

ASD & the IEP Process

Tips & Tools for an Effective
Individualized Education Plan (IEP)



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About this Toolkit

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a **written document** that is developed for each eligible child with a disability. Federal regulations specify the procedures that school districts must follow to develop, review, and revise the IEP for each child. This toolkit is designed to help you understand your child's right to a free appropriate public education (FAPE), and how to work together with your school district to create an effective IEP. Working together with your child's IEP team can prove to be a frustrating and challenging aspect of ensuring your child is receiving what he/she is legally entitled to: a free, appropriate, public education in his/her least restrictive environment.



Please note that if your child has not yet been determined eligible for an IEP, you will need to begin the process by requesting a full multidisciplinary evaluation (in writing) to your school district. If your child is not yet school aged, please visit our **First Signs, Next Steps** free, downloadable toolkit for more information.

Preparation is Key

Before any meeting, whether you are reviewing evaluations, informally meeting, or scheduling an IEP eligibility or review meeting, it is important to be prepared. You should request to have a copy of evaluation results, IEP drafts, or any other relevant documents at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting so that you can review the information and make notes on the documents of any questions or concerns you may have. Also, the meeting must be scheduled at a mutually convenient time. If you request these documents or copies in writing by a certain date prior to the meeting, and the school fails to provide you with them, you can request to reschedule the meeting so that you can be fully prepared. You should also have prepared any doctor notes, outside evaluations, and your own notes regarding your goals and concerns for your child. Bring a pen and notepad, and be prepared to take notes.

If you've never attended an IEP meeting before, you may want to ask another parent in the district if they'll allow you to attend theirs so that you have an idea of what a meeting entails, and what you can generally expect. Whether you are creating a new IEP or reviewing an existing IEP, it can be very helpful to create a list of your biggest concerns or goals for your child before reading the team's goals. For example, if your child's struggle to stick to a schedule, tell time, or transition from one activity to another is greatly affecting his/her life, or consistently presenting challenges, you'll want to make sure it's addressed in the IEP. Remember, the ultimate goal of education is to prepare students for further education, employment, and independent living as contributing members of society. Even if you have to get creative, it is almost always possible to tie these skills directly into IEP goals, and if the team hasn't already done so, it's up to you to present it at the meeting as an area of need with a goal that should be addressed.



As a parent, you are legally entitled to be an equal member of the team creating your child's IEP. This means that you have a say in what the goals are, and how the team will go about meeting them.

About the IEP Document

While each state's formatting and titles may vary, all IEP's contain a section on strengths/needs, and IEP goals.

Strengths, Needs, and Goals:

When your team is reviewing your child's strengths/needs, be sure that every need is tied to a service. This means that if a member of the meeting brings up a need, whether in writing or spoken, there is a service in place to help address that need. For example, if a team member says, *Your child's hand flapping continues to be a distraction to other classmates*, then you will ask questions such as, *Why do you believe he is flapping? Have you allowed him to relocate to be able to do this? Have you tracked what is preceding this behavior? How long does this typically last, and how often does it occur? Have you had success resolving this in the past? Is he working with an OT to address any related sensory needs?*, etc. If a team member suggests your child needs extra help to keep up or tutoring in a subject, and you have it documented that a team member stated this, then the school must provide your child with the tutoring/extra help.

Services:

There is also a section of every IEP that states which services your child will receive, how often they will receive them, who will provide the service, and in what type of setting the services will be provided. Making sure that logistically, the IEP is exactly what you believe you are agreeing to is crucial to your child receiving proper services. If a service is listed as "group," this may mean that the therapist is going into your child's classroom and working with several students who have IEPs

at once, while they participate in a class activity. While it may be beneficial for your child to work directly in the classroom either pulled aside or during a class lesson, it may also be beneficial to receive 1:1 services in a quiet location. It is important to specify that the person providing the therapy/service is qualified. You should ask that speech is being directly provided by a speech and language pathologist, that occupational therapy is being directly provided by an occupational therapist, etc. Your school's models may vary, and sometimes therapists will give specific tasks/lessons/strategies to teachers. While this may be productive in certain situations, it is still prudent to specify in the IEP document how often your child will work directly with qualified professionals, and in what exact settings.

