School Terms Glossary

How to Use this Glossary:

These definitions are written in plain language to help you understand the terms and acronyms being used by school boards in Ontario.

We recommend you access the 'source' if you're looking for the Ministry of Education definition. The Ministry definitions can be helpful when advocating within your school system.

A

Ableism is when people or systems see people with disabilities as less important, less able to contribute, or less worthy of respect and consideration. It can happen through unfair rules, beliefs, or actions that limit what people with disabilities can do or how they are treated.

Source: Development of proposed Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) education standards – 2022 final recommendations report

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Accommodations are changes to **how** the material is taught or assessed without changing what they are expected to learn (i.e., the curriculum). These can include different ways of teaching, environmental considerations, special tools, or extra support to help the student succeed.



Tip: It's important to identify whether the curriculum is being "accommodated" or "modified" as this can impact future opportunities.

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

Alternative expectations are learning goals created to help students gain skills or knowledge that are not part of the curriculum for their grade level. These goals can include social skills, life skills, etc. Like all Ontario curriculum, these alternative programming goals are assessed and reported on regularly.

Source: Effective Educational Practices for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Resource Guide.

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Annual program goals are clear statements of what a student is expected to learn by the end of the school year in a certain subject or skill. These goals are used when the student is working on different or personalized learning expectations.

Source: Ministry of Education. (2017) Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

Assessment is the way teachers collect information to understand how well a student is learning. This may be through observation, conversation, or formal tools. When assessments are completed prior to teaching, the teacher has a benchmark of where to start. It also helps teachers support the student's progress and show what the student knows and can do.

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

Assistive technology is any tool or device that helps a student with learning needs learn, communicate, or do tasks more easily and independently. Examples include laptops with programs for speech-to-text and/or text prediction.

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

Augmentative communication includes tools like pictures, symbols, or devices that help a student with speech or language challenges to communicate their thoughts, needs, wants, feelings, and ideas. These tools can support spoken words.

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

C

A **Certificate of Accomplishment** is given to a student who finishes school at age 18 but hasn't met the requirements for a high school diploma. It recognizes the student's efforts and can support their next steps, like job training.

Source: Diploma and certificate requirements and related procedures for secondary schools.

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Classroom placement options describe where and how a student receives support when their learning needs cannot be fully met in a regular classroom.

There are five options that may be available within a school board:

Regular class with indirect support: The student stays in the mainstream class all day while the teacher gets advice and strategies from a special education teacher.

Regular class with resource assistance: The student learns in the mainstream class but gets extra help from a special education teacher in the same room.

Regular class with withdrawal assistance: The student learns in the mainstream class but may leave for up to half the day to work with a special education teacher.

Special education class with partial integration: The student spends most of the day in a special education class but joins a mainstream class for at least one subject each day.

Full-time special education class: The student learns in a special education class for the whole school day.

Source: Identifying students with special education needs.

D

Diagnostic assessments help teachers understand a student's strengths, needs, and readiness to learn the school curriculum. These usually happen at the start of the year or at the beginning of a new term, however they can happen anytime. It helps plan the best ways to teach and set learning goals.

Source: Development of proposed Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) education standards – 2022 final recommendations report

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Differentiated instruction is a teaching method that adjusts lessons to match each student's strengths, needs, interests, and learning styles, helping them learn in the best way for them.

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

E

Equity means treating everyone fairly and with respect, while considering their individual needs and differences to ensure everyone has what they need to succeed.

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

Evidence-based means using programs or methods that are proven to work through scientific research. These practices are supported by evidence showing they help students succeed.

Source: Development of proposed Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) education standards – 2022 final recommendations report

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Evidence-informed means using the best available research and knowledge to guide how programs are designed and carried out. It combines what is already known with new ideas while considering families' cultures, values, and preferences.

Source: Development of proposed Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) education standards – 2022 final recommendations report

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An exceptional pupil is a student who meets the specific criteria for an exceptionality, as determined by the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC).

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

Exceptionalities refer to five categories of differences- behavioral, communicational, intellectual, physical, and multiple- that can affect a student's learning needs, as outlined by the Education Act.

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

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I

The Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) is a group that decides if a student meets the criteria for an exceptionality and recommends the best classroom placement for the student. This committee reviews their decisions every year.

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

Inclusive design involves creating systems, programs, services, or environments that consider the diverse needs of all individuals, ensuring that no one is excluded or faces barriers.

