachers are advised to introduce these topics with care and sensitivity, and to select resource materials in consultation with school board mental health professionals.



DID YOU KNOW?

Schools have an important role to play in building skills, knowledge, and habits that help mental well-being and can reduce the risk of social and emotional problems. Learning about mental health can help students both academically and socially, and create support for students who are experiencing social or emotional difficulties.

Talking with your children about mental health

Routine interactions with children provide them with much of the psychological support they need, but there may also be times when it is important to talk to them directly about mental health issues. These situations may arise if a child, or someone close to them, is showing signs of mental health problems. Starting these conversations is not always easy, but the following tips may help:

- Help them describe their emotions (e.g., “You look like you feel sad. Saying good bye can be hard. I feel sad too.”)
- Look for opportunities to talk informally in a relaxed setting.
- Let the discussion develop gradually over time rather than trying to cover too much in one conversation. Children may need time to become comfortable talking about their concerns.
- If children are uncomfortable speaking directly about their own feelings and experiences, approach the issues indirectly. Talk about imaginary situations or about characters in books or television programs.
- Let them know that you are there to talk and help, and that their mental health, like their physical health, can change over time.

If your child seems to be struggling with a mental health disorder, he or she can be referred to a mental health professional for further assessment and treatment. Ask your child’s teacher if she or he has noticed behavioural changes, and discuss ways in which the school might provide support. Check with your family doctor about possible medical reasons for changes in behavior or emotions.

Taken from Ontario's Ministry of Education, 2015 <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/mentalhealthfact.pdf>

Additional Resources

- **ABCs of Mental Health**

www.hincksdellcrest.org/ABC/Parent-Resource/Welcome

A source of expert information about child development, signs and symptoms of difficulty, and supportive strategies that can help at home and school.

- **Parents for Children’s Mental Health**

www.pcmh.ca/

PCMH is a support and advocacy network focussed on child and youth mental health. Parents who have children experiencing a mental health problem might value insights and resource recommendations from parents who have “been there”.

- **Children’s Mental Health Ontario**

www.kidsmentalhealth.ca/parents/introduction.php

Fact sheets and links to resources about child and youth mental health and information about getting help from Ontario’s mental health system.

Identifying and Overcoming Challenges: Bullying

What Is Bullying?

The Education Act defines bullying as aggressive behaviour that is typically repeated over time. It is meant to cause harm, fear or distress or create a negative environment at school for another person. Bullying occurs in a situation where there is a real or perceived power imbalance.

Types of bullying

Bullying can take many forms. It can be:

- physical – hitting, shoving, damaging or stealing property
- verbal – name calling, mocking, or making sexist, racist or homophobic comments
- social – excluding others from a group or spreading gossip or rumours about them
- written – writing notes or signs that are hurtful or insulting
- electronic (commonly known as cyber-bullying) – spreading rumours and hurtful comments through the use of e-mail, cell phones (e.g., text messaging) and on social media sites.

Electronic bullying or cyber-bullying

Is electronic communication that:

- is used to upset, threaten or embarrass another person.
- uses email, cell phones, text messages and social media sites to threaten, harass, embarrass, socially exclude or damage reputations and friendships.
- includes put-downs, insults and can also involve spreading rumours, sharing private information, photos or videos or threatening to harm someone.
- is always aggressive and hurtful.

DID YOU KNOW?

In Ontario schools, principals are required to address cyber-bullying if it has an impact on the school climate. For example, if the student is being bullied and is embarrassed as a result of an email message that was sent about him or her to other students in the school, he or she may not want to attend school.

Regardless of its form, bullying is **UNACCEPTABLE**

How can I tell if my child or teenager is being bullied?

A young child may not know the word "bully", but she knows when someone is being mean, hurting her, or making her feel sad or scared. She may not tell you because she may be worried she'll make things worse if she "tells", "tattles" or "rats".

Your teenager won't necessarily tell you there's a problem either and may use a term such as "harassment" rather than "bullying" to describe the behaviour. Teenagers often prefer to handle things on their own. They might think you'll get upset, that you will take away their technology, such as their cell phones, or they might just find it embarrassing to have a parent involved.