Supplementary Aides and Services:

Another crucial part of your child's IEP is the section on Supplementary Aides and Services. This is the section where all accommodations and modifications should be listed, including preferential seating, equipment needs (assistive technology devices, sensory tools, large print, etc.), social interaction support, communication logs, etc.) This is also the place you would list levels of staff support needed, planning time for collaboration needed by staff, testing adaptations, social interaction support, or other environmental needs.

As a parent, you have a right to request communication logs to ensure solid home/school collaboration, and to help yourself collect data on your child's progress and areas of need.

For example, you can request a brief, weekly written summary of how many sensory breaks your child needed, how many meltdowns occurred and how long they lasted, any social struggles teachers were aware of, etc. This will help you to obtain proper services and bring up any needs with data in future IEP meetings.



TIP

IEP Goals should be S.M.A.R.T. Smart stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented, and Time-bound. If you are unsure how a goal is meeting each of these criteria, don't be afraid to ask!

IEP Tips for Success

There are a few golden rules that apply to every part of a successful IEP.



1) Get everything in writing, and keep a copy. Whether you are making formal requests, checking in on your child's progress, getting copies of evaluations, or asking a simple question, it is essential that you do this in writing. Email is an easy way to document and keep records of your communications with the school. If someone from the school calls you or gives you information in person that is not in writing, a simple way to document this is to follow up by email. You can say something as simple as, *I just wanted to thank you for letting me know (insert details) at school today.* Or, *As you mentioned in your phone call, (insert details.)*"

2) If possible, don't attend an IEP meeting alone. It can be extremely intimidating sitting across from an entire team of professionals while discussing your child, whom you are more invested in than all of the other people combined. Sometimes simply having someone physically "on your side" and listening to both sides can help to ensure a productive meeting. You are able to bring anyone, including a friend, family member, anyone who has worked with or is currently working with your child, or an advocate. Ask that they dress professionally, bring a pen and notepad, and take notes for you if you do not want them to actively participate.

Parents have also noticed that it changes the dynamic of the meeting, and professionals from the school are less likely to speak in a condescending tone (even if they don't mean it), when you have someone with you. If you anticipate challenges agreeing with your child's IEP team on appropriate services, you can check to see if your state allows IEP meetings to be recorded, and if so, write a letter of notice to your district 24 hours in advance informing them that you will be recording the meeting.

3) Maintain professionalism. Treat an IEP as you would a business meeting. Dress professionally, and be prepared to disagree without letting emotions take over, which can be challenging. Remember that your child's teacher may have your child's best interest at heart, but does not want to disagree with the therapists, director, or principal in the room. You can help level the field by asking the teacher questions such as, *How does (insert details) affect his/her ability to participate or engage in different subject areas?* Or, *Have you seen other students who have improved in this area with (insert details) services/therapy?* If you've followed golden rule #1, you may even have some previous feedback from your child's teachers/therapists stating challenges in specific areas to back your case with evidence.

4) Don't assume the school is fully aware of your child's rights. Do your research. WrightsLaw.com is a fantastic resource for parents to get answers to specific questions about what students are entitled to under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and Section 504. You are able to bring notes, or copies of sections of IDEA to share with team members so that you can explain why you believe your child is entitled to certain services.

5) Don't sign the final copy of the IEP while at the meeting unless you are absolutely certain you agree to everything. You have every right to take home a copy of the IEP and review it thoroughly before signing, and we highly encourage you take advantage of being able re-read the IEP once more in a quiet environment before signing it and returning it.



You can call an IEP review meeting at any time, if you believe your child has met a goal, or a goal needs to be added to reassess the current IEP.

Special Concerns

Wandering/Eloperment

Wandering, also referred to as elopement, is the tendency for an individual to leave the safety of a responsible person's care or safe area, which may result in potential harm or injury. This might include leaving the classroom or playground unnoticed. Nearly half of children with autism are at risk of wandering or running away from school, home, and other settings. Here are some tips for addressing wandering behaviors with your child's IEP team:

Make them Aware: Some IEP members may not realize that wandering/elopement is a common occurrence in the autism community. Make them aware of the issue and your concerns. Also provide any written details of past incidents that involved your child.

