

Introduction to the IEP:

A parent guide to help clarify and explain the IEP process

What is an IEP?

Once a student evaluation has been completed, parents will meet with a team of qualified professionals to interpret the evaluation data. Parents will be notified of the scheduled time, date, and purpose of the meeting at least 10 days in advance. At the meeting, it will be determined if the child has a disability, if the disability is having an adverse impact on the child's education, and whether special education services are needed. If the child is eligible for special education services, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) will be developed that will include specific goals and objectives that address the individual child's strengths and needs. At the IEP meeting, the team will determine the appropriate special education services and educational environment for the child. The special education team will meet annually to review the current IEP, discuss the child's progress, and develop new goals and objectives. Although the team will meet at least once per year for an annual review, parents may request a meeting at any time to discuss IEP goals, progress, and/or concerns.

What is included in an IEP?

A child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) will include:

- Present level of educational performance
- Annual goals
- Progress toward annual goals and how parent(s) will be informed
- Short-term instructional objectives/benchmarks
- Specific special education, related services, supplementary aids and services, and a statement of program modifications or supports for school personnel
- Beginning date, amount, frequency, location, and anticipated duration of services and modifications
- Extent of participation in regular education programs
- Language(s) or mode(s) of communication
- Participation in assessments
- Placement
- Extended school year services
- Additional information may also be provided in the IEP if needed based upon the evaluation results and input from school personnel.

Before an IEP Meeting:

What will the school do?

- **Complete the evaluation.** Once parents have given consent for an evaluation, the school has 60 school days to complete your child's evaluation.
- **Notify parents.** The school will notify parents of the scheduled time, date, and purpose of the meeting at least 10 days in advance.
- **Provide parents/guardians with a copy of procedural safeguards.** All parents/guardians who have a child with a disability who is receiving or may be eligible to receive special education and related services have rights that are safeguarded by state and federal law.
- **Arrange for appropriate school personnel to be present.** All individuals who have been a part of your child's evaluation are invited to be present at the meeting. This may include, but is not limited to, the general education teacher, resource teacher, occupational therapist, physical therapist, school psychologist, social worker, speech/language pathologist, nurse, principal, and special education administrator.
- **Assign a case manager.** One IEP team member will serve as your child's case manager. All communication regarding your child should be directed to the case manager who oversees the implementation of the IEP and monitors your child's progress toward IEP goals.

What can parents do?

- **Review procedural safeguards information.** This will help parents/guardians understand their rights that are safeguarded by state and federal law.
- **Bring questions, concerns, and suggestions.** Being prepared with any questions, comments, concerns, or suggestions will help to ensure the most productive IEP meeting. Be sure to bring extra blank paper for taking notes.
- **Review your child's records.** It may be helpful to re-familiarize yourself with any previous assessments, evaluations, or reports of your child.
- **Request evaluation report in advance.** Parents can request and read the evaluation report before the conference. This may be helpful in understanding the tests that were performed, why they were performed, and what the results indicate.
- **Visit the classroom.** Parents may find it helpful to visit their child's classroom to observe him/her in class and have an opportunity to observe his/her strengths and needs in an educational environment prior to the IEP meeting. Please set up an appointment with the teacher in advance if you would like to do this.
- **Set your priorities.** The IEP meeting can be most productive if you prioritize the issues that you feel are most important for your child.
- **Bring support, if needed.** Parents often find it most helpful to have both parents attend the IEP meeting. However, if that is not possible, you may choose to bring another relative, friend, or advocate with them. This may help in providing moral support and/or additional valuable insight.
- **Create your own draft goals for your child.** It may be helpful to think about your own personalized goals for your child before the IEP meeting. Being prepared with ideas of goals for your child can help create a sense of shared responsibility between parents and special education team members as they collaborate to create IEP goals at the meeting.
- **Meet team members ahead of time.** The notification that is sent home to parents lists all the individuals that are invited to attend the meeting. Parents may find it helpful to call, email, or meet with team members prior to the meeting to better understand the role that they play in their child's education.

During an IEP Meeting:

What will the school do?

