

Before the IEP meeting:

- **Attend a special education rights training session in your area.**
- **Obtain a copy of the Federal Rules and Regulations on IDEA**, and your state Rules and Regulations on Special Education. Read pertinent portions, underline the most significant sections and make your own index of important sections for easy reference.
- **Review your child's school records**, IDEA Regulations, the Family Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and the Illinois Student School Records Act ensure your right to examine school records, receive an explanation of the contents, challenge the contents, and obtain copies of the records.
- **Prepare a written statement of your input for the IEP meeting.** Use the language of the Rules and Regulations. Avoid using phrases like "most appropriate" or best educational program. "Appropriate" is the key word, and will enable you to present your position adequately. Adding other words may deflect from the focus of the meeting- which is an appropriate educational program for your child.

Sample parent IEP statement:

"Parent input on the Individualized Education Program for Johnny Doe:

- *My recommendation is for placement in a class of 4 to 5 students, with a teacher skilled in play therapy and behavior management skills.*
- *The teacher and the teacher's aide need to be familiar with visual teaching techniques since my child learns best through visual rather than auditory teaching methods.*
- *Extended school year needs to be provided due to the nature and severity of my child's disabilities.*
- *Long term goals should focus on developing my child's social skills, basic math and reading skills, and self help and survival skills.*
- *Short term objectives need to focus on learning how to tell time, how to read street signs, how to do the dishes, how to play a game with others.*
- *I am requesting an evaluation for vocational services, and for occupational therapy services."*

At the IEP meeting:

- **Invite others to attend the IEP meeting with you.** It is common for parents to feel overwhelmed and alone when confronted with a roomful of professionals discussing their child in a clinical manner. Invite other parents, friends, relatives for moral support. You can provide the same support for other parents at their IEP meeting.
- **The image you portray may affect how school personnel react toward you.** You should dress in a professional manner-simple but dignified. Walk confidently into the room and introduce yourself. Bring your copies of the Rules and Regulations and other materials for reference. Remember, the school personnel are paid to work for you and your child.
- **The IEP meeting should begin with a report of your child's present level of functioning.** His/her strengths and weaknesses should be discussed. From this, the professionals and the parent(s) together should formulate the annual goals for the coming year, and the short term instructional objectives for the immediate futures (the next two to three months). Do ask questions, you have the right to clear explanations in lay person's language.
- **Listen with an open mind,** taking special note of important points raised at the meeting. Use a tape recorder. If someone protests, explain that is a good business procedure to tape important meetings, such as IEP meeting.
- **Pass around a sign in sheet at the beginning of the meeting.** You will then have the names of all those present, and will be able to address them by name (from their position on the sign- in sheet)
- **When speaking during the meeting,** take a deep breath to help project your voice clearly and confidently, and maintain eye contact with all in attendance at all times.
- **Repeat what you are asking for as often as necessary.** Remember that you are not at the IEP meeting to discuss the limitations of the school budget. You are there to determine what your child needs to have an appropriate education.

If you disagree:

- **If you cannot come to an agreement,** are running out of time, or need time to consider the situation, you have the right to request another meeting. Do not feel pressured to make a decision on the spot.
- **You may obtain an independent evaluation** and request another meeting based on the new evaluation.
- **Remember that federal and state law does not require that you sign the IEP.** If you do not agree, simply sign your name and write after it "attended meeting, but not in approval of the IEP" For more information on what to do when you do not agree, call FRCD at 312-939-3513
- **If school personnel refuse to include needed services in the IEP,** or follow recommendations from an independent evaluation, you may file for a due process hearing and /or mediation, file a written complaint with the Office for Civil Rights, and /or contact the Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

Be sure to ask for a copy of the IEP. The IEP may be revised at any time if you so request. It must be reviewed at least annually.

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How to Participate Effectively in Your Child's IEP Meeting

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How to participate effectively in your child's IEP meeting:

As the parent of a child with special education needs, you should learn how to use the IEP (Individualized Education Program) process as an effective tool to obtain appropriate special education and related services for your child.

You should know:

- what an IEP should consist of
- how to prepare for an IEP meeting
- how to write your own IEP input statement
- how to effectively participate in an IEP meeting
- how to use communication skills to build a cooperative home/school relationship
- how to obtain appropriate special education and related services through the IEP

What is an IEP?

