



The purpose of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is to help a student learn and actively participate at school with his or her peers and prepare him/her to lead a productive adult life. An important dimension of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) is that all students are entitled to access to the general education curriculum with individually determined supports, services, accommodations, and/or modifications so that they can be successful.

Family members are equal participants on the team that develops their child's IEP. Families have long-range vision and commitment to their child and hold important information about their child's strengths, learning styles, interests, and needs.

This packet was designed by PEAK Parent Center, Inc. to help parents prepare for the IEP meeting by thinking through each step of the process before the meeting. Additional resources are available at www.peakparent.org.

1. Identification

Through the Child Find program, school districts have the responsibility to locate, identify, and assess students age birth to 21 with disabilities. The school may refer a child for assessment and request permission to evaluate the student to determine if the child has a disability. Parents may request an evaluation from the school. Parents also have the right to request an independent evaluation if they disagree with the results.

2. Evaluation

Children needing evaluation may be referred by teachers, doctors, schools, Child Find, or others close to the child. Parents may request an evaluation of their child from their school or from Child Find. When a disability is known or suspected, parents must give their written permission before any evaluations on their child are conducted. A significant change included in IDEA 2004 is the elimination of the requirement to show a student has a "severe discrepancy" between their intellectual ability and academic achievement in order to be identified as having a learning disability. Now schools can use a process called Response to Intervention to decide if a student responds to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation process. For more information contact your local school district or the Department of Education in your state.

3. Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance

The IEP team is made up of: the parents, at least one general education and one special education teacher, school district representative, someone knowledgeable about the evaluation results, anyone with knowledge about the child, and when appropriate, the student. IDEA 2004 allows people to be excused from the meeting if their area of the curricula or related services is not being changed or discussed, or if they give a written report to the parents and the other team members before the IEP meeting. The parents must agree in writing to excusing any team members. Parents are urged to not allow members to be excused very often. Not having all the IEP team members present means some individuals with experience working with the student will not be able to participate in the discussion at a meeting.

5. Eligibility

The team of school professionals and parents review the evaluation results and needs and together decide if the student is a “child with a disability” as defined by IDEA 2004. If a student is determined eligible for special education supports and services, the IEP process continues.

If the child is determined not to be eligible, a discussion about whether the child qualifies under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 occurs. If the student does not qualify under Section 504, then the family is referred to other community resources and the information gained from the assessment is provided to the classroom teacher.

The family should be provided with information about their rights. This includes their right to request an independent evaluation in order to gain a second opinion and their right to contest the decision in mediation or a due process hearing.

6. Annual Measurable Goals

After determining the child is eligible for special education services the team prioritizes and clusters the needs into goals. The annual goals must be child-centered, should be able to be reached in one year and must be measurable.

Five critical elements in developing measurable goals:

- The student ... (*Who*)
- Will do what ... (*Behavior*)
- To what level or degree...(*Criterion*)
- Under what conditions...(*Conditions*)
- In what length of time...(*Timeframe*)

IDEA 2004 requires that a student’s goals are consistent with the state’s goals and standards for all students. Therefore, it is important that the goals be based on academic standards. In addition, the goals can be based on other skills the child will need to live and work successfully as an adult.

Examples of these skills:

- Being organized
- Communicating effectively
- Speaking up for oneself
- Getting around the school independently

IDEA 2004 requires the IEP have a part that describe how the child’s progress toward meeting the annual goals will be measured, and when periodic reports on the progress the child is making will be provided. Best practice suggests teachers give frequent curriculum based measurements to see if the student is making progress. This helps the teacher and parent know if the instructional strategies are being effective, or if they need to be changed. The IEP team can write in the IEP how teachers are going to measure student progress with objective data and how often it will occur. Parents are urged not to accept “teacher observation” as a way to measure if the child is making progress or not. Parents are encouraged to ask the school to give progress reports on their child’s IEP goals at the same time school report cards are given, or more often if needed. It is important to know if your child’s progress will lead to them achieving their goals in one year.

Example goals and the skill which the goal addresses:

Angie will count up to 20 objects from the classroom environment to demonstrate one-to-one correspondence (i.e., counting out notes to pass out to her class). (State Math Standard #1)

Neil will demonstrate appropriate attention-getting behavior (in accordance with his behavior support plan) at recess and in the hallways an average of 3 days per week, measurable by adult observation. Documentation will occur in a weekly teacher-planning meeting. (Social Skill)

John will be able to successfully express and defend his point of view expressed in a written essay as measured by teacher evaluation and the district writing assessment. (State Reading & Writing Standard #4)

Mary will use correct picture symbols to communicate food choices during lunch four times per week, measurable by weekly communication between Mary and her teacher regarding progress. Documentation will take the form of a teacher journal. (Reading & Writing Standard #1)

Look at the needs you listed, and list some goals for your child.

7. Short-Term Objectives

These are no longer required by IDEA 2004 (except for students who take alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards), but are still considered best practice. Short-term objectives provide information for teachers and parents to measure student progress and are an effective communication tool between general and special education teachers and families. Nothing in IDEA 2004 prevents an IEP team from writing short-term objectives for any student. Parents can ask the school team to include these in the IEP.

