



# The Parent's Guide to Special Education





## **A MESSAGE TO PARENTS**

Sagamok Anishnawbek believes that all students have the potential to learn and that all students should progress to the best of their ability. Every effort is made to address the needs of students in a regular classroom in their community school. Some students benefit from a variety of program modifications and accommodations to their educational program. Other students may require more specialized educational programs and services in order to assist them to reach their full potential. Parents are important partners in their children's education. You are encouraged to meet frequently with the school team to discuss the educational program being planned and delivered. The Parent's Guide to Special Education has been prepared to help you fully participate in decision-making regarding your child's needs.

### Note:

When used in this guide, the word “parent” includes guardian.



## Is Your Child Struggling at School?

Is your child is struggling with school work, or with school in general?

Did you receive a phone call from his/her teacher stating they are concerned about your child? You may feel shocked, angry, anxious or embarrassed. Remember it is about your child, and what is best for them.

If your child has an issue with their work, and you believe he/she are sincerely struggling with the work, make arrangements to speak with the teacher. You can contact the teacher by email, phone or in person.

## HOW TO BE YOUR CHILD'S SUPPORTER (ADVOCATE)

The school and your child's teachers welcome your participation in communicating your concern(s). If school problems do come up, it's important that you quickly recognize and address them. Problems at school can show up as poor academic performance, loss of interest in school work, or poor relationships with peers or teachers. Remember your concerns are important but sometimes it takes some time to establish the best solution.

### Plan Your Approach

- ◆ Gather the information;
- ◆ Talk to your child about the process;
- ◆ Be clear about the facts ahead of time;
- ◆ Organize what you want to highlight;
- ◆ Know what questions you want to ask.

Parents can contact an agency/organization within the area who supports children and families with any special needs for guidance and assistance. You can also invite a friend or advocate at any time to attend meetings with you.

### Communicate Regularly With your Child's Teacher

Each student is different and learns differently, and no one knows your child better than you do. You may be able to provide some insight that will help the teacher and/or the special education resource teacher work more effectively with your child at school by email, phone or in person.

◆ Be positive and focus on one or two issues at a time;	◆ Share information about your child that you feel is important;	◆ Share information at school;
◆ Share information on what the child likes to do or what they are good at (strengths);	◆ Share information that you have gathered from outside sources that may assist with programming	◆ Listen actively – every person at the meeting has important information to share; § Give some thought to the solutions you would

Difficulties at school may be minor, severe, short-term or long term. Even short-term school problems can have a negative effect on how children feel about school and themselves. It is never too early to seek help for your child but it might cause more difficulties if you wait too long. Going through the process to determine the difficulties may feel confusing. Always ask questions if there are things that you don't understand.

Parents play an important role and your child needs you to ask for support. Help them to realize you can all work together with the school as a team so resources can be put in place to assist them. When your child is diagnosed with a learning disability or other issue it is hard not to get caught up in the negative. Look for the positive, and together you can figure out how to harness your child's strengths in the face of their challenges.

## Does Your Child Need Special Education Support?

Ask your child if there are certain things that are always difficult at school;

Some medical conditions may affect learning (e.g. hearing, vision etc.), so it may help to talk to your child's doctor when you notice these conditions;

Ask the teacher if he or she thinks your son or daughter needs extra support and if the teacher can provide the extra help;

Meet with Teacher;

