Individualized Program Plans

Individualized Program Plans (IPPs) are required for all students with special needs, including those with learning disabilities.

IPPs are:
- written commitments of intent by education teams to ensure appropriate planning for individual students with special needs
- working documents and records of student progress
- collaborative team efforts involving students, parents, regular education teachers and resource personnel
- based on a belief in individualized programming and developed to address the specific needs of individual learners
- instructional guides for teachers
- administrative documents that help monitor and evaluate students' educational progress and programs
- guides for transition planning.

Sample Steps in the IPP Process

One way of looking at the IPP process is as a set of interrelated actions that can be described as the following six steps.
1. Identifying needs
2. Setting the direction
3. Creating a plan
4. Implementing the plan
5. Reviewing and revising
6. Transition planning

These steps may occur in different sequences or be worked on simultaneously depending on the individual needs of students.

Identifying strengths and needs
Because the purpose of IPPs is to establish individualized programming, it is essential to identify the student's strengths and specific learning needs. Knowing what students' strengths are, will help the learning team choose goals, strategies and accommodations that build on these strengths. Knowing what the student's interests and personality traits are might also contribute to more effective programming decisions. Learning needs may include academic needs as well as social, behavioural and other needs.

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The learning team should examine information from a variety of sources in order to accurately identify student needs. These sources may include:

- parent observations
- teacher observations
- classroom assessments and products
- specialized assessments.

Setting the direction

Establishing priorities helps the learning team focus on what is critical for the student to learn this school year. The team establishes these priorities based on all the information that has been gathered to date and the availability of resources.

To determine the most important learning goals, the team considers:

- priority areas to focus on
- possibilities for using this new skill or knowledge in other areas and settings
- related areas of strength
- how this need affects overall learning and achievement
- transferability to other subject areas
- how the skills and knowledge relate to the student's future career goals.

Creating a plan

Based on a discussion of the student's needs and strengths, as well as the priority areas identified, the learning team will develop a plan that includes long-term goals and short-term objectives for the student.

Long-term goals are broad statements about achievement, such as:

- by the end of the year, Jace will improve his reading comprehension skills to a Grade 3 level
- by the end of the year, Lee will play and work cooperatively with peers throughout the school day.

Short-term objectives are small measurable steps that will lead from the child's present performance to the long-term goal. For example, short-term objectives for the same long-term goals above could include:

- by January 31, Jace will independently read one self-selected book and be able to retell the general storyline to another person
- by February 15, Lee will participate successfully in small group mathematics activities and complete all related group tasks keeping his hands to himself.

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Specific accommodations for supporting the student also need to be identified at this stage of the process.

Implementing the plan
In this phase of the process, the learning team reviews the content of the IPP and how progress will be measured. Teachers then put the instructional and assessment strategies into practice, and adjust short-term objectives as needed. Parents and other team members may support the IPP goals at home or in other contexts.

Reviewing and revising
Ongoing review and revision are important parts of the IPP process. Review meetings are opportunities to discuss the student's program and consider possible revisions. The year-end review is especially important as the team reviews the education plan and adds written recommendations to the IPP. This is particularly true for students moving from one school to another or making any kind of transition.

Parents or other team members may also request a review of the IPP at any time if they have concerns about the student's progress or if the student is experiencing significant changes in achievement, attitude or behaviour. The IPP can be adjusted or changed at any time throughout the school year, as the team deems necessary.

Transition planning
Transition planning involves identifying the kinds of skills that need to be in place for students to be successful in future settings, and developing a plan of action to ensure students acquire these skills and attitudes. The annual transition plan identifies potential transitions within the next school year and outlines strategies for preparing and supporting students through these transitions.

Strategies to Develop and Implement IPPs

Students with learning disabilities face complex challenges at the junior high and senior high school levels. Students' learning strengths and needs interact with the evolving demands of schooling that include increases in workload, the complexity of curriculum demands, the speed of presentation of material, the volume of reading and writing, the abstractness of language and the demands on memory. There may be larger classes and many instructors with a wide range of expectations. Students are expected to be increasingly independent. The organizational structures and curriculum demands make it more difficult to individualize programming, and social and emotional factors have a significant impact.

