

Individualized Education Program (IEP) Facilitation



Office for Dispute Resolution

IEP Facilitation

Individualized Education Program (IEP) Facilitation is an option available to parents and school district staff when they both agree that it would be valuable to have a neutral person—the IEP Facilitator—present at an IEP meeting to assist them in discussing issues regarding the IEP. Most IEP meetings do not need the services of an IEP Facilitator. Typically, an IEP Facilitator is brought into those situations where the parents and school district staff are having difficulties communicating with one another about the student's needs. The IEP Facilitator assists in creating an atmosphere for fair communication and the successful drafting of an IEP for the student.



Role of the Facilitator

The Facilitator:

- Helps the IEP team focus on the student's needs.
- May help create an overall agenda and assist in generating ground rules for the meeting, with the agreement of all IEP team members.
- Assists the IEP team to resolve conflicts and disagreements that arise during the meeting. The IEP Facilitator typically does not address disputes unrelated to the IEP.
- Helps to maintain open communication among all IEP team members.
- Models effective communication and listening.
- Helps to keep IEP team members on task and within the time allotted for the meeting.
- Maintains impartiality and does not take sides, place blame, or determine if a particular decision is right or wrong.
- Clarifies points of agreement and disagreement.
- Ensures that the meeting is student focused.
- Does not impose a decision on the group.
- Is not a member of the IEP team.
- Does not chair the meeting or write the IEP.



Benefits of an IEP Facilitation

An IEP Facilitation:

- Builds and improves relationships among the IEP team members and between parents and schools.
- Provides opportunities for IEP team members to resolve conflicts if they arise.
- Encourages parents and professionals to identify new options to address unresolved problems.
- Serves as a more cost-efficient mechanism for resolving disputes than more formal proceedings such as due process hearings.
- Is typically a less stressful mechanism for resolving disputes.
- Supports all parties in participating fully.

Family Preparation for IEP Facilitation

Good preparation is one key to a successful IEP meeting. The following suggestions may assist families in preparing. Families can:

- Make a list of your child's strengths and needs, and your major concerns about his/her education.
- Prepare a written list of issues you want to discuss and questions you want to ask.
- Consider how your child's disabilities affect his/her education.

- Think about whether your child has been making progress with his/her current program. Make a list of what you think has been working and what has not.
- Request a copy your child's most recent Evaluation Report and IEP from the school and review it before the meeting to ensure that it is still an accurate and complete picture of your child.
- Be willing to listen carefully and consider possible solutions and options discussed at the meeting.
- Attend a workshop or training conducted by your local Parent and Training Information (PTI) Center (listed below) to learn about your role and responsibilities as a member of the IEP team. A PTI staff member can answer your questions and help you prepare for the meeting.
 - Parent Education and Advocacy Leadership Center/central and western PA (866-950-1040)
 - Parent Education Network/eastern and south central PA (800-522-5827)
 - Mission Empower (855-825-0788)
 - Hispanos Unidos para Niños Excepcionales/ Philadelphia (215-425-6203)
- Contact the Special Education ConsultLine (800-879-2301) to speak with a specialist who can help you understand your rights regarding your child's special education services.

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Frequently Asked Questions About IEP Facilitation

How do I request IEP Facilitation?

Either the parents or the school district can request IEP Facilitation; however, since the process is voluntary, both sides must agree. When everyone agrees to IEP Facilitation, a request form is completed and signed by the parents and the district and then submitted to the Office for Dispute Resolution (ODR). This form is available from ODR, or online at ODR's website (www.odr-pa.org).

When are IEP Facilitations scheduled?

IEP teams interested in IEP Facilitation should submit the completed and signed request form to the Office for Dispute Resolution (ODR) at least two weeks prior to the IEP meeting. ODR will make every attempt to locate a facilitator who is available in the time frame chosen by the IEP team. If no facilitator is available on this date, however, the IEP team may need to reschedule the date or proceed without the facilitator. Just as for any IEP meeting, the IEP Facilitation meeting is scheduled by the school at a time and place that is mutually agreeable to all required IEP team members.

How will I be notified about the IEP Facilitation meeting?

Notification about an IEP Facilitation meeting is the same as any other IEP meeting. The school district is still required to give proper notice of the IEP meeting to the parents, including the purpose, time, location, and list of who has been invited.

Who attends the IEP Facilitation?

Attendance at an IEP Facilitation meeting is the same as any other IEP meeting. The required members of the IEP team attend the meeting, in addition to the Facilitator. As with nonfacilitated IEP meetings, parents have the option to invite an advocate or other people who have knowledge or special expertise regarding their child.

Is there any cost for the IEP Facilitation meeting?

No, there is no cost to the parents or the school district for IDEA related IEP facilitation.

What happens if the IEP Facilitation is not successful?

As with any IEP meeting, if the parties to an IEP Facilitated meeting are not able to resolve the disagreements preventing them from drafting a mutually-agreeable IEP, they are free to pursue other forms of dispute resolution such as mediation or a due process hearing.

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Does the IEP Facilitator make decisions for the team?

No. The role of the Facilitator is to make every effort to ensure that the team is communicating so that the IEP team, not the IEP Facilitator, can develop an appropriate IEP for the student. The Facilitator also assists by offering suggestions for resolving conflict that may be preventing the team from agreeing on the various components of the IEP. The members of the IEP team remain the sole decision-makers.

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