

PARENTS' GUIDE TO AN IEP



Dear Parent or Guardian of _____,

This is an invitation to attend a meeting about your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Like your child, each IEP is unique. Your participation is very valuable in planning and implementing a program that addresses your child's specific needs. To help you understand the process and be more comfortable as a member of your child's IEP team, we have answered below some questions you might have.

“WHAT IS AN IEP?”

Federal Regulations and State Rules, mandate that any child who meets the criteria for exceptionality and demonstrates need for special education or related services must have an “Individualized Education Program” (IEP) to meet his or her unique educational needs. The IEP must be developed, and reviewed at least annually by a team that includes school professionals, parents, and others as appropriate.

“WHO WILL BE INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING THE IEP?”

The specific participants in developing an IEP are determined on an individual basis, but in general, the team is composed of parents, the child (if appropriate), a regular education teacher (if the child is, or will be, participating in the general education program), a special education service provider and/or qualified district specialist and a school or district supervisor. In addition, the school or you may invite other people who have special knowledge or information about your child that could be important in planning an appropriate program.

“WHAT IF I CAN'T ATTEND THE MEETING?”

Your input at an IEP meeting is very important. The school will make every reasonable effort to ensure that you are included. If, upon receiving an invitation and notice of an IEP meeting for your child, and you cannot attend, you can reschedule the meeting by contacting your child's school. If for some reason you still cannot be present, you can participate through written input or by phone. You may request an interpreter, if necessary, to ensure your full participation in the meeting.

If you do not respond to the invitation and do not choose to participate, the school can hold the IEP meeting without you. They will then mail or give you a copy of the IEP for your review before the program starts to give you an opportunity to review the school's findings or plans.

“WHAT WILL BE DISCUSSED AT THE IEP MEETING?”

The IEP will include the following information:

- (1) your child's skills, abilities and strengths.
- (2) your child's academic and/or social needs.
- (3) reasonable objectives (goals) and expectations that your child can achieve within one year, and the activities that will help him or her do so.
- (4) the special education and related services your child may need in order to benefit from his or her education
- (5) the accommodations and/or modifications (changes) your child may need to participate in the general education program or curriculum;

- (6) the supports your child may need to participate in standardized testing or other ways to measure progress and mastery of skills;
- (7) a determination if there is a need for extended school year (ESY) services or assistive technology; and
- (8) supports, as needed, for school personnel and parents.

“WHAT CAN I DO TO PREPARE FOR THE MEETING?”

Since the focus of the meeting is on your child and you know him or her best, take some time to think about what strengths your child has that can be reinforced, what interests and goals he or she has, what hopes you have for his or her future, and what concerns you have about your child? Then fill out the *Parent Report Questionnaire* form (attached to this letter) and bring it to the meeting.

Consider if there is anyone who would have special knowledge or information about your child that would help the team design the best possible IEP for the child. This could be another family member, a professional, or someone in the community who could offer insight from another perspective. You are not required to bring someone to the meeting, but you do have the right to invite others if you wish. (If you are planning to bring someone, please let the school know ahead of time to ensure that the meeting area is large enough for everyone.)

“WHAT WILL HAPPEN AT THE IEP MEETING?”

Whether the meeting is to develop the child’s first IEP or it is to review and update an existing IEP, the team will begin by discussing the child’s strengths and looking at the child’s assessments. Each team member will have the opportunity to contribute. As the child’s parent and valued member of the team, offering your insights is an important part of the process. The team will then work together to formulate annual goals and short-term objectives or benchmarks tailored to your child’s needs. During the process, feel free to ask questions or express your point of view.

The IEP is a plan for your child’s educational success. Once the IEP is developed, you will receive a copy. The plan is a 12-month plan and reviewed annually; however, you may ask to revise the IEP at any time.

“WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE MEETING?”

The IEP will include specific goals and objectives for your child, how he or she will accomplish them, and what support necessary to do so. Once the team has reached consensus about the plan, the program begins. The IEP team will monitor progress and you will receive written reports at least quarterly, or as spelled out in the IEP.