Address Triggers: If there are any known triggers that could prompt fleeing (loud noises, bright lights, fears, etc.), work with the IEP team to create goals centered on teaching your child safe, alternative ways to respond, de-escalation techniques, and if necessary, ways to eliminate these triggers from your child's school day.

Incorporate Safety Accommodations: Work with the IEP team on accommodations to promote a safe environment for your child, such as noise-canceling headphones, door alarms and stop signs, proper fencing, communication technology, de-escalation tools and techniques, and a 1:1 aide for your child if elopement behaviors pose a serious risk.

Seek Support: If your child has a history of elopement, consider asking his/her primary care physician to write a letter to the IEP team on your children's behalf. A ***sample letter*** can be found in the 'tools' section of this guide.

Be Proactive: Provide your child's IEP team with an individualized ***student profile sheet*** that can be found in the 'tools' section of this guide. If the school does not have funding for door chimes and other safety tools, offer to provide the tools yourself or have them email naa@nationalautism.org and we will ship the tools free of charge.



Talk with your child's pediatrician about the diagnostic code for wandering, Z91.83, which can be used for safety planning in schools.

Bullying

Research shows children with disabilities are two to three times more likely be bullied than their non-disabled peers, and according to a study by the Interactive Autism Network (IAN), 63% of children with autism have been bullied at some point in their lives. There are many prevention strategies parents and school can use, including in the IEP. If you fear your child is being bullied, you should:

Include social and self-advocacy skills: Make sure the goals are clear and measurable, and that data is taken to monitor progress toward goal.

Request Peer Support: If possible, identify at least one friend who will be with your child during less structured environments (lunch, PE, recess). Children who are alone are most vulnerable to bullies. If your child does not have a suitable friend, ask that peer support be written into the IEP. Some campuses have programs such as Circle of Friends or other buddy systems. Even something as simple as having another student accompany your child during class changes can thwart many potential problems.

Request accommodations: You can request the student dress for PE in alternate settings unless adult supervision is present (or pursue alternate PE credit if available). Locker rooms are notorious for bullying behaviors.



Never allow restraint and/or seclusion terminology into any IEP language as a means to increase safety. Examples of this may include terms like "calming room," "therapeutic hold," and "timeout."

Restraint/Seclusion

Restraint is any manual method, physical or mechanical device, material, or equipment that immobilizes or reduces the ability of an individual. Seclusion is involuntary confinement of an individual alone in a room or area from which they are physically prevented from leaving.

Although the Children’s Health Act of 2000 protects children from abusive practices in facilities such as hospitals, residential treatment centers and residential group homes, it does not protect students, including those with disabilities, from such practices in both public and private schools. If you are concerned about these practices, you can:

Start the Conversation: Share your concerns about restraint and seclusion practices with your child’s IEP team.

Write a ‘No Restraint’ Letter: A ‘no restraint’ letter can be placed into your child’s IEP. A **sample letter** may be found at in the ‘tools’ section of this guide.

Avoid IEP Traps: Never allow inclusion of restraint & seclusion into your child’s IEP, or any language implying these practices.

Access to Communication Technology

Communication is often one’s first line of defense, and without ways to communicate, certain behaviors may arise. If your child has communication challenges, work with the IEP team to secure communication technology for school and home use. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, each public agency must ensure that assistive technology devices or assistive technology services, or both, are made available to a child with a disability if required as a part of the child’s Special education or supplementary aides and services. On a case-by-case basis, the use of school-purchased assistive technology devices in a child’s home or in other settings is required if the child’s IEP Team determines that the child needs access to those devices in order to receive FAPE.

TIP

A great way to find out exactly how the school is operating is to volunteer in the classroom. We highly encourage this whether you suspect a school is out of compliance with your child’s IEP or not.