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You can maximize the benefits of educational programming in the junior high and senior high school years by emphasizing:

– transition planning
– meaningful parent involvement (with the gradual transfer of responsibility to students in senior high school)
– self-advocacy
– knowledge of learning strengths and needs
– knowledge of effective accommodations
– metacognitive skills: problem solving and higher order processing, self-management
– continued development of literacy skills
– content-area instruction with appropriate accommodations, assessment and instructional strategies
– instructional strategies to facilitate learning: explicit direct instruction, strategy instruction and strategic teaching are all important in junior high and senior high school.

Specific strategies to facilitate the IPP process are outlined below.

Enhancing the collaborative team
- Actively involve parents in the IPP process.
  – Seek parental input prior to IPP conferences; e.g., send home a form seeking information about parent goals, children's preferences. See Goal Setting—Parent Form for a sample template.
  – Discuss how and when parents want to be involved in and kept informed about their children's education programs.
  – Assist parents in preparing for IPP meetings.
  – Create a draft IPP and invite meaningful input from parents. Make changes and additions with their input.
  – Provide parents with a copy of the IPP to facilitate their support at home and as a working copy for their observations.
- Actively involve students in the IPP process with increasing participation and responsibility as students mature.
  – Involve adolescents in all aspects of planning and implementing their instructional programs, including assessment, program planning, goal setting, monitoring, evaluation and transition planning.
  – Involve students in selecting accommodations. Adolescents are sensitive to the reactions of their peers and prior discussion can help avoid embarrassment.
  – Provide coaching and opportunities for self-advocacy, such as approaching a content-area teacher to discuss accommodations.
  – Provide opportunities for students to try out accommodations and evaluate their effectiveness.

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- Provide support in learning to use assistive technology, particularly computer technology. Keyboarding skills and basic word processing skills are important to success after senior high school.
- Support students in taking responsibility for describing their needs and seeking appropriate support. For two strategies you can share, see Helping Students Communicate in the IPP Process.

- Involve appropriate school personnel in developing IPPs.
  - All school personnel involved in providing instruction for students with learning disabilities should be involved in developing IPPs. Regular classroom teachers are better able to use IPPs as instructional guides when they are involved in developing them.
  - IPPs are most effective when viewed in the context of an active problem-solving process, which can be facilitated by an organizational structure; e.g., Student Support Team Model, that provides a forum for ongoing team planning.
  - Provide professional development and guidance for teachers to increase understanding of the purpose and structure of IPPs.
  - Encourage support for the IPP process; e.g., time for involvement, communication, access to additional expertise.

Individualizing IPPs
- Focus on the individual needs of students, not on the categorical label. Avoid a generic list of accommodations: individuals with learning disabilities vary widely in their strengths and needs.
- Consider ways that instruction can build on students' academic, cognitive and processing strengths.
- Consider the appropriate balance for individual students. Each student should participate in the regular curriculum as much as possible with accommodations to support success. Students may also need additional instruction to develop skills and strategies.
- Use multiple sources of assessment data to determine strengths and needs.
- Consider students' needs beyond academics, such as social and behaviour needs.
- Focus on key goals for the individual student.
- Build in time for students to receive additional instruction/mentoring in literacy, learning and organizational strategies.
- Consider the workload and students' areas of difficulty. Where possible, adjust students' timetables to balance the number of courses with heavy demands for reading and written assignments taken in a term.

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Using IPPs
- IPPs need to be accessible working documents to be useful for ongoing instruction and monitoring. Some teachers keep them in binders in their desks for planning lessons and noting observations.
- If there are several teachers responsible for a student's education program, it is important to develop procedures for all teachers to have access to the IPP so they can use it to plan instruction, monitor progress, and contribute to evaluating and changing goals and objectives.
- Designate a key contact person on staff to whom a student can go for assistance, who monitors student progress and coordinates the student's program. Some students need daily communication with a key contact person.

