

Navigating the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Process Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is an Individualized Education Plan (IEP)?

A: An IEP is a legal document that outlines an educational program developed to meet a student's specific, individual needs. This plan is a mandate of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Q: What is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)?

A: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a federal education law that protects the rights of students with disabilities by ensuring every student receives a free appropriate public education (FAPE), regardless of ability. It was primarily designed to meet the needs of students who require special education services. Students may need special education services as a consequence of their disease process.

Q: What is meant by disabilities?

A: IDEA outlines 14 categories of disabilities. Most students will qualify under "other health impairment". Other health impairment means, "having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that –(i) Is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome; and (ii) Adversely affects a child's education performance."

Q: What is special education?

A: Special education is specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.

Q: What is the purpose of an IEP?

A: The IEP serves two purposes: the first is to set reasonable learning goals for a student, and the second is to outline the services and accommodations the school district will provide for the students.

Q: How does a student get an IEP?

A: This is a multistep process:

- Parents or guardians contact the child's teacher or other school professional to request their child be evaluated. This request may be verbal or in writing.
- The student is tested. Students must be evaluated in all areas related to the suspected disability and the evaluation results will be used to decide eligibility. If the parent or guardian disagrees with the evaluation, they have the right to take their student for an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE). They may ask that the school system pay for the IEE.
- Eligibility is then determined. Parents or guardians may ask for a hearing to challenge the eligibility decision.
- If the student is found eligible for services as defined by IDEA, he or she is eligible for

special education and related services. Within 30 calendar days after a child is determined eligible, the IEP team must meet to write an IEP for the student. The school is responsible for scheduling a meeting with the family.

Q: What is in an IEP?

A: All IEP's must contain:

- the student's present level of academic achievement
- how the student's disability affects his or her involvement and progress in the general curriculum
- annual goals for the student- what the parent or guardian, and the school team thinks he or she can reasonably accomplish in a year
- the special education and related services to be provided to the child and how much of the school day the child will be educated
- how (and if) the student is to participate in state and district-wide assessments
- when services and modifications will begin, how often they will be provided, where they will be provided, and how long they will last
- how school personnel will measure the student's progress toward the annual goals

Q: What are some example accommodations?

A: The student may be given extra time for class work, homework or tests, modification of assignments and workload, or the student may receive one-on-one instruction to help with comprehension.

Q: Who is involved in writing the IEP?

A: The student's parent or guardian, classroom teacher, special education teacher, guidance counselor, other key school staff/administrators and the student (if appropriate).

Q: Can I bring people to the IEP meeting?

A: Yes. You can bring other family members, a social worker, advocate, etc. who you think will be helpful in articulating your student's needs.

Q: How long does an IEP last?

A: The IEP team must review the child's IEP at least once a year.

Q: What do I do if I do not agree with part of the plan?

A: Your first option is to not sign the initial plan. In the event the agreed upon plan is not being carried out, you have the right to ask for an additional meeting. If at that meeting the issue is not resolved, you have the right to request due process hearing. These requests can be made at any time.

For more information on the Individualized Education Program Process, please visit

The US Department of Education: <http://www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/index.html>