Behavioral Challenges

Whether it’s elopement, self-injury, disruptive behaviors, or other challenges, if it interferes with your child’s ability to learn, it can be addressed through a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) as part of the Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) mandated by IDEA 2004.

FBA is a process which describes a student’s disruptive behaviors, looks for the reasons behind the behaviors, and offers interventions that teach new behaviors to replace the challenging ones. Once completed, a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) is put into place.

Your child’s BIP is designed to address the behaviors and can include prevention strategies, which stop the behaviors before they begin, as well as replacement behaviors, which achieve the same function as the disruptive behavior without causing disruption. In addition, the BIP provides a plan for responding to the old behavior that is being replaced and promoting the new behavior.

For students with disabilities, the BIP is a legal document that is a part of an IEP. It must be followed both inside and outside of the classroom.



To learn more about your rights, you can read about procedural safeguards in special education. The school should also provide you with information on safeguards.

Tools

Taking notes and staying organized is critical in both the short and long-term. Be sure to keep everything properly labeled and in one place. Even as your child enters adulthood, some documents -- even those decades old -- may be necessary for reference. Use the following tools as a reference or guide, and keep letter language samples should certain needs arise. For additional support, you can always write us at naa@nationalautism.org.



'Important Numbers' Template

Use the template below to list important numbers, and keep the sheet in a convenient location.

School Numbers:

Main _____

Case Manager _____

Teacher _____

Aide _____

Principal _____

Other _____

Other _____

Other _____

Other Helpful Numbers:

State Protection & Advocacy Agency:

ndrn.org or 202-408-9514

Autism Information & Referral Center:

1-855-828-8476

National Autism Association:

1-877-622-2884

Other _____

Other _____

Other _____



IEP Organization Worksheet Sample

Date: _____ Handwritten, email, phone, or in person?: _____

Who participated in conversation/exchange: _____

Comments, conflicts, occurrences at school, ect.: _____

Solutions, ideas, responses: _____

Concerns: _____

Notes: _____

Date: _____ Handwritten, email, phone, or in person?: _____

Who participated in conversation/exchange: _____

Comments, conflicts, occurrences at school, etc.: _____

Solutions, ideas, responses: _____

Concerns: _____

Notes: _____

Date: _____ Handwritten, email, phone, or in person?: _____

Who participated in conversation/exchange: _____

Comments, conflicts, occurrences at school, etc.: _____

Solutions, ideas, responses: _____

Concerns: _____

Notes: _____

Date: _____ Handwritten, email, phone, or in person?: _____

Who participated in conversation/exchange: _____

Comments, conflicts, occurrences at school, etc.: _____

Solutions, ideas, responses: _____

Concerns: _____

Notes: _____



Communication Log Sample

If a challenging behavior occurred, please note time, duration, intervention used, and event that preceded behavior.

Week of _____ to _____

Home/ School Communication Logs

Monday's Challenges: _____

Monday's Positives: _____

Tuesday's Challenges: _____

Tuesday's Positives: _____

Wednesday's Challenges: _____

Wednesday's Positives: _____

Thursday's Challenges: _____

Thursday's Positives: _____

Friday's Challenges: _____

Friday's Positives: _____



IEP Letter Sample/Wandering

Drafted by NAA as an example only. Please incorporate details as they apply to your personal situation.

Dear (List School Administrator's Name) and IEP Team;

Our child, NAME and DOB, attends (list name of school) and has a diagnosis of autism. He/she is susceptible to wandering, elopement and fleeing incidents.

NAME is extremely interested in (include any outside attractions, such as areas of water, pools, lakes, ponds and creeks). He/she will wander off to get to these areas and all measures must be taken to ensure his/her safety. Due to NAME's tendency to wander, including (list any past incidents) his/her physician has drafted the attached letter strongly urging close one-on-one adult supervision.

Should NAME wander, 911 should be called IMMEDIATELY. We also request immediate parental notification of any wandering incident, including incidents where he/she may have wandered within the building. All incidents should be well documented, and include when and how the occurrence took place.

