

Preparing For a Successful IEP Meeting

This fact sheet is intended to be a general guide to parents in how to prepare for meetings regarding a child's individualized education program. It is not intended to be a comprehensive publication about all issues that might be discussed in an IEP meeting.

It is highly recommended that parents read the LDA publication "The Advocacy Handbook: A Parents Guide to Special Education" (see www.LDAAmerica.org) or "A Guide to the Individualized Education Program" available from the U. S. Department of Education (see www.ED.gov).

Once it has been determined that a student has a disability and needs individually designed instruction, a meeting will be held to put into writing a description of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) the student will receive. This meeting is an opportunity for parents and school staff to share information and to collaborate in planning how the student's needs will be met.

IEP meetings must be held at least once per year but can be held more often if either the parent or the school requests it.

1. GENERAL PREPARATION:

Visit your child's classroom

Make an appointment to observe your child in class, preferably in more than one subject area.

Review Your Child's Records

Schools keep a cumulative (general information) file on all students and a confidential (special education) file on students with disabilities. You may periodically wish to review information contained in these files. It is very important that you review this and other information prior to an IEP meeting. If your child has recently received an individual evaluation by a school psychologist or diagnostician, request that a copy of the report be sent you at least one week prior to the IEP meeting. It is also important to review information contained in report cards, assessment scores, and other communications the school provides regarding your child's performance.

Ask who will be attending your child's IEP Meeting

You should get a written list of the people the school plans to have at the meeting and you should tell your school contact person if you plan to bring others to the meeting as well. Also you should ask or be informed about the expected purpose of the meeting. If your child is 14 years of age or older and one of the purposes of the meeting is transition planning, he or she must be invited to the meeting

Negotiate the time of the meeting

Both you and the school should cooperate to set the meeting at a time that is convenient for as many people as possible. It is common for schools to give

you at least 10 days notice before scheduling the meeting. Also discuss how long the meeting is scheduled to last. You need to feel comfortable that enough time is allotted for the meeting so that you do not feel rushed.

Talk to other parents and parent organizations

Check with your state or local Learning Disabilities Association as well as the State Parent Training and Information Center(s).

Review your copy of the parent rights booklet

The School should have provided you with a booklet describing your rights as a parent. If you cannot find it, be sure that you request another copy and review it before the meeting.

2. DEVELOP A PLAN OF WHAT YOU WISH TO SAY AND QUESTIONS YOU WISH TO ASK AT THE IEP MEETING

Ask your child

Ask your child what is going well in school and what s/he would like to do better. Ask if your child would like to attend the IEP meeting. As your child approaches adolescence, discuss academic or vocational interests, possible career choices, education or training beyond high school and where s/he might like to live as an adult.

Prepare a list of your child's strengths and weaknesses

Include such items as: hobbies, behavior at home, relationship with family and friends, and difficulties or strengths you may have noticed. A focus on your child's strengths, interests, and preferences and being future-oriented will significantly influence the atmosphere, the results, and the content of the IEP meeting. Write down questions or concerns you may have about current evaluations or other school reports. Be sure to ask how your child is performing in comparison with other students at his or her grade level.

Review the goals from the current IEP

Which goals are the most important to you as a parent? Which goals are most important to help your child prepare and achieve what s/he would like to do when s/he graduates from school? Make a list of questions you might wish to ask about the progress your child has made in mastering these goals. Were the goals met last year? Should they be continued or deleted for the coming year? Be prepared to ask what strategies teachers find successful with your child and which ones are not working.

Write down some goals you would like to see your child achieve in the coming year

What skills would you like your child to learn? Be specific. What behaviors would you like to see improved? Has your child had a behavioral assessment and does he/she need a behavioral plan? What are your main concerns for your child right now? If your child is in middle school or entering high school, what are his/her career/transition interests and goals? (Review the LDA fact sheet on Transition.) Be prepared to ask questions about the amount of time your child will need to spend in special education in order to meet these goals. Where will the special education services be delivered to your child—regular classroom, separate special education small group, etc.? Are the goals appropriate for your child's age and grade placement? Ask if your child has had an evaluation for assistive technology and if assistive technology would

benefit your child. (Review the LDA fact sheet on Assistive Technology) Be prepared to discuss whether your child needs after school or summer tutoring (extended school year services).

Decide how often you need progress reports

The school must give you a progress report each time a report card is issued, usually 4 to 6 times per year. Teachers often send notes home more frequently. Do you feel that you have been adequately informed of your child's progress throughout the year? What is necessary in order for you to feel that you are adequately informed to support the school and your child?

Be prepared to support your ideas and requests

Bring copies of any recent evaluations or medical information with you. Also bring samples of your child's work that you believe indicate strengths or needs for improvement. If your child is involved in any community activities or work, bring copies of evaluations or letters from supervisors.

Be organized

Organize your materials prior to the meeting so that you can find information easily.

Write down your questions and suggestions and practice your comments prior to the meeting.

AT THE IEP MEETING:

Introductions

Request that everyone at the meeting introduce themselves and their role in the meeting (including anyone you have brought with you). Write this information down for your records and date it. You may tape the meeting if you wish, but be sure to let the other team members know you intend to do this.

Follow the plan you developed

Systematically go through every question, concern or comment you included in the plan you developed.

Positive attitude

Be positive and assertive but not antagonistic. Thank the participants. Be sure to get a copy of the IEP to take home with you. It is okay to say you need to take some time to review the IEP at home before you decide whether you agree.

Reschedule if necessary

If it appears that the members of the team cannot reach agreement, or if you need time to consider recommendations, ask for the meeting to be continued at a later date.

Taken from

<http://www.lidaamerica.org/index.cfm>