Source: Development of proposed Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) education standards – 2022 final recommendations report

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Inclusive education is an approach where all students are accepted and included. It ensures that students see themselves in the curriculum, the classroom, and the school environment, where diversity is valued and everyone is respected.

Source: Development of proposed Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) education standards – 2022 final recommendations report

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An **Individual Education Plan (IEP)** is a written plan that describes the special education supports and services the school board will provide for a student. It is a working plan that is regularly reviewed and updated.

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

L

Learning expectations are clear goals on the IEP that describe what a student is working on to help them reach their annual educational goals. These expectations may include academic achievement and/or social and relationship skills.

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

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M

Modifications are changes to what a student is taught. Modifications are based on the grade level topics with changes in the number or complexity of the information. This might mean making the work easier (i.e., lower grade level) or harder (i.e., higher grade level) to meet the needs of the student.



Tip: It's important to identify whether the curriculum is being "accommodated" or "modified" as this can impact future opportunities.

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

O

The **Ontario Secondary School Certificate (OSSC)** is given to students who leave high school at age 18 without earning a full diploma, if they or their family ask for it. The student must have completed at least 14 high school level credits, including credits in math and literacy.

Source: Diploma and certificate requirements and related procedures for secondary schools.

The **Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD)** is Ontario's official high school diploma. The student must have completed 30 credits, 40 hours of community service, and have completed the requirements for the Provincial Literacy Test.

Source: Diploma and certificate requirements and related procedures for secondary schools.

The **Ontario Student Record (OSR)** is a file that tracks a student's progress in school. It moves with the student if they change schools in Ontario and is managed by the school principal.

Source: Student records, attendance, and transfers.

P

A **person-centred** approach puts the student at the centre, focusing on their strengths, goals, and needs so support is built around what matters most to them.

Source: Development of proposed Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) education standards – 2022 final recommendations report

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Person-directed planning helps a person with a disability explore their interests, try new things, and make choices about their future. Supports are built around their personal goals for work, volunteering, and activities they enjoy.

Source: Development of proposed Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) education standards – 2022 final recommendations report

S

A **safety plan** is made with school staff, parents, and community supports to help everyone on the team know what to do if a student's behaviour risks their safety or the safety of others.

Source: Caring and Safe Schools in Ontario: Supporting Students with Special Education Needs Through Progressive Discipline, Kindergarten To Grade 12.

SEAC (Special Education Advisory Committee) is a group in every Ontario school board that gives advice to the board on special education. SEACs are made up of school board trustees, representatives from local organizations and First Nations communities, and other volunteers.

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

A **Special Education Appeal Board** is a group of people who review a parent's appeal if they disagree with an IPRC decision about their child's special education placement. The group includes three people: one person is chosen by the school board, one by the family, and together they choose the third person.

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

A **special education plan** is a document that explains the special education programs and services a school board provides. It is updated yearly to meet the needs of students with exceptionalities and is available to the public.

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

A **special education program** is a program designed for students with exceptionalities. It is based on ongoing assessments and includes an Individual Education Plan (IEP) with specific goals and services to meet the student's needs.

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

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Special education services include the resources, support staff, and equipment needed to create and deliver a special education program for students with exceptionalities.

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

T

Teaching strategies are methods designed to help students meet specific learning goals. They are tailored to a student's individual needs, in addition to the regular teaching methods used for all students.

Source: Glossary of Special Education Terms

A **tiered approach** is a step-by-step method to give students the right amount of support to meet their learning needs. Tier 1- Instruction that benefits all students. Tier 2- Supports for a student who is struggling in a particular area, or in general. Tier 3- Supports for a student who needs intensive support to meet their learning goals. Teachers use observations and assessments to understand what level of support is best for each student.

Source: Learning for All, A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students, Kindergarten to Grade 12.

A **transition plan** is a written plan in a student's IEP that helps them move between grades, between classroom placements, from secondary school to post-school activities, like work or further education and any other changes. It is required for students 14 or older with an IEP.

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

Transition planning is the process of preparing students for changes, helping them adjust to new settings. It begins with the student's goals and helps them develop and refine those goals for the future.

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.

U

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a teaching approach that makes learning accessible to all students, no matter their age, skills, or learning needs. It uses flexible methods to support different needs and helps every student engage with the curriculum.

Source: Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide.