



## GETTING THE BEST IEP FOR YOUR CHILD

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is mandated for all students who are eligible under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Public Law 105-17. The IEP describes the special education and related services designed to meet the unique educational needs of a student with a disability.

### Step 1 - Preparation

- The time you take, the thoroughness of your preparation, and your command of information will save time and assure greater success.
- Know the federal and state laws.
- Know that you are a full partner in this process and should expect to participate as an equal with school personnel. You are an authority on your own child. The IEP must consider your concerns for enhancing your child's education.
- Contact your child's teacher or your local special education director to ask who will be in attendance, the issues that will be discussed, and your rights and responsibilities.
- Develop a written list of information about your child that you want to share with the IEP team and items you want addressed during the development of your child's IEP since you, as the parent, are an "information specialist" relative to your child.
- Know your child's strengths and weaknesses in areas such as academic achievement, communication, social/emotional, behavioral and life skills.
- Collect and create documentation of your child's development: physical, social and cognitive (intellectual abilities) -- especially his/her language and academic skills.
- Know your child's current skills profile in every area listed above and other areas such as his/her ability to concentrate, to complete a task, to follow directions, and to organize work. Be able to talk about the time, the amount of support and help required by your child to complete assignments. A checklist to help you organize this information may be available from your child's teachers, your pediatrician, your state parent resource center, or others.
- Examine your long-range vision of your child. What do you want your child to do when he/she leaves

school, or in the next 3 years? What do you think should be done to maximize his/her strengths and remediate weaknesses?

- Consider annual goals that will help your child accomplish his/her long-range plans. What do you expect your child to learn this year, especially in the area of reading and written expression?
- Talk with your child and with the teacher(s) about these issues.
- Decide whom you want to accompany you to the IEP meeting. It is important for both parents and/or guardians to be present. If this is impossible, take a knowledgeable person(s), preferably one experienced in the process. Do not go alone. Notify the school system in advance of the identity of the person(s) you will bring.
- Call ahead of time and ask for a draft of the school's proposed IEP, if there is one. Send your reactions to the IEP team coordinator ahead of time as well as the issues you would like to have the IEP team consider.
- Organize your documentation carefully and take it with you to the IEP meeting.

### Step 2 - The IEP Meeting

- Do not be intimidated by the number of school personnel attending. Bring someone with you. Have someone take notes or tape the meeting.
- If an IEP already exists, review your child's progress towards each annual goal and in the general education curriculum before revising the current IEP. Were goals met? If not, why not? Were the strategies realistic and/or appropriate? What procedures were used to evaluate each goal? Why did the student have problems in the general education curriculum?
- Insist that a summary of new test findings be written in clear English; that the presenter explain fully how your child's disability affects his/her performance within the educational environment both academically and non-academically. Insist that strengths be specified.
- Plan for upcoming transitions and discuss fully the implications of the transitions. For the older student, the discussions of transition beyond high school begin at age 14 or younger.

- Be sure that the annual goals cover all concerns; are specific to your child's needs; and are stated in measurable, observable, and concrete behaviors. Objectives (measurable intermediate steps) or benchmarks (major milestones) must be written for each annual goal. Instructional strategies should be specified.
- All accommodations, modifications, supplementary services and aids, and personnel supports should be stated clearly in the IEP, including those for instruction, test taking and assessment.
- Be sure that beginning and ending dates for all services are stated, along with the location, frequency, and duration of these services.
- Explore any differences of opinions; ask other team members to give explicit, concrete reasons for their statements. If you still cannot agree, clearly state your reasons.
- At all costs, act calm! If you need time to compose yourself, ask for a recess.
- Delay giving consent, when required, if you are not satisfied with the IEP or believe you need time to review the contents of the IEP. You may always request a continuation of the current meeting. Finally, you may, at any time, request an IEP meeting to review and revise your child's IEP. You may also request an independent evaluation.

### **Step 3 - Monitoring the IEP - It's A Team Effort That Includes You**

Once the IEP has been developed and agreed to (your child's initial IEP requires your consent prior to implementation), it needs to be implemented. Your child's IEP must include a statement of how his/her progress towards the annual goals will be measured and how you will be informed of that progress. You should be informed at least as often as parents of non-disabled children are informed of their child's progress.

You can request an IEP meeting to review and/or revise the IEP at any time during the year. You may make changes in the amount of special education and/or related services; changes or additions of goals and objectives or benchmarks; addition or termination or

related services; and changes or additions of program modifications, supplementary aids and services, or personnel support.

The IEP team needs to review the IEP at least annually to determine whether the annual goals are being achieved and to revise the IEP as appropriate to address:

- any lack of expected progress toward the annual goals and in the general curriculum, where appropriate;
- the results of any reevaluations;
- information about your child provided to, or by you, the parent(s);
- your child's anticipated needs; or
- other matters.

In order to do this, the IEP team should collect information which directly addresses the goals, objectives or benchmarks to assess progress. The present level of educational performance goals, objective services, placement, etc. can be revised to reflect the progress. The IEP should change as the needs of your child change.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** Contact your local branch of The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) if you need help or support.

*The International Dyslexia Association thanks Claire D. Nissenbaum and Harley A. Tomey III for their assistance in the preparation of this fact sheet.*

#### **Related Reading:**

- Antonoff, Stanley J., Olivier, James and Norlander, Karen, 1998. The "J" Book, Justice for All, Baltimore, MD: The International Dyslexia Association's *Orton Emeritus Series*.
- Bateman, Barbara D. and Linden, Mary Anne, 1998. Better IEPs: How to Develop Legally Correct and Educationally Useful Programs, 3rd Edition. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.



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