Please know that failure to address known, preventable escape patterns and security breaches puts our child at great risk. We ask for your cooperation in working with us to report all incidents, to make sure the school's premises has proper architectural barriers in place, to ensure all school staff members are aware of his/her tendency to wander or flee, to ensure fences are gated at all times and exterior doors are always shut, and to ensure that our child is never left unattended no matter what the circumstance.

(NOTE: If your child's school does not have fencing or other architectural barriers, this should be noted in detail.)

Incidents that may trigger fleeing include (list triggers or other pertinent information). De-escalation methods are best in preventing self-injurious behavior (SIB) or fleeing the premises. As the attached physician letter also strongly recommends, calming methods should be facilitated by the staff member most familiar with NAME, and aversive methods, unnecessary restraints, seclusion practices and escalation triggers should be avoided.

Sincerely,

(Your name, signature, and contact information)



Physician Letter Sample/Wandering

Drafted by NAA as an example only. Please incorporate details as they apply to your personal situation.

NAME OF CHILD (DOB XX/XX/XX) carries a diagnosis of Autism, which poses certain cognitive challenges and safety risks. NAME currently attends NAME OF SCHOOL in NAME OF TOWN.

NAME has a history of wandering from safe environments, including a YEAR incident where NAME wandered from LIST INCIDENT. According to Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Wandering places children and adults with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) in harmful and potentially life-threatening situations—making this an important safety issue for individuals affected and their families and caregivers.

If given the opportunity, NAME will wander from safe environments. NAME’S wandering tendencies include goal-directed elopement, which means NAME will seek out items of interest, specifically roads and bodies of water. NAME’S history also includes fleeing incidents following a meltdown or escalation trigger.

It is for these reasons, and NAME’S history of elopement, that NAME now has a medical diagnosis of Wandering In Diseases Classified Elsewhere (ICD-10 Z91.83). To ensure NAME’s safety, it is medically necessary that NAME have close and constant adult supervision at all times, and that proper safeguards are in place. Safeguards may include architectural barriers, door alarms, visual prompts, and a school-wide response protocol.

A Functional Behavioral Assessment should be done to help identify root causes of NAME’s elopement behaviors. Calming methods should be facilitated by the staff member most familiar with NAME, and aversive methods, unnecessary restraints, seclusion practices and escalation triggers should be avoided. NAME must never be left unattended by any adult for any reason. Leaving NAME unattended poses serious safety and health risks.

Sincerely,

(Physician name, signature, and contact information)

'No Restraint' Letter Sample

Drafted by Calvin and Tricia Luker of the Respect ABILITY Law Center. Please incorporate details as they apply to your personal situation.

Date

(Name of Special Education Director)

(Name of School District)

(Address of School)

Re: child's name and birth date

Dear (Name of Special Education Director):

My child, NAME, is a _____ grade student at _____ school. NAME has autism and has been receiving special education services since s/he started school.

We are concerned that NAME's behavior challenges now are being or might be addressed in part through the use of physical management and restraint. I have not authorized and will not consent to any activity that involves physically or mechanically restraining my child while at school or going to and from school. I know that special education law requires the use of functional assessments of behavior and positive behavior support plans to address behavior challenges. If the school feels NAME's behavior is such that physical management or restraints are being considered or used, it is obvious to me that we need to follow the law, do the assessment and develop a positive behavior support plan.

I am sure you are aware of the number of news reports in recent years highlighting the death of children with autism during or after having been physically managed or restrained. Given that special education law requires the development of behavior plans, and given the known risks to children – and to NAME – of the use of restraint, I need for you to be clear that I will weigh all legal options if restraint activities against NAME are not terminated immediately.

You may consider this letter a request to convene a behavior support team meeting to discuss NAME's behavior and possible approaches to address his/her particular needs. You also may consider this letter my request and consent for the performance of a functional assessment of behavior across environments and across time, provided that I am informed in advance that the functional assessment of behavior is going to be conducted and am permitted to participate in the development and implementation of the assessment.

