

## QUICK GUIDE: PREPARING FOR AN IEP MEETING

### Questions to ask before the IEP meeting:

- What is the child's diagnosis?
  - Talk to your doctor or search medical resources at a library or the internet to learn about the disability. If you do not understand the disability, you will not know if the goals of the IEP are reasonable, if the services and accommodations in the IEP are appropriate, or if behavioral interventions are needed.
  - If you have not seen the assessment, ask the school for a copy and review it before the meeting.
- Who will attend the meeting?
  - If you do not understand the assessment, make sure that a school psychologist will be present to explain the information provided in the evaluation report.
  - There will be several representatives from the school. There should be a regular education teacher (if your child is in any regular education classes), a special education teacher, a representative from the district, and someone who can interpret testing results (often a school psychologist).
  - Bring allies, people who can support and help you at the meeting or who know the child and what he or she needs. You can bring a friend, a social worker, a counselor, or a lawyer. If they attend, be sure to let the school know in advance. If they cannot attend, ask them to write a statement about what they think the child needs or will respond to.
- What will the IEP meeting look like?
  - Ask for a copy of the school's IEP form in advance of the meeting so you can see exactly what the team will be deciding on and filling in.
  - The meeting will be driven by the need to fill in the blanks on the form – if there is not a blank for something you want to discuss, you will have to raise the issue.
- What do you want for your child?
  - Be prepared to tell the team what you think your child can do and what help the child needs to be able to do it. Write out in advance what your realistic goals are for your child for the year. Write out in advance what services you think your child needs. If you have a copy of the form, you can even write out your dream IEP before the meeting.
  - The IEP team must consider the parents' ideas for improving the child's education. You are an expert on your child; help the team by being prepared to share your expertise.
- Do you know how your child is doing at school?
  - Request a copy of your child's cumulative file, including academic and disciplinary records and testing results, and review it before the meeting. In particular, teacher comments in report cards or in disciplinary referrals may help explain what is working at school and what isn't. This will help you know what to ask for in the IEP.
- Are you a foster parent?
  - If so, you must have written authorization from DSS to make educational decisions for the child to represent the child's interest at the IEP meeting.

### Questions to ask during the IEP meeting:

- Did you understand the assessment results?
  - Ask the school psychologist to explain what the testing revealed and how the disability will affect your child's academic progress and in-school behavior.
- Will the IEP actually help my child where he or she is struggling?
  - Listen carefully during the meeting. Will the goals, services, and accommodations proposed by the IEP team actually help your child and address the academic or behavioral weaknesses the team has identified?
- Do the goals make sense?
  - The IEP goals should match up to the long-term goals you have for your child.
  - Example: If you want your child to perform at grade level, an IEP goal of improving organization does not fully address your long-term goals for your child.
  - The IEP goals should also be measurable in a way that you can understand.
  - The IEP should include how the child's progress on the goals will be measured and reported to you.
  - If you won't be able to tell if your child is making academic progress based on what the school will be sending you, ask the team to explain how progress is being measured and if it can be reported in a more meaningful way.
- Are the goals and services different from previous years' IEPs?
  - Good special education services should help a child improve from year to year.
  - If the goals and benchmarks have not changed over time, it is likely that the services and accommodations are not working.
- Does the IEP include services?
  - The IEP must specifically identify the "special education" that will be provided. "Special education" is specially designed instruction, which is adapted in content, method of instruction, or delivery of instruction, as needed based on the child's disability. Insist the IEP explain how the special education is specially designed.
  - Services cost schools money. Sometimes, the IEP team may be under pressure to minimize the cost of special education. They may therefore try to include lots of accommodations (which usually don't cost much) and fewer services.
  - If you think your child needs services, like one-on-one instruction to reinforce what is covered in class, ask for it.
- What is the child's setting?
  - The IEP must state whether the child will be separated from regular students, included with regular students, or have a mixture of both.
  - Ask the team to explain the reasoning for the placement decision and how the setting will benefit the child and how it might delay the child's academic progress.
  - If the child is in a completely separate setting, ask the team members to explain why the child could not be in a regular education setting.
- If your child is in high school, what is the diploma pathway?
  - If your child is on the Occupational Course of Study, ask the team to explain why.
  - See **Quick Guide: Graduation Requirements** for more information.
- What does the final IEP actually say?
  - Before signing the IEP at the end of the meeting, review it carefully. The IEP does not always match up to what was discussed at the meeting. In particular, if you wanted specific and measurable goals, the IEP may be more general than what the team verbally decided on.
  - If the final IEP does not contain certain services or accommodations that you think are necessary, do not sign the IEP.

### **Questions to ask after the IEP meeting:**

- Did you get a copy of the IEP and any meeting notes?
  - If not, request copies and keep them for your records.
- Does the IEP require the school to do anything for the child?
  - Bad IEPs put the burden of improvement mostly on the child and the parent. If the school is not required to help your child, request another IEP meeting to revise the IEP.
  - If the IEP does not specifically explain the “special education” to be provided, request another IEP meeting.
- In the weeks and months after the IEP is put in place:
  - Is your child doing better with the IEP services and accommodations in place?
    - If you don’t know, request an IEP meeting to revise the IEP to include better ways to report the child’s progress.
    - If no, you can request an IEP meeting to revise the IEP to figure out better ways to help your child (more or different services, behavioral interventions, or accommodations).
    - If yes, check with your child’s teachers to see if they agree your child is doing well. Ask them what they think is working and why.
  - Is the school doing what the IEP says it will?
    - If you can’t tell, request a new IEP meeting to set up better ways to monitor the IEP’s implementation.
    - If no, write a letter requesting an IEP meeting to discuss why the IEP is not being implemented.
    - If yes, thank the teachers and other school employees for their help.
- What can I do at home to help my child be successful in school?
  - The school must provide services to your child, but that does not guarantee your child’s future success. Your involvement is key.
  - You can monitor the child’s progress and pay attention to the IEP progress reports that are sent home. If the child is not improving, talk to the teachers to see why.
  - Pay attention to the child’s grades and talk to teachers to see if your child is completing assignments.
  - The more you know about your child’s progress and weaknesses, the better the next IEP will be.

### Additional Resources

If you have access to the internet, the following websites contain additional information on special education law, disabilities, and ways parents can advocate for their children:

Wrightslaw, Special Education Law and Advocacy  
The U.S. Department of Education’s IDEA website

<http://www.wrightslaw.com/>  
<http://idea.ed.gov/explore/home>