

Just for Parents: Your Child's Individualized Education Program (IEP)

If Your Child Qualifies for Special Education

If an evaluation shows that your child needs special education, the next step is to plan an Individualized Education Program (IEP). To do this, the school district will set up a meeting with you.

The meeting is usually called an IEP team meeting. Some states may use a different name. The purpose of the meeting is to review the evaluation results and develop a special education program to help your child learn. School staff will schedule the meeting, and they will let you know when and where it will be held. The meeting time may be changed if you cannot attend at the time it is scheduled. This is an important meeting for you and for your child. It is a time to share what you know about your child's strengths and needs. You know your child in different ways than anyone else.

Getting Ready for the Meeting

The IEP meeting is where your child's special education program will be created. There are several things you can do to get ready for the meeting:

- write down what you think your child is good at
- write down what you think he or she needs
- talk to your child about what is happening at school
- ask for a copy of the evaluation so that you can read it before the meeting
- make notes on what you would like to say at the meeting

The IEP Team

A number of people will be invited to the IEP meeting. This group is called the IEP team. The school district will let you know who they expect to attend. The following people are members of the IEP team:

- you, the parent(s)
- your child's regular education teacher(s) if your child is, or may be, in regular education
- your child's special education teacher(s) or special education provider(s)
- a person from the school district who is qualified to provide or supervise special education
- someone who understands what the evaluation means and can talk about the instruction your child may need
- others that you or the school invite because they know your child or have expertise. You may bring anyone of your choice, such as a friend, advocate, or service provider.



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The IEP Meeting

You are a very important member of the IEP team. The team will meet to talk about your child's strengths and needs. You may talk about the evaluation results, too. This discussion will help everyone to understand your child better. The evaluation will help team members decide what services are needed.

Your team will develop goals for your child. The goals are based on what the evaluation says is needed. These goals are written into the IEP. They describe what your child should learn in one year. The team will also write down the kinds of special education services your child needs.

The IEP team will also consider whether your child needs related services. These are the kinds of services that support special education instruction. They include such things as transportation, physical therapy, and school social work services. One person will take charge of writing the IEP program, based on the team discussion.

Deciding Where Services will be Provided

A very important decision that is usually made by the IEP team is where services will be provided. The IEP may be carried out in different settings, depending on what your child needs. The law says that services should be provided in the regular classroom and school whenever possible. Sometimes a child's needs cannot be met in the regular classroom or school. If this happens, then services must be provided as close to home as possible. In some cases the placement decision is made by a small group of people that is not the entire IEP team. If so, you will be part of the group that decides where services will be provided.

When the IEP is completed, you will be given a copy. You should read it carefully. You will want to be sure it is what you have agreed to. If you do not understand part of the IEP, ask to have it explained.

You have a right to agree or disagree with the IEP. If it is your child's first IEP, the school district cannot provide services without your written permission. If you do not agree and it is not your child's first IEP, you must disagree in writing. Ask for a meeting to talk about your concerns. Ask your team members for a written copy of your rights.

Once you agree in writing to the IEP, special education will begin as soon as possible. You will receive regular progress reports from the school. These reports will explain the progress your child is making in meeting the IEP goals.

If you have questions at any time, you may call the IEP manager. This person's name and telephone number are on the IEP. The IEP manager can set up meetings when they are needed. He or she may be able to answer special education questions. Or, the IEP manager can direct you to the right person to answer questions or explain parts of the IEP that you do not understand.

As a parent, you are an expert on your child. It is good to know what your child's day is like in school. It is important to know what your child is learning. When you know these things, you can focus on your child's progress.

Contact Your Local Parent Center