- **Summarize, interpret, and document evaluation results.** Each member of the special education team will have an opportunity to summarize, interpret, and provide parents with documentation of the child's evaluation results.
- **Determine eligibility for special education services.** If the report indicates that the child has a disability, the disability must adversely impact the child's school performance in order for the child to qualify for special education. Not every disability qualifies a child for special education.
- **Notify parent(s) of their right to an independent evaluation.** If there is a disagreement about the evaluation results, parents have the right to request an independent evaluation. In addition, if the evaluation reports do not accurately cover the area(s) of the child's needs, you may request additional assessments.
- **Develop an IEP.** If the child is eligible for special education services, all team members will work collaboratively to develop an IEP that will enable the child to be involved in the general curriculum, through the creation of individualized annual goals and short-term objectives. The IEP will also include the appropriate special education and related services as well as the educational placement.
- **Provide a copy of eligibility determination to parents.** If it is determined that the child is eligible for special education services, a copy of this eligibility determination will be provided to parents at the end of the meeting.
- **Stay on task.** The school will ensure that the meeting follows its intended purpose, as indicated on the notification form, and stays within the scheduled time period.

What can parents do?

- **Greet everyone at the meeting.** Introducing yourself to team members that you have not yet met is helpful for everyone. If there is someone at the meeting that was not identified as an attendee on the notification letter, parents have the right to postpone the meeting. In addition, if there is someone absent that was scheduled to attend, parents may request to have the meeting rescheduled.
- **Ask questions.** If something comes up at anytime during the meeting that you do not understand, do not hesitate to ask for an explanation. It is important that you fully understand the evaluation results, the eligibility determination, as well as the IEP goals. Your questions are a very important part of the process.
- **Share information about the child's strengths and needs.** It is helpful for parents to share information about their child's particular strengths and needs to help in determining the learning goals and the learning environment where the child will be most successful.
- **Collaborate in all decisions.** As the IEP team works together with you to determine eligibility, the special education and related services to provide, the educational environment, and the IEP goals, parents should help contribute to all discussions to ensure that the decisions made are most appropriate for their child's individual needs.
- **Take notes.** Parents may find it helpful to take notes on discussion items, recommendations, items to follow through on, and any scheduled dates/appointments.
- **Maintain a positive attitude.** Keeping positive helps to ensure the most productive meeting possible. If you have disagreements or concerns, be clear and constructive with your comments, and avoid making accusations by using child-focused language.

After an IEP Meeting:

What will the school do?

- **Provide parents with a copy of the completed IEP.** After the IEP has been completed, the school will provide parents with the IEP document that was discussed and agreed upon at the IEP meeting.
- **Provide progress reports each trimester.** The school will provide progress reports on IEP goals at the end of each trimester
- **Establish open lines of communication.** Members of the special education team will establish open lines of communication and contact parents when there are questions, comments, or concerns.

What can parents do?

- **Review the completed IEP.** Take time to review the IEP to ensure that it reflects all decisions that were agreed upon at the meeting. Ensure that you understand the role of all team members in your child's education program.
- **Put information in writing.** Sometimes agreements may be made at a meeting that are not written into the IEP. When this happens, you may request that a written agreement be formally added to the IEP by IEP Amendment.
- **Utilize available resources.** There are a variety of resources available to help parents learn more about special education and related services. Utilize resources on the internet, such as The Illinois State Board of Education (<http://www.isbe.state.il.us/spec-ed/>), The Council for Exceptional Children (www.cec.sped.org), The Learning Disabilities Association of America (www.Ldanatl.org), The National Autism Association (www.nationalautismassociation.org), and Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (www.chadd.org). Other helpful resources include parent support groups and programs offered by District 96 or LADSE.
- **Keep all important documents and correspondence from the school.** It is important to save documents such as IEP's, samples of your child's work, evaluation results, notifications of meetings, etc. It may also be helpful to keep a log in which you record important dates and milestones of your child's educational program.
- **Develop a positive relationship with all team members.** When parents and special education team members work together, this leads to greater benefits for the child. Getting to know the special education team members who provide services to your child is helpful in establishing positive, working relationships. It is helpful to periodically check in with the teacher and case manager to discuss how the program is going. Maintain open communication by reading the progress reports, attending parent-teacher conferences, sharing important information, and e-mailing or calling team members whenever you have questions or comments.
- **Review IEP each trimester.** Parents will receive progress reports on IEP goals at the end of each trimester. It is important to review these progress reports to ensure that the plan is working as intended. If you feel as though changes to the IEP would be beneficial, you may request a meeting at any time.