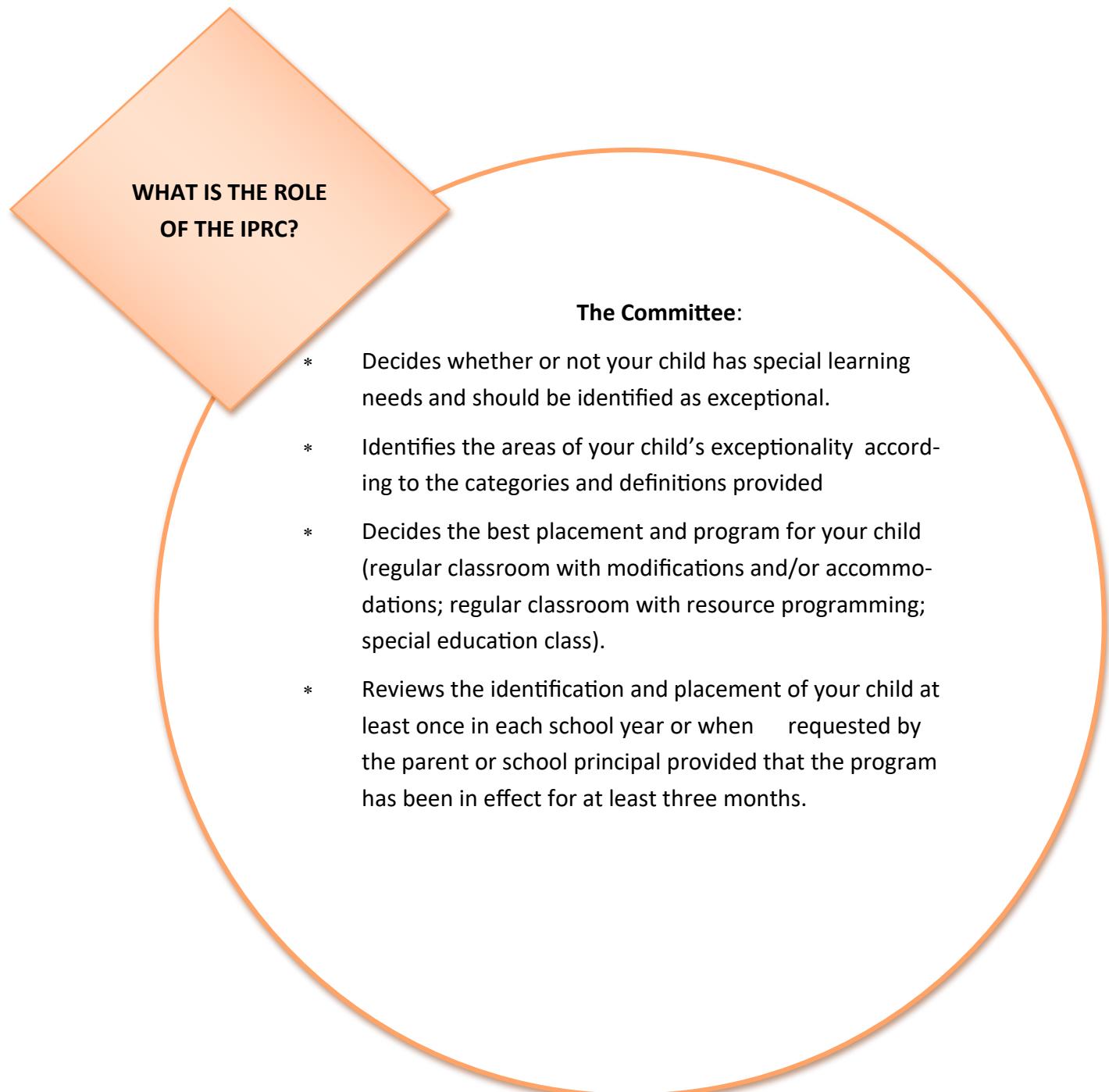
Your child may be assessed to determine if they have special needs and what those needs are. There may be a short waiting list to be assessed by the parent and teacher.;

If your child's doctor and/or teacher determine that your child needs to be evaluated. Please try to ensure that they have a good night's rest the night before the assessment.



## IDENTIFICATION, PLACEMENT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE (IPRC)

The Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) is a meeting to officially determine whether or not your child should be identified as exceptional. An IPRC may be requested by the parents or the school. Once parents have made a request in writing, an IPRC must be held within 15 days. The Principal must inform the parents about an IPRC, and it is very important for parents to attend.



## WHAT HAPPENS AT AN IPRC?

The IPRC meeting usually includes the student's teacher and/or special education resource teacher, principal, parents and the student (if over 16 years of age). Using information from the staff and parents, the committee will consider an educational assessment of your child. Consider, subject to the conditions of the Health Care Consent Act, 1996, a health or psychological assessment of your child conducted by a qualified practitioner, if they feel that such an assessment is required to make a correct identification or placement decision. They will recommend a placement for the student, and the parents will be asked to sign a document agreeing to the committee's recommendations.

Some tips:

You can bring an advocate or support person who may speak on your behalf of you and your child

Bring any doctor's notes or assessments about the student's medical condition or about his or her learning skills

Take a photograph of your child to help the committee remember who they're talking about

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

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

Specific procedures for the identification and placement of exceptional pupils are set out in Regulation 181/98

If a particular placement is recommended, you may ask to visit it

**How will I know where and when the IPRC Meeting will be held?**

At least ten (10) days in advance of the meeting you will receive a letter from your child's school principal inviting you to the meeting to be held in your child's school on a specified date and time;

You will be requested to indicate by telephone or return mail whether or not you will be in attendance. Before the IPRC meeting occurs, you will receive a written copy of any information about your child that the chair of the IPRC has received. This may include the results of assessments or a summary of information.

If you are unable to attend the scheduled meeting you may:

Contact the Principal to arrange an alternative date or time; or

Let the school Principal know you will not be attending and as soon as possible after the meeting, the Principal will forward to you for your consideration and signature, the IPRC Statement of Decision noting identification and placement and any recommendations regarding special education programs and services.



**What happens after the IPRC has made its decision?**

If you agree with the IPRC decision you will be asked to indicate by signing your name that you agree with the identification and placement decisions made by the IPRC. You may take the document home and think it over before signing it.

**Develop Individual Education Plan (IEP)**

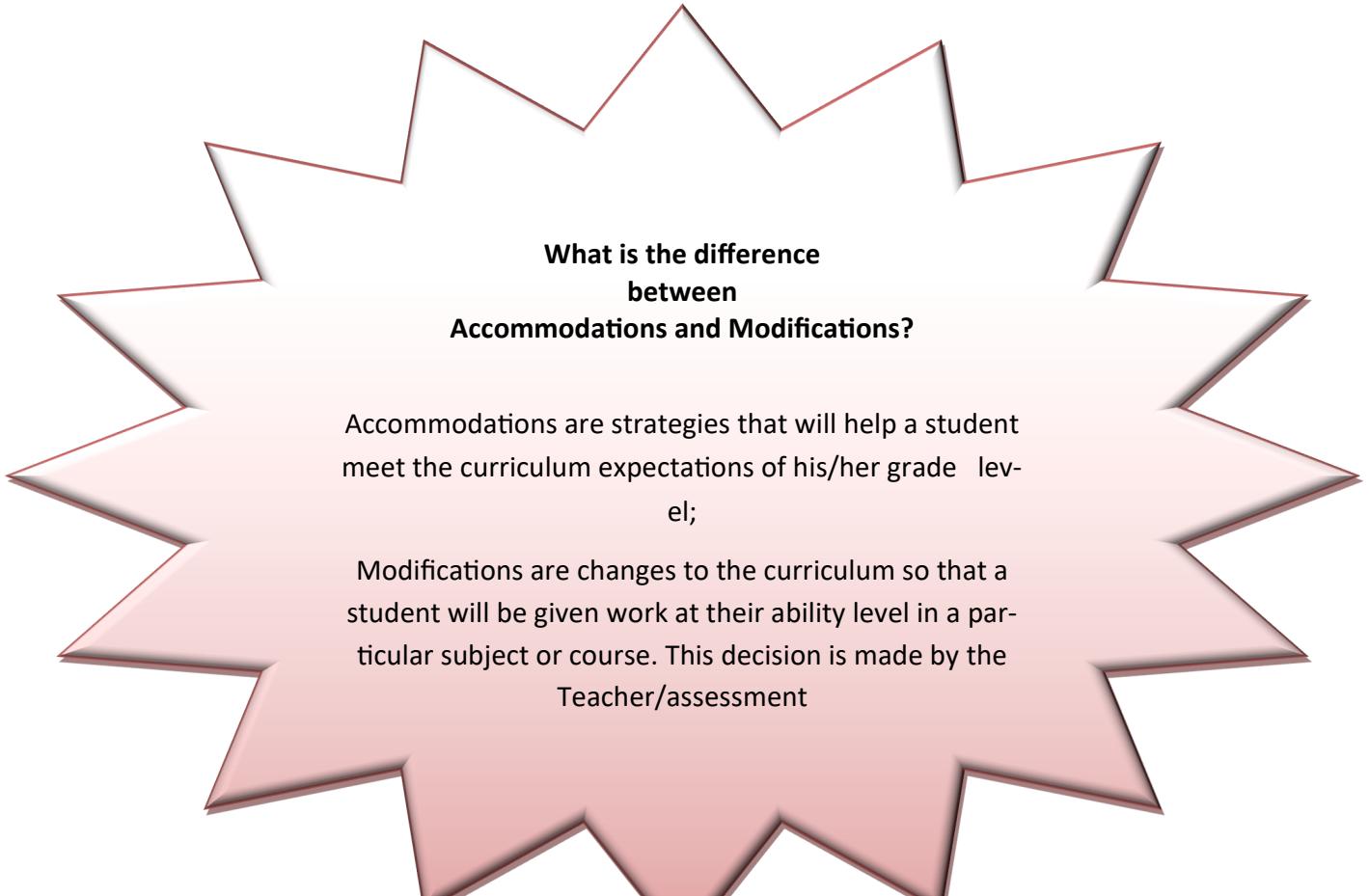
## INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN (IEP)

In consultation with the parents, the Individual Education Plan (IEP) is developed by the teacher when special supports are needed. It is a written plan that describes what the school will do to help your child be successful. It is based on assessments and evaluation that show the student's learning strengths and needs. Schools must develop an IEP for every identified student and a student does not have to be formally assessed to have an IEP.

The IEP should:

- ⇒ List the student's strengths and needs discovered through assessment;
- ⇒ Outline of the special education programs and services that will be provided, where and when the service will be provided, and who will provide it;
- ⇒ List general classroom Accommodations;
- ⇒ List program Modifications (changes required to grade-level expectations in the Ontario Curriculum);
- ⇒ List specific educational expectations, teaching strategies and assessment methods for modified and alternative curriculum;
- ⇒ Include a description of how the student's progress will be measured and reviewed;
- ⇒ List a set of goals and expectations for the student and teacher to work toward over the year;
- ⇒ List any special equipment to be provided;
- ⇒ List any medical/health Information;
- ⇒ List Assessment data;

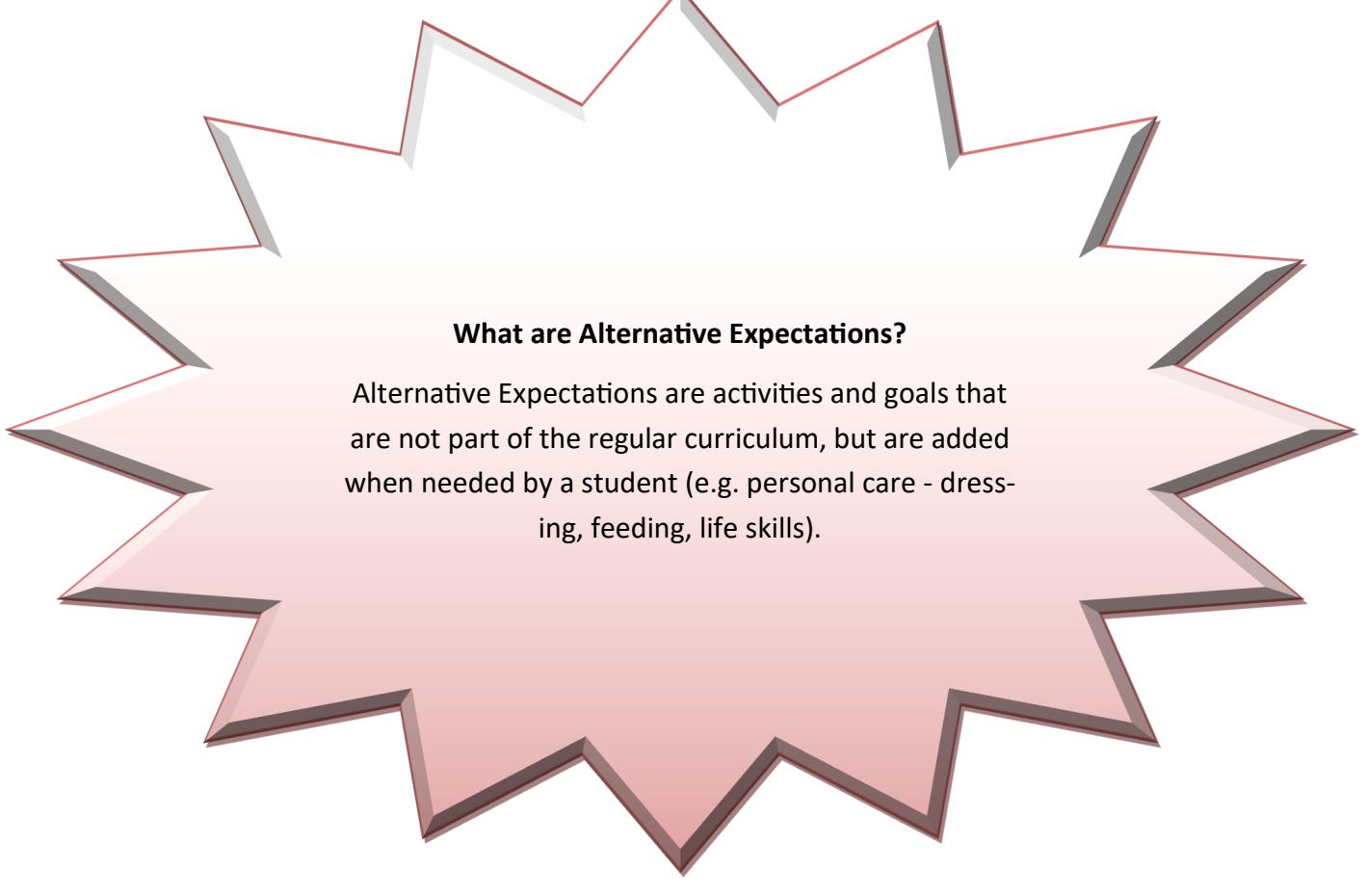
An IEP must be completed within 30 school days after your child has been placed in a special placement and the principal must ensure that you receive a copy of it. The IEP must be reviewed each reporting period



**What is the difference  
between  
Accommodations and Modifications?**

Accommodations are strategies that will help a student meet the curriculum expectations of his/her grade level;

Modifications are changes to the curriculum so that a student will be given work at their ability level in a particular subject or course. This decision is made by the Teacher/assessment

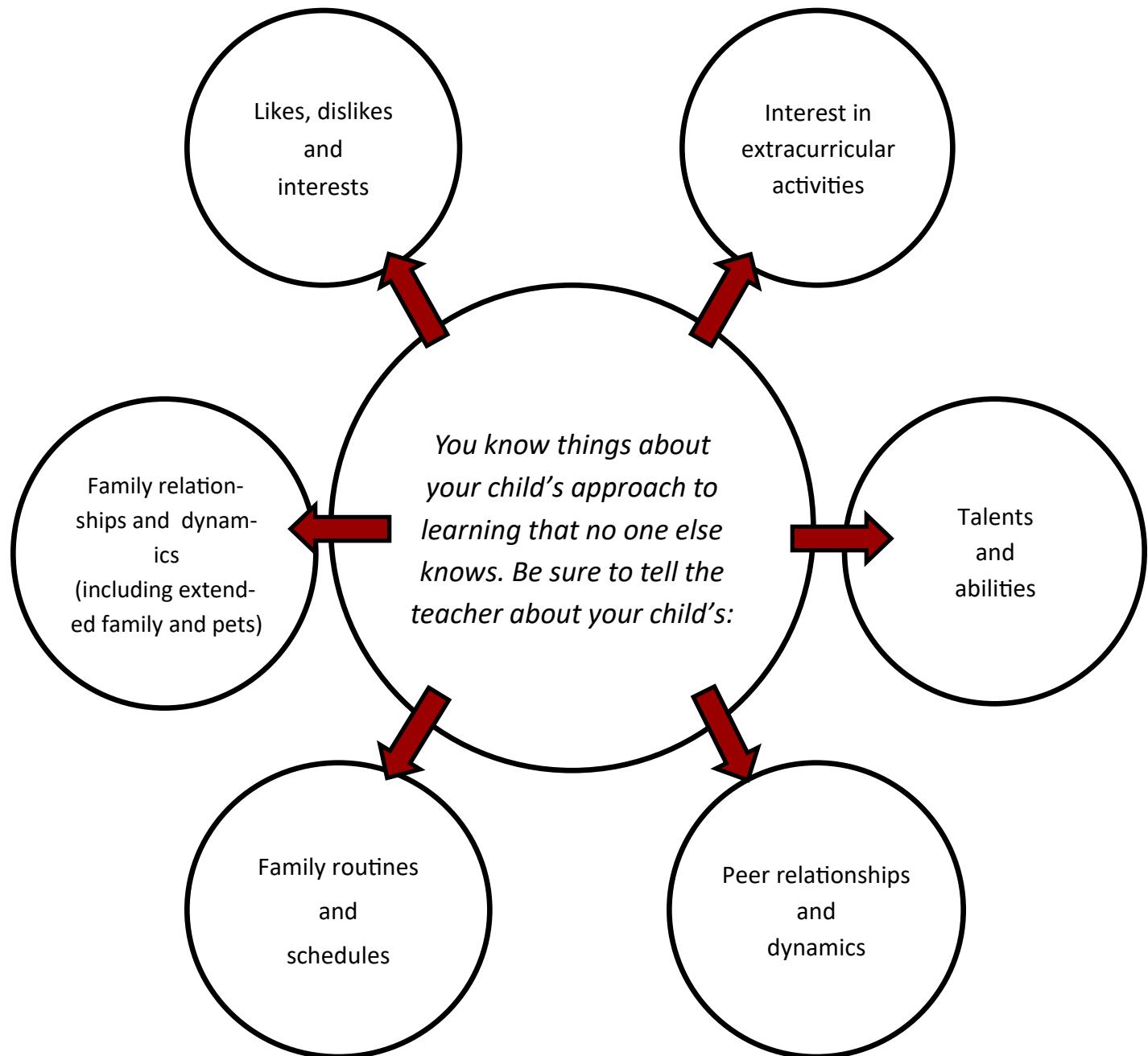


**What are Alternative Expectations?**

Alternative Expectations are activities and goals that are not part of the regular curriculum, but are added when needed by a student (e.g. personal care - dressing, feeding, life skills).

## As the parent, what role do I play?

Parents play a powerful supporting role in the IEP process. As well, be sure to ask for a copy of your child's IEP within thirty (30) days after the IPRC meeting so that you can support the planned activities at home.



## How can I contribute to the planning goals for my child?

Beginning with your child's strengths and needs is an important first step. You can help by:

- \* Including your child in the discussions.
- \* Telling the teacher what you hope your child will accomplish this year.

**Review and update the IEP:** Your child's progress towards his/her goals will be reviewed. Then the IEP will be updated to include different strategies, approaches, and/or resources considered necessary to help the learning process.

- \* Talk to your child's teacher about the goals that have been set;
- \* Communicate regularly with your child's teacher regarding progress;
- \* Look for evidence of growth towards goals on your child's report card;
- \* Recommend changes in goals, strategies and/or resources or support where you see a need;
- \* Be actively involved in discussions at school when your child is changing grades, schools or moving into the workplace.

Many organizations are available to support you in understanding the IEP, and/or to provide additional resources. Your school's principal can provide the names of the organizations that serve your area or review the list of community agencies and organizations within this Guide. Please note that every student in Ontario has an Ontario Student Record (OSR) that travels with the student from school to school, even if the family moves to a new school. The OSR contains all of the relevant information about the student, including report cards, and information about special education assessments, IPRC's and IEPs. Because there are no standard Special Education programs across the province, the "placement" part of the IPRC may differ widely from board to board.

### Categories of Exceptionalities

The following five categories of exceptionalities have been identified in the Ministry of Education definition of exceptional pupil:

1. Behaviour
2. Communication: Autism, Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing, Language Impairment, Speech Impairment, Learning Disability
3. Intellectual: Giftedness, Mild Intellectual Disability, Developmental Disability
4. Physical: Physical Disability, Blind and Low Vision
5. Multiple: Multiple Exceptionalities



As a parent, you continue to  
play an important role in  
ensuring your child gets the  
best education.

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