

Considerations for program planning

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Planning for Students with Special Education Needs

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Classroom teachers are the key educators of students with special education needs. They have a responsibility to help *all* students learn, and they work collaboratively with

special education teachers and educational assistants, where appropriate, to achieve this goal. Classroom teachers commit to assisting every student to prepare for living with the highest degree of independence possible.

Learning for All: A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students, Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2013 [\[link\]](#) describes a set of beliefs, based in research, that should guide program planning for students with special education needs. Teachers planning programs or courses in all disciplines need to pay particular attention to these beliefs, which are as follows:

- All students can succeed.
- Each student has their own unique patterns of learning.
- Successful instructional practices are founded on evidence-based research, tempered by experience.
- Universal design^[*] and differentiated instruction^[*] are effective and interconnected means of meeting the learning or productivity needs of any group of students.
- Classroom teachers are the key educators for a student's literacy and numeracy development.
- Classroom teachers need the support of the larger community to create a learning environment that supports students with special education needs.
- Fairness is not sameness.

In any given classroom, students may demonstrate a wide range of strengths and needs. Teachers plan programs that are attuned to this diversity and use an integrated process of assessment and instruction that responds to the unique strengths and needs of each student. An approach that combines principles of universal design and differentiated instruction enables educators to provide personalized, precise teaching and learning experiences for all students.

In planning programs or courses for students with special education needs, teachers should begin by examining both the curriculum expectations in the grade or course appropriate for the individual student and the student's particular strengths and learning needs to determine which of the following options is appropriate for the student:

- no accommodations^[*] or modified expectations; or

- accommodations only; or
- modified expectations, with the possibility of accommodations; or
- alternative expectations, which are not derived from the curriculum expectations for the grade or course and which constitute alternative programs and/or courses.

If the student requires either accommodations or modified expectations, or both, the relevant information, as described in the following paragraphs, must be recorded in their Individual Education Plan (IEP). More detailed information about planning programs for students with special education needs, including students who require alternative programs^[*] and/or courses, can be found in [Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide, 2017 \(Draft\)](#) [\[↗\]](#) (referred to hereafter as *Special Education in Ontario, 2017*). For a detailed discussion of the ministry's requirements for IEPs, see Part E of *Special Education in Ontario*.

Students Requiring Accommodations Only

Some students with special education needs are able, with certain “accommodations”, to participate in the regular grade or course curriculum and to demonstrate learning independently. Accommodations allow the student with special education needs to access the curriculum without changes to the regular expectations. Any accommodations that are required to facilitate the student's learning must be identified in the student's IEP ([Special Education in Ontario, 2017, p. E38](#) [\[↗\]](#)). A student's IEP is likely to reflect the same required accommodations for many, or all, subjects or courses.

Providing accommodations to students with special education needs should be the first option considered in program planning. Instruction based on principles of universal design and differentiated instruction focuses on providing accommodations to meet the diverse needs of learners.

There are three types of accommodations:

- *Instructional accommodations* are changes in teaching strategies, including styles of presentation, methods of organization, or use of technology and multimedia. Some examples include the use of graphic organizers, photocopied notes, adaptive equipment, or assistive software.
- *Environmental accommodations* are changes that the student may require in the classroom and/or school environment, such as preferential seating or special

lighting.

- *Assessment accommodations* are changes in assessment procedures that enable the student to demonstrate their learning, such as allowing additional time to complete tests or assignments or permitting oral responses to test questions.

(For more examples, see page E39 of *Special Education in Ontario, 2017*.)

If a student requires “accommodations only”, assessment and evaluation of their achievement will be based on the regular grade or course curriculum expectations and the achievement levels outlined for the particular curriculum. The IEP box on the student’s Provincial Report Card will not be checked, and no information on the provision of accommodations will be included.

Students Requiring Modified Expectations

Modified expectations for most students with special education needs will be based on the regular grade or course expectations, with changes in the number and/or complexity of the expectations. Modified expectations must represent specific, realistic, observable, and measurable goals, and must describe specific knowledge and/or skills that the student can demonstrate independently, given the appropriate assessment accommodations.

It is important to monitor, and to reflect clearly in the student’s IEP, the extent to which expectations have been modified. At the secondary level, the principal will determine whether achievement of the modified expectations constitutes successful completion of the course, and will decide whether the student is eligible to receive a credit for the course. This decision must be communicated to the parents and the student.

Modified expectations must indicate the knowledge and/or skills that the student is expected to demonstrate and that will be assessed in each reporting period (*Special Education in Ontario, 2017*, p. E27). Modified expectations should be expressed in such a way that the student and parents can understand not only exactly what the student is expected to know or be able to demonstrate independently, but also the basis on which the student’s performance will be evaluated, resulting in a grade or mark that is recorded on the Provincial Report Card. The student’s learning expectations must be reviewed in relation to the student’s progress at least once every reporting period, and must be updated as necessary (*Special Education in Ontario, 2017*, p. E28).

If a student requires modified expectations, assessment and evaluation of their achievement will be based on the learning expectations identified in the IEP and on the

achievement levels outlined under [Levels of Achievement](#) in the “Assessment and Evaluation” section.

Elementary: The IEP box on the Elementary Progress Report Card and the Elementary Provincial Report Card must be checked for any subject in which the student requires modified expectations, and, on the Elementary Provincial Report Card, the appropriate statement from *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools, First Edition, Covering Grades 1 to 12, 2010*, page 61, must be inserted.

Secondary: If some of the student’s learning expectations for a course are modified but the student is working towards a credit for the course, it is sufficient simply to check the IEP box on the Provincial Report Card, Grades 9–12. If, however, the student’s learning expectations are modified to such an extent that the principal deems that a credit will not be granted for the course, the IEP box must be checked and the appropriate statement from *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools, First Edition, Covering Grades 1 to 12, 2010*, pages 62–63, must be inserted.

In both the elementary and secondary panels, the teacher’s comments should include relevant information on the student’s demonstrated learning of the modified expectations, as well as next steps for the student’s learning in the subject or course.