Examples of short-term objectives for goals from the previous examples:

- **GOAL:** John will be able to successfully express and defend his point of view expressed in a written essay as measured by teacher evaluation and the district writing assessment.

Short Term Objectives:

1. Complete an internet search on a selected topic to gather information.
2. Identify and record facts from research that support his opinion.

- **GOAL:** Mary will use correct picture symbols to communicate food choices during lunch, four times per week, measurable by weekly communication between Mary and her teacher regarding progress. Documentation will take the form of a teacher journal.

Short Term Objective:

1. Indicate likes and dislikes for typical lunchroom fare.

Look at each of your child’s goals and list some short-term objectives that will help the child reach the goals.

8. Supports and Services

Next, the team discusses the supports and services the student needs to reach the goals set earlier, and what program modifications or supports for school staff are needed. This section of the IEP is considered by many families and educators to be the most critical to the student’s success, so it is important to allow enough time needed during the meeting to do this part well. Statements of special education and related services, including transition services when appropriate, must state the specified kind and amount of supports and services to be provided so that it will be clear to all who are involved in writing and putting the IEP into practice.

IDEA 2004 allows transition plans to be written not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16, or younger if appropriate. The transition plan should be based on information about the student’s strengths and interests.

Special education services can include accommodations and/or modifications your child may need to access the general education curriculum and extra-curricular activities. An **accommodation** is a change made to the teaching or testing procedures in order to provide a student with access to information and create an opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and skills. A **modification** is a change in what a student is expected to learn and/or demonstrate. While a student may be working on modified course content, the subject area remains the same as the rest of the class.

This section also specifies instructional strategies, assistive technology, extended school year services (ESY) if needed, behavior support plan if needed, related services (e.g. speech and language therapy consultation in the general education classroom), transportation, and any other services or supports the student needs to reach his or her goals in academic settings and for extra curricular or other non-academic activities. Instructional programs



and other services should be supported by strong evidence that they are effective. The special education and related services need to be written in terms of what, by whom, how often, how much, and what kind with regards to the services to be provided. Parents need to be certain that the frequency of services is adequate to meet the student’s needs and will result in reaching the goals.

Examples a school will provide or ensure:

- tests are given orally
- additional time to take tests
- a smaller number of representative math problems
- consistent expectations from all adults
- a locker with an adapted lock
- weekly home-school communication through a chart or notebook filled out by the paraprofessional
- a behavior support plan for use at home and school
- modifications to general education curriculum done by the special educator
- modification in the general education classroom with proper support
- professional development for the staff
- transition services for students 16 years and older*
- *best practice is to start looking at transition services at age fourteen.

List some examples of adaptations or supports your child will need in order to be successful in school.

9. Placement

Placement and location are actually two different things. The child should be placed in the “least restrictive environment” (LRE) for receiving an appropriate education designed to meet his or her special education needs, while still being educated with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible.

The intent of the law is that special education services are brought to the child, not that the child is pulled out of the classroom for services in special education classes.

The question to consider is “How can the IEP goals and objectives be met in the classroom with supports and services and with the child’s peers?”

10. Implementation of the IEP

Just like having a map doesn’t guarantee a successful journey, a well written IEP does not guarantee an effective school year. The IEP must be followed and student’s successes and difficulties



documented so changes can be made as needed. All staff involved need a copy of the IEP to be sure that they are using the accommodations, modifications, and supports that help the student learn successfully.

Parents should stay involved, communicate frequently with teachers and team members, give positive feedback when staff members do things that work well, and choose battles wisely. When issues arise, parents should use their strongest advocacy for the issues that are the most important. If parents realize that the IEP is not working, they need to let the school know immediately and ask that the IEP be used as it was intended. Sometimes another IEP meeting is required.

IDEA 2004 allows for IEPs to be changed without having the complete IEP team present. Parents are encouraged to be cautious about having the IEP amended or changed in this way. Significant revisions such as changes in services because of behavioral or disciplinary issues should call for a full IEP team meeting. Change in placement or access to curriculum because of lack of progress in academics could reflect on accommodations and modifications being used/not used and should call for a full IEP meeting. Parents and educators need to make sure they receive a written copy of any changes agreed to.

Dispute Resolution Options under IDEA 2004

Disagreements need to be dealt with when they occur. This may be during the evaluation/reevaluation process, at the IEP meeting, or when the IEP is being implemented. Parents can try informal ways to solve the disagreement, such as requesting a: parent/teacher conference, meeting with the school principal, special education director, or the superintendent.

The more formal options are: mediation, due process complaint, resolution meeting, or state complaint.

Final Thoughts

Now that you have had a chance to prepare for your child's IEP meeting, you can be a more active and effective participant in planning your child's "Individualized Education Program."

The IEP is developed by team consensus, with parents as equal members. Parents can ask for an IEP meeting at any time to review the IEP or to change it if their child reaches goals or if his or her needs change or they feel that things are not going well.

If you have questions or would like additional information about the IEP process, contact your state Parent Training and Information Center. To locate your State Parent Training and Information Center please see: www.taalliance.org.