Even if they don't talk about it, you can watch for signs that your child is being bullied. Here are some signs to watch for:

Children who are being bullied:

- May not want to go to school or may cry or feel sick on school days.
- They may not want to take part in activities or social events with other students.
- They may act differently than they normally do.
- They might suddenly begin to lose money or personal items, or come home with torn clothes or broken possessions, and offer explanations that don't make sense.
- Teens who are bullied and/or harassed may also start talking about dropping out of school and begin skipping activities that involve other students.

DID YOU KNOW?

Nearly one in three Ontario students (29%) report being bullied at school, according to a 2011 study from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)

Bullying takes place when there is an imbalance of power between people. An "imbalance" could mean one student is older, of a different race or has more friends than another.

-Pepler, D., Craig, W., Connolly, J., Yuile, A., McMaster, L., & Jiang, D. (2006). A developmental perspective on bullying. *Aggressive Behavior*, 32, page 376

My child is being bullied. What should I do?

- Listen to your child and assure him that he has a right to be safe.
- Be clear on the facts. Make notes about what happened and when it happened.
- Help your child see that there is a difference between “ratting”, “tattling” or “telling” and reporting. It takes courage to report. Reporting is done not to cause trouble for another student, but to protect all students.
- Make an appointment to talk to your child/teenager’s teacher, another teacher that your child/teenager trusts or the principal or vice-principal of the school.
- Difficult as it may be, try to remain calm so that you can support your child and plan a course of action with him or her.
- Stay on course. Keep an eye on your child’s behaviour. If your meetings with school staff haven’t made the bullying stop, go back and talk to the principal.
- Follow up on the steps that were agreed to at the meeting.
- Speak to the instructor or coach if the bullying is taking place during after-school activities or sports events.
- Contact police if the bullying involves criminal behaviour, such as sexual assault or use of a weapon, or if the threat to your child’s safety is in the community rather than the school.

How can I help my child deal with bullying?

- By working with the school to help your child or teen handle the bullying problem, you are leading by example and giving a clear message that bullying is wrong.
- Regardless of age, you can help by encouraging your child to talk to you about bullying and by giving the following advice:
 - Stay calm and walk away from the situation.
 - Tell an adult whom you trust – a teacher, the principal, the school bus driver or the lunchroom supervisor – about what happened or report it anonymously.
 - Talk about it with your brothers or sisters, or with friends, so that you don’t feel you’re alone.
 - Call Kids Help Phone at **1-800-668-6868** or visit www.kidshelpphone.ca

How do schools deal with bullying and other incidents?

Students who bully others, whether it happens in person or on-line, can face different consequences.

When addressing bullying, principals use a progressive discipline approach. Ontario's progressive discipline policy allows a principal to choose from a range of options to address the behaviour and help the student learn from his or her choices. Some examples include:

- an apology for a hurtful or disrespectful comment
- a review of the expectations for the student
- a meeting with parents/guardians
- anger management counselling
- having the student suspended from school.

In more serious cases, the principal may recommend that the student be expelled from school if the student was previously suspended for bullying and continues to present an unacceptable risk to the safety of another person. These rules apply to both elementary and secondary students.

All board employees are required to report serious student incidents, such as bullying, to the principal. Principals are required to investigate all reported incidents of bullying.

Board employees who work directly with students, such as teachers, social workers and guidance counsellors, must respond to all inappropriate or disrespectful behaviour that has a negative impact on the school climate, including bullying.

School boards are required to provide programs, interventions or other supports for students who have been bullied, who have witnessed bullying and who have engaged in bullying.

For more information on how staff deal with incidents at school or to learn more about the services available through your school, talk to your school's principal.

Principals must contact the parents/guardians of students who have been bullied, as well as students who have engaged in bullying, and tell them:

- what happened
- what harm was done to the student
- what steps were taken to protect the student's safety, including any disciplinary measures taken in response to the incident
- what supports will be provided for the student in response to the incident.

DID YOU KNOW?

All schools and boards are required to have:

- **policies to prevent and address bullying**
- **policies for progressive discipline and equity and inclusive education**

In addition:

- principals must invite parents to have a discussion about the supports provided to their child.

If my child is being bullied, what can I expect from the school?