I want to work with you and with NAME's teachers and professionals at _____ school to be sure that NAME learns to develop positive behavioral skills in an environment that is safe for him/her, for his/her peers and for school personnel. I am certain that you also share my concern for student safety where physical intervention has the potential to result in the student's death. I, like you, want my child's school to be a safe and secure environment where all students can learn. I want to work with you to help create that environment for NAME.

Sincerely,

(Your name, signature, and contact information)



Request Letter Sample/Functional Behavior Assessment

Drafted by Calvin and Tricia Luker of the Respect ABILITY Law Center. Please incorporate details as they apply to your personal situation.

Date

(Name of Special Education Director)

(Name of School District)

(Address of School)

Dear (Name of Special Education Director):

My child, NAME, attends school name. I believe that NAME's behavior is beginning to interfere with his/her ability to learn and to reach his/her IEP goals and objectives. The following difficulties support my concern:

List your observations – here are some examples

- S/he does not know how to respond to name calling or teasing;
- S/he is not cooperative in groups;
- S/he needs help to distinguish from socially acceptable and unacceptable behavioral responses;
- S/he does not recognize situations in his/her self-control is needed;
- S/he does not know how to cope with stress-provoking situations he/she cannot avoid; and
- S/he does not understand the consequences of appropriate & inappropriate expressions of his/her feelings.

Please consider this letter as my formal request for and consent to the District to perform a functional assessment of behavior. Please include me in that assessment process. When the assessment is completed, please provide me with copies of all data and results. I also ask that a behavior team, including me as a member, be convened to develop a positive behavior support plan. Please expedite these requests as my child is at risk of suspension or expulsion.

Thank you for giving this request for a functional assessment of behavior and development of a positive behavior support plan your immediate attention

Sincerely,

(Your name, signature, and contact information)



Student Profile Sample

Drafted by NAA as an example only. Please incorporate details as they apply to your child.

SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENT PROFILE FOR EDUCATORS

STUDENT'S NAME & AGE

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

MEDICAL CONDITION(S)/ALLERGIES/DIETARY RESTRICTIONS

EMERGENCY CONTACT

DO'S & DONT'S

SIGNS OF ESCALATION

PLACE STUDENT'S PHOTO HERE

STUDENT'S TRACKING FREQUENCY (IF APPLICABLE)

LIKES/ATTRACTIONS/FAVORITE THINGS

TRIGGERS/DISLIKES/FEARS

IF LOST, MAY LIKELY BE FOUND AT

BEST CALMING METHODS

NOTE: immediately notify parent or caregiver of a wandering incident, even if it seems small or insignificant. If the student is ever missing, CALL 911 and search areas that pose the highest threat first, such as nearby water sources and traffic. Avoid the following: non-emergency restraint, prone or supine restraints, and seclusion practices as these can cause new behaviors or worsen existing behaviors.

ADDITIONAL INFO

Empty rounded rectangular box for additional information.

IEP Glossary of Terms

Compiled by Understood, keep this glossary on hand and use for reference as needed.

Accommodation: This is a change to or in your child's learning environment. Accommodations can help her learn and then show what she's learned without having her challenges get in the way. For instance, if your child takes longer to answer questions, she might be allowed extra time to take a test. Even with accommodations, kids are expected to learn the same content as their peers.

Annual goals: The IEP document lists the academic and functional (everyday) skills the IEP team thinks your child can achieve by the end of the year. These goals are geared toward helping your child take part in the general education classroom. IEP goals need to be realistic and measurable.

Assistive technology (AT): Any device, equipment or software that helps your child work around her issues. AT can help your child learn, communicate and function better in school. AT ranges from simple tools (like highlighters) to high-tech software (like apps that reads text aloud).

Behavior intervention plan (BIP): A plan designed to teach and reward positive behavior. Typically, the plan uses strategies to prevent and stop problem behaviors. It may also have supports and aids for the child. A BIP is often included as part of an IEP. To get a BIP, a child must have a functional behavioral assessment.

Due process: A formal process for resolving disputes with a school about special education and IEPs. Due process isn't the only way to resolve a dispute. There are other options, like mediation and filing a state complaint.