Monitoring student progress
- Use diverse assessment and evaluation strategies to demonstrate and communicate progress.
- Monitor progress frequently. If objectives are met, set new ones. If the student is not demonstrating progress, review the program and make changes.
  - Gather baseline data as a benchmark for comparison to demonstrate growth.
  - Organize ongoing frequent monitoring of student progress in reading and writing; e.g., systematic weekly checks, timed readings, observations during oral reading, daily journal writing and response, spelling tests.
  - Gather information about the effectiveness of accommodations. Does the student benefit from extra time on exams? Does the quality of the student's written work improve when produced on a computer?
  - Make decisions about the need for instructional modifications if the student is not progressing.
- Use IPPs as working documents. Record, note or attach assessment information. Make changes and additions as required.
- Use a variety of techniques and instruments to assess the full range of student knowledge, skills and attitudes, and gather information about student learning. Assessment may be curriculum-based or focused on IPP goals for the student. Plan and revise instruction based on this information.
- Consider the following assessment approaches.
  - Student portfolios
  - Rubrics
  - Error analysis
  - Informal reading inventories
  - Assessment of student responses, products or performances

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- Observation
- For more information on possible assessment strategies, see [Assessment](#).

Guiding transition planning
- Make collaborative, comprehensive transition plans well in advance of anticipated transitions.
- Organize ongoing dynamic transition planning throughout junior high and senior high school.
- Organize transitions from junior high to senior high school. The transfer of information about students is extremely important. Schedule transition planning meetings well before the transition to senior high school to provide students, parents and school personnel with key information to facilitate the continuity of programming and the successful adjustment to senior high school.

(See [Planning for Transitions](#) for more information and strategies.)

Strategies to Support IPPs

Even if you are not the lead teacher responsible for developing a student's IPP, there are many ways you can support the student's individualized program plan. The following questions may guide reflection about the IPP of a student with learning disabilities.

- How will this student's strengths and needs affect success in my content area?
- How are the goals for this student relevant in my class?
- How can I help monitor progress toward IPP goals?
- How will I assess progress and understanding of concepts in my content area?
- What accommodations are identified in the IPP? How will I support the student in using these accommodations in my class?
- How will I participate in the IPP process?
- What strategies will I stress for this student?
- How can I maximize the students' access to the regular curriculum by:
  - providing appropriate accommodations
  - varying instructional time
  - considering the learning environment
  - providing resources and materials
  - varying the presentation formats
  - varying assignment and assessment techniques?

For more information, strategies and tools for developing and supporting IPPs, consult the Alberta Education document *Individualized Program Planning*.

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Goal Setting—Parent Form[1]

▶ **Dear Parents**
You are important members of the learning team! Please complete this goal-setting form and we will use it for planning and discussion at our parent–teacher conference. Thank you.

Student Name: _____

School: _____

Our child has these five strengths:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Our child has these five areas of need:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

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1. From Catherine Walker (Edmonton, AB: Smart Learning, 1993).

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A. Our first goal for our child this school year is:

_____

_____

This is what we will do at home to help achieve this goal:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

B. Our second goal for our child this school year is:

_____

_____

This is what we will do at home to help achieve this goal:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

I agree to review these goals at each reporting period.

_____   _____
Parent's Signature   Date

☐   I need more information! Please send home a sample of what a completed family goal sheet might look like.

☐   I need more ideas. Let's work on this together at the parent–teacher conference.

☐   I do not wish to participate in family goal setting this school year.

Please return to the school by:

Helping Students Communicate in the IPP Process[2]

IPLAN is a strategy that helps students focus on effective planning and communication.

I   Inventory your strengths, areas you need to improve, goals and interests, and choices for learning.

P   Provide your inventory information.

L   Listen and respond.

A   Ask questions.

N   Name your goals.

SHARE is a strategy that helps students focus on appropriate behaviours for effective communication.

S   Sit up straight.

H   Have a pleasant tone of voice.

A   Activate your thinking.

R   Relax.

E   Engage in eye contact.

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2. Adapted from "I-PLAN: Helping Students Communicate in Planning Conferences" by Anthony K. Van Reusen and Candace S. Box, *Teaching Exceptional Children*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 1990, 30, 31. Copyright 1990 by The Council for Exceptional Children. Adapted with permission.