

What Makes a Good Individual Education Plan for Your Child?

1. The IEP must be in writing. Parents should be given a copy.
2. It must contain annual goals and short-term objectives for your child's progress in school with a timetable for reaching each objective.
3. It must be based on the needs of your child, as determined by a formal assessment conducted at least every three years.
4. The IEP should be developed by a team representing various viewpoints and areas of expertise. The team should involve school personnel who work with your child directly (classroom teachers, tutors, other support personnel). Parents can request additional persons to serve on the team. These persons should be knowledgeable about the disability of your child or the child's racial or cultural background. The additional team members can be professionals, a friend or an advisor, etc. When appropriate, the student should be included. If the IEP meeting involves a small group, the FOUR people who must be present are:
 1. a regular classroom teacher,
 2. the special education teacher,
 3. the parent(s), and
 4. a representative of the school district. If transition needs are being considered, (age 14 through 21), the student must be invited.
5. Parents must be invited to attend the staffing conferences, which are held at a time and place agreeable to both school and parents.
6. The IEP should define:
 - a. What should be taught, and how (for example, a plan of your child's program, showing how each goal or objective will be worked on). The amount of time in special education services must be noted.
 - b. Who will teach it (names and school telephone numbers).
 - c. Where it will be taught. If changes in school buildings are needed, the plan should note the location of services.
 - d. When the program will begin, how long it will be provided, and when it will be reviewed. A schedule for review of the IEP (at least once a year) must be included in the plan.
 - e. How much time your child will spend with children who do not have disabilities.
 - f. Why the plan is needed, based on the assessment of the student's needs

7. The service plan should include: A justification of the proposed plan in accordance with the "least restrictive environment" principle.
 - . A plan and date for periodic review of the student's program.
 - a. A plan for meeting the physical education needs of the student.
 - b. A plan for meeting the transitional needs of the student, if age 14 or in 9th grade.
 - c. Special education and related services to be provided for your child.
 - d. Modifications and accommodations needed in regular education settings.
 - e. Behavior plan, with goals and objectives, should be part of the IEP if the child's behavior is identified as a concern by the team.
8. The school is required to seek parent consent for the IEP and give parents the opportunity to disapprove the plan.
 - . If the parent approves, the plan goes into effect.
 - a. If the parent does not respond, the plan goes into effect if it is not the initial IEP. (If this is your child's first IEP, the school must wait for your written consent before starting the program.)
 - b. If the parent disapproves, he/she is entitled to a conciliation conference with school personnel.

Tips on Attending a Staffing Conference to Discuss Your Child's Individual Education Plan (IEP)

- I. BEFORE THE CONFERENCE** Either you or the school may initiate a conference. It should be held at a time mutually agreeable to both.
- A. Check information you already have about your child. Is there something you don't understand in it? Jot down questions to ask for clarification. List your child's strengths and your main concerns and the schooling she/he is receiving.
 - B. You have the right to see all school records, files, and other materials that pertain to your child. Copies must be provided at a reasonable cost, if you request them.
 - C. You may want to get a written copy of the assessment results or set up an information meeting with the school to discuss the assessment before the staffing.
 - D. If you disagree with the school's assessment, you may request (in writing) an independent (outside) evaluation at the school's expense. The school must pay for the evaluation or prove, through a due process hearing, that their evaluation was appropriate. If you obtain an independent evaluation at your own expense, and you choose to place it in your child's record, the results must be considered by the team.
 - E. Two heads are always better than one. Bring your spouse, an advisor from a local disability organization, or a friend who knows your child or is simply there to give you moral support.

II. THE CONFERENCE ITSELF This conference is very important. Many problems can be solved at this meeting. It is an excellent opportunity to ask questions and expect answers from the school staff. It is also an opportunity to give school people your insights about your child, whom you know better than anyone else. The school needs to learn what your child is like at home, after school, on weekends, vacations, etc.

- A. Remember, diagnostic tests do not present the total picture. Your most important job is to make sure that the others at the staffing never forget that you are talking about a real child. Make sure the focus of the discussion is on your child's strengths as well as weaknesses.
- B. If you don't understand something that is said, ask to have it explained.
- C. The program for your child should be built on services that relate to strengths and abilities, special problems and learning needs...not to his/her category of disability. If you don't agree that this is what the program does, speak up! Changes can be made if you state your views and ideas.
- D. When you feel teachers and school personnel are doing a good job, compliment them. Praise, when deserved, is a great thing!
- E. You can expect the teachers to carry out informal assessment on a continuing basis. They should be willing to keep trying new methods if your child is not making progress.
- F. You probably should not sign a proposed IEP immediately. You can take it home to think about it before signing it. You have 10 school days in which to make a decision.
- G. Your child's progress must be reviewed at least once a year. Parents are not always included in these review meetings. If you want to attend, ask to be invited. You can also request a review at any time.

Remember - you have the right to ask questions and request changes either during the conference or later.