The school must have a procedure that allows you, students and other people to anonymously report incidents of bullying.

If you are concerned about your child or simply want more information, ask to see your:

- School board's bullying prevention and intervention policy.
- School's code of conduct, which sets out how students, teachers, and other members of the school community should behave towards one another.
- School and board's bullying prevention and intervention plan. This document outlines what school staff can do to solve the problem.
- School's results from the School Climate Survey. This anonymous survey helps schools assess feelings about safety and make decisions about how to prevent bullying and promote safe and accepting schools. Surveys must be done at least every two years.

If staff becomes aware that your child is being bullied, you can expect the school to contact you. You may find that your child's teacher or another teacher your child trusts may be able to help identify some strategies that will help resolve the problem.

Schools are expected to make every effort to fully investigate your concerns, while protecting students' privacy. They will assist all students who are involved in bullying, including those who engage in bullying, those who are bullied and those who witness bullying.

The school will have a process you can follow if you are concerned about the support provided to your child. If you are not satisfied with the school's response, you may contact the supervisory officer of your school board. In addition, you may consider joining the Safe and Accepting Schools Team at your school. The team is responsible for fostering a safe, inclusive and accepting school climate. It includes the principal, at least one parent, school staff, a student and a community partner.

Taken from Ontario Ministry of Education (2016) <https://www.ontario.ca/page/bullying-we-can-all-help-stop-it>

Identifying and Overcoming Challenges: Academic Streaming

What is academic streaming?

The practice of academic streaming is grouping students based on ability. Ontario officially ended streaming in 1999, but recent reports make a compelling case that we may have ended streaming in name only. Officially we do not have streams but “pathways.” And the idea is to place students into different classes within these pathways, purportedly to better suit their needs and interests.

Dividing students into separate tracks

The new system created in 1999 established applied and academic courses in grades 9 and 10, which were prerequisites for a range of “destination based” courses in grades 11 and 12. The policy was intended to end streaming in Ontario secondary schools and create a system that kept “options open for all students.” In most cases, however, students in applied courses are in different classrooms, have different teachers, and experience a different curriculum. Data from the Ministry of Education on course selections in 2014 show that 62% of students taking applied math were taking three or more applied courses, and that only 11% of students in applied math take no other applied courses. Students are, in effect, grouped into separate tracks.



The association between applied courses and low-income students

The applied/academic system may perpetuate current economic and educational disparities among families. Demographic data from EQAO, along with 2006 Census data, show that schools with higher percentages of students from low-income families also have higher proportions of students in applied mathematics. A recent TDSB study found that only 6% of students from the highest income neighbourhoods took the majority of their courses as applied courses, compared to 33% of students from the lowest income neighbourhoods. In addition, we see an overrepresentation of non-white students in applied tracks.

The link between applied courses and widening achievement gaps

There is evidence that the current course selection system may be exacerbating achievement gaps in secondary school. In 2013, EQAO reported a 40% gap in test performance between students in academic and applied courses. Over the past five years, the percentage of students in applied English who passed the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test declined from 62% to 51%.

The gap between success in applied and academic courses is also evident when students are followed from elementary to secondary school. Of the students who did not meet the standard in Grade 3 or in Grade 6, and took academic mathematics in grade 9, 47% met the standard on the EQAO Grade 9 academic mathematics assessment. The results were much different for students in applied mathematics: of the students who did not meet the standard in Grade 3 or in Grade 6, and took applied mathematics in grade 9, only 30% met the standard.

Recent Initiatives: Success combining applied and academic

A small number of schools in Ontario have delayed early course selection by combining applied and academic courses in grade 9. In one such school, teachers reported improved student behavior and time on task in the grade 9 academic math class. After the change, 89% of the students writing the grade 9 math test achieved the provincial standard or higher, compared to the District average of 82%, and the province at 84%.

NEXT STEPS

Ontario's education policy states that the system should keep "options open for all students." The reality is that forcing students as young as 13 years old to choose between two paths through school closes many options.

In particular, it may disadvantage our most vulnerable students. We strongly recommend delaying course decisions involving academic and applied courses to a later point in secondary school.

-People for Education Annual Report 2015

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