Extended school year services (ESY): Some students receive special education services outside of the regular school year, such as during the summer or, less commonly, during extended breaks like winter break.

Functional behavioral assessment (FBA): This is a process used to try to solve a child's behavioral problems. It can uncover why a student is having behavioral issues by identifying social, emotional and environmental causes. The school then writes a behavior intervention plan (BIP), which outlines how to address the issues.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): The nation's special education law. IDEA is a federal law that guarantees all children with disabilities access to a free and appropriate public education.

Independent educational evaluation (IEE): This is different from an evaluation given by the school. Professionals who are not school district employees conduct IEEs. Parents sometimes request an IEE if they disagree with the results of the school's evaluation of their child. Sometimes the school requests an IEE when they don't have the right experts to evaluate a specific issue a student might have. You have the right to request that the school pay for an IEE. Whether or not the school ends up paying for an IEE, it has to consider the results.

Least restrictive environment (LRE): Students with documented disabilities must be taught in the least restrictive environment. This means they must be taught in the same setting as students without documented disabilities as much as possible. The school must offer services and supports to help a child with an IEP succeed in a general education classroom.

Modification: A modification is a change in what a student is expected to learn and demonstrate. For example, a teacher might ask the class to write an essay that analyzes three major battles during a war. A child with a modification may only be asked to write about the basic facts of those battles. Modifications are different from accommodations.

Present level of performance (PLOP, PLP, PLAFF, PLAAFP): This is a snapshot of how your child is doing right now. PLOP describes your child's academic skills (such as reading level) and functional skills (such as making conversation or writing with a pencil). The school prepares this report for the IEP meeting. This is the starting point for setting annual IEP goals.

Prior written notice: This is a formal letter the school sends to parents. It's also a legal right under IDEA. Any time the school district denies, refuses or accepts a parent request for an evaluation or change to special education services, it must give prior written notice. It explains what the school plans to do or refuses to do. Find out when schools send prior written notice.

Standards-based IEP: This alternative to the traditional IEP is only used in some states. A standards-based IEP measures a student's academic performance against what the state expects of other students in the same grade.

Supplementary aids and services: These are supports to help your child learn in the general education classroom. They can include equipment or assistive technology, like audiobooks or highlighted classroom notes. They may also include training for staff to help them work with your child.

Transition plan: This part of the IEP lays out what your teen must learn and do in high school in order to succeed as a young adult. S/he and the IEP team develop the plan together before it kicks in at age 16. The transition plan includes goals and activities that are academic and functional. But they extend beyond school to practical life skills and job training.

Conclusion

Hopefully you will have worked with your IEP team to write goals and agree on services that will help your child make progress toward the ultimate goal of education: to prepare your student for further education, employment, and independent living.

Sometimes, however, the team and parents will disagree on one or many parts of developing an IEP, from evaluation results, the child's placement, and services. If this is the case, you should first try to have a conversation with the school and reach a compromise, even if the compromise is temporary. You can agree to try a plan for a set amount of time to see if it is effective, and plan to meet again at the end time. If this is not possible or you still disagree with the rest of the team, you still have the right to mediation, where you will meet with the team again along with a third party to try to reach an agreement. If there is still no mutual agreement, you will need to file a due process complaint. You will need to communicate to the school in writing the ways you believe the school has violated your child's rights under IDEA. From due process, there will be a resolution process, a due



Due process is a complaint filed with your state department of education against the school district, a resolution meeting is required between district and parents, if no agreement is reached, it then goes to a due process hearing with the state.

process hearing, and finally a state complaint. While sometimes this is necessary, it is always best to try to avoid due process and to work with the team to reach a resolution.

If you continue to face difficulties, you can contact your state's Council on Developmental Disabilities to see if there is a parent advocate who can help you work with your school district.

Resources



Bazon: bazelon.org

Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates: copaa.org

National Autism Association: nationalautism.org

IDEA Information & Resources: sites.ed.gov/idea

Respect ABILITY Law Center: respectabilitylawcenter.com

State Protection & Advocacy Agency: ndrn.org

Wrights Law: wrightslaw.com