

Preparing for Your Child's IEP Meeting

A “How-To” Guide

Collect and review documents

There are some basic documents you want to collect and review to prepare for an IEP meeting. It's likely that you already have all or most of them.

1. Review your child's current IEP before the meeting. What were his goals for this year and what services was he being provided to achieve them?
2. Look at your child's special education eligibility report. This is the form which you would have received the last time your child's special education eligibility was determined. It lists all the tests that were done to determine whether your child was eligible for services and in which disability category. If your child has had any testing done recently that isn't on the eligibility report, ask for copies of that new data so you can review it ahead of the meeting.
3. On a regular basis, your child's school has to give you a progress report on how well your child is doing towards meeting his annual IEP goals. You'll usually get the IEP progress reports when you receive your child's regular report card. Look at the progress reports. How has your child been doing this year? Has he been progressing as everyone hoped? If not, think about why not. Make a note to address any lack of progress at the IEP meeting.
4. Review your child's recent report cards. If he's not doing well, think about whether he may need any additional supports. Again, be prepared to bring up these concerns at your meeting.
5. Has your child taken any state standardized testing in the last year or so? If so, make sure you have and review those testing results. What do they say about his performance as compared to his peers in his grade level?
6. Pull out any work samples you've collected; what do they say about his mastery of the regular course of study and his IEP goals?
7. If your child has behavioral challenges, review any behavior data that might have been collected during the year or any disciplinary notices. If you think you're missing some disciplinary notices, ask the school to run a discipline report on your child.
8. Review attendance records. Has your child struggled with attendance this year and has it been impacting his school performance? His attendance should be noted on his transcript or you can ask the school to run an attendance report.

9. Finally, if your child sees any outside providers – physical therapists, mental health clinicians, or the like, it might be helpful to review any information they have regarding your child.

Collect information from people

Every day, at dinner or at bedtime or in the carpool, you've talked to your child about school. Now is the time to revisit some of the ideas and feelings he's shared with you. What does your child like AND dislike about school. What's easy for him? What's hard for him?

Talk to school staff. What insights do they have about how your child is doing in school? Don't focus just on his classroom teachers; talk to his guidance counselor and other school personnel for input.

Finally, if your child sees any outside providers like a physical therapist or a mental health clinician, that person might have her own thoughts on how your child is progressing in certain skill areas or thoughts on unaddressed school needs.

What is your child studying?

Take a look at the Alabama courses of study (sometimes referred to as content standards). You can find them in these locations on the web:

<http://alex.state.al.us/index.php>

<http://alex.state.al.us/ccrs/>

At these websites, you'll see the courses of study in all the subjects taught in Alabama, including math, English, science and social studies. Review the courses of study to get a general idea of what your child is expected to be able to learn in the coming school year. (If you don't have access to the internet, your child's school should have copies of the courses of study that you can review.)

Think about your child's achievement levels and abilities in relation to courses of study. Is there a gap between what he knows now and what he's expected to be able to do in the coming year? His IEP should be designed to eliminate or shrink that gap as much as possible. For example, what reading skills are second graders expected to learn? How prepared is your 1st grader to learn those specific skills when she returns to school in the fall? Where and how will he need to be supported? These are things that should be discussed at your child's IEP meeting.

Understand your Rights

If you have questions about your and your child's rights under the law, check out ADAP's on-line version of "Special Education: A Right not a Favor," located at:

http://adap.ua.edu/uploads/5/7/8/9/57892141/rnfcomplete_book.pdf

Big Picture Planning

As you're thinking about your child's schooling and how special education services can help him, remember that special education is about all of a child's needs.

Many parents believe the special education is just about academics. It's not. It's about all your child's disability-related needs and how they impact his schooling.

For example, perhaps your child has mobility issues which affect his ability to access school programming – that's something that should be addressed in his IEP.

Or, maybe he has behavior problems and he's getting suspended all the time. Or, he's interrupting the learning of others with his behavior. In either situation, those behavior problems should be addressed in his IEP.

One of the basic rules about special education is that your child must have access to the regular curriculum that children without disabilities are learning. So, if children in Alabama learn about Native American Indians in 4th grade Social Studies, your fourth grade student should be learning about them too.

Prep Steps

1. Prioritize your concerns going into the IEP meeting. What are the two or three most important things you want to accomplish in the IEP meeting? Focus on them. You don't want to go to the meeting with no ideas about what you want to see addressed. At the same time, you don't want to go to the meeting with a long, unfocused list of ideas.
2. Understandably, it's often difficult to actively participate in a meeting and take good notes. If that's true for you, consider taking a friend with you to be your note-taker. In the alternative, tape record meetings so you can refer back to the recording afterwards. Even if your child's school has a written policy against tape recording meetings, you are still entitled to do so if necessary to participate in the special education planning process.

3. Keep focused on the issues at the meeting, even if disagreements arise.
4. Check to see the IEP is filled in correctly and that it accurately represents what the IEP Team has decided. Ask for copies of any papers discussed at the meeting.
5. Your signature on an IEP shows you attended the meeting, not that you are agreeing with the content of the plan. If there are things about the IEP with which you don't agree, go ahead and sign the IEP. You can also note your disagreement on it somewhere but there is no legal requirement that you do so. In addition, request "Prior Written Notice" (sometimes called "Notice of Intent"). Whenever a school district proposes to initiate or change the identification, evaluation, or educational placement (including services) of your child, it must provide you with prior written notice of that action. The opposite is also true. Any time a district refuses to initiate or change any of these things (including in response to a request from you) it must give you written notice of its refusal. This notice must be provided to you a reasonable time before the school takes the action it's contemplating.
6. Don't let up after the IEP meeting. Review the IEP regularly to check on your child's progress on her goals and benchmarks. Note any problems you see and call for a meeting if you are concerned about a lack of progress. Check in with your student to make sure she is getting the services, aids, and accommodations agreed to in the IEP meeting.

Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program

Box 870395 Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0395

(205) 348 - 4928 (V) | (205) 348 - 3909 (Fax) | (800) 826 - 1675 (Toll-free)

adap@adap.ua.edu | <http://adap.ua.edu>