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), every child who receives special education services must have an Individualized Education Program, or IEP. An IEP is a written education plan developed by a team of professionals and the child's parents, after the child has been evaluated and found to be eligible for special education supports and services. The plan outlines the types of supports that will enable the child to participate in and benefit from the general education curriculum. Once an IEP is developed, schools are required to follow it as outlined. If the child changes schools, the receiving school must continue to follow the current IEP until a new IEP is written, again with parent participation. State and federal law require that a written IEP be developed and reviewed annually, to meet your child's unique education needs.

The IEP is developed at a special meeting which includes: your participation and the participation of the student, general education teacher, special education teacher, school administrator, evaluation personnel, and others with knowledge or special expertise about the student.

Your child's IEP should include:

- a statement of your child's present educational performance level
- annual goals for your child and short term instructional objectives
- specific educational services to be provided
- specific related/support services to be provided based on determined needs
- the extent, if any, of your child's participation in the general education program and accommodations needed.
- the extent, if any, of your child's participation in an extended school year (ESY)
- transition goals (for age 14 ½ and older)
- appropriate criteria and the schedules for determining annually (at least) whether instructional objectives have been achieved.

An annual goal is a general statement of desired change and progress to be worked towards throughout the year. Example: *"To improve self help skills, to eliminate self-destructive behaviors, to improve understanding of basic math concepts."* The number of annual goals is determined by the nature and severity of the disability. Generally, there are 5 to 10 annual goals.

A short term instructional objective is a specific statement on progress to be achieved during the next few months. This is to include the materials and methods used; how often, and the number of minutes the objectives will be worked on; who will work with the child; and what criteria will determine to what extent each goal has been achieved. Example: *"To teach the child how to button his/her coat daily before leaving the school. The teacher will assist the child only after the child attempts to do it himself/herself, and will reward the child with praise for trying. The child will also work with a big button doll for 3 minutes, 3 times a week with assistance and verbal reinforcements from the teacher. Criteria for completion of the goal will be the ability to button the coat independently 90% of the time."* Include necessary **transportation services** and vehicle adaptation in the IEP. Example: *"Transportation to be provided by a bus equipped with a two-way radio, and with a bus attendant."*

Your child's IEP can be implemented through:

- a general education class in a public school, with appropriate support/related services and accommodations
- a special education class in a public school, with the appropriate support/related services, as necessary
- a special education public school
- a special education program in private day or residential school that meets state standards (if this is needed to meet your child's educational needs)
- a special home or hospital program if your child is absent from school more than two consecutive weeks.
- a special education program in a state residential facility.

Your child should receive non-academic and extra-curricular services, including:

- adaptive physical education (if unable to participate in regular physical education)
- music, art, and vocational education
- other non-academic subjects that other children in the school are receiving
- recreational opportunities that other children in the school are receiving.

Extended school year (ESY)

If your child needs an extended school year (ESY), a recommendation for the program must be written into the IEP before your child can participate. Your child's need for ESY services can be documented through evidence of regression and lack of recoupment.

Related/support services must be provided to meet your child's needs as indicated in the IEP.

Related/support services can be:

- speech and language services
- psychological services, social work services, counseling services
- special readers, braillists and interpreters
- physical and occupational therapy, and other therapeutic services
- supportive school health services
- parent counseling and training
- transportation services
- transition services
- consultative services.

The need for related services is determined by an appropriate evaluation of the child's needs. If you feel your child is in need of a specific related service, you should request an evaluation in that specific area.

The IEP should state: each needed related service; the date of initiation and anticipated duration of the service; how many times per week; and for how many minutes the service will be rendered, and by whom. The IEP should also state whether the service will be provided on a one to one basis, in a group, by consultation with the classroom teacher, or integrated into the classroom setting. Example: *"Physical therapy for 20 minutes daily on a one to one basis with physical therapist; speech therapy for 30 minutes daily in a group of 3 children with speech therapist; occupational therapy on a consultative basis with the teacher 10 minutes per week"*

When requesting related services, you should have evidence that your child needs a given service in order to benefit from his/her education program.