

# Chapter 2

## Writing your Child's Individualized Education Program (IEP)



### **What is an Individualized Education Program (IEP)?**

Think of an IEP as a blueprint of your child's education for a year. The IEP sets out goals that your child will work towards during the year. It lists the services the school system has committed to provide to help her achieve these goals. It also explains how the school will track her progress towards reaching these goals and how that progress will be reported to you.

### How can you, as a parent, make sure that the IEP Team writes an effective IEP for your child and that the school follows the IEP?

- Understand your role in the IEP process.
- Never stop learning about your child's disability and her school needs.
- Understand the rights you and your child have under state and federal law.
- Learn how to effectively share your knowledge and concerns about your child with the school system.

### Who writes my child's IEP?

Your child's IEP is written by a team of teachers and school personnel along with the person who knows her best - you!

An IEP Team is made up of the following persons:

- You - the child's parent(s).
- Your child, whenever appropriate. While your child may always attend an IEP meeting, if the purpose of an IEP meeting is to consider post-high school goals and transition services, the school must invite your child to the meeting. If she doesn't attend, the school must take other steps to ensure that her preferences and interests are considered by the Team in its IEP planning.
- Someone who represents the school district, called the Local Educational Agency (LEA) representative in the IDEA. This person must be able to provide or supervise the provision of special education services. She must also have knowledge of the general education program and the special education programs and services the district can provide your child. The LEA representative must have knowledge of the district's resources and have the power to commit those resources to support the IEP that is being developed by the Team. Often the LEA representative will be the district's special education coordinator, although the district may name another school employee.
- At least one of your child's special education teachers or related service providers.
- At least one of your child's general education teachers, if your child is, or may be, participating in the general education environment.
- Someone who can read, interpret and understand the results of tests and evaluations. This information will help the IEP Team write IEP goals and determine what supports and services your child will need to achieve her goals. Often, the district's psychologist or psychometrist will fill this role, but it may be filled by the LEA representative, special education teacher or provider, or the general education teacher depending on the experiences and credentials of the individuals.
- When post-secondary goals and transition services are to be discussed, the school must invite a representative of any other agency that is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services.



The IDEA specifically requires that the special education teacher (or related service provider) and the general education teacher who attend your child's IEP meeting must be her teachers - not just any special education- or general education teachers who are available during the time the IEP meeting is to take place.



Your child's IEP team must revise her IEP to address any lack of expected progress toward her annual goals and in the general education curriculum.

- However, the school must get your consent (or the consent of your child if she's 19 years or older) to do so.
- When children are transitioning out of Part C/Early Intervention (EI) services, a parent may request that a representative of the EI system be invited by the school to the initial IEP Team meeting. This EI staff member can help ensure the smooth transition of children from Part C/Early Intervention services to Part B/public school programming.
- Other people who you or the school choose to invite who have special knowledge that would help the IEP Team write your child's IEP: physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, vocational rehabilitation counselors, outside mental health professionals, parent advocates or others.

You are not required to notify the school district if you want to have someone like an outside expert or parent advocate accompany you to the IEP meeting. However, giving school districts the courtesy of knowing who might attend with you will help foster the spirit of collaboration that the IEP process needs to succeed. If an attorney is attending the IEP meeting with you, she must notify the school district so that the district has the opportunity to be represented by counsel as well.

#### When is my child's IEP written?

IEPs must be written at least annually. Typically, IEP meetings are held in the spring, at which time the next year's IEP is written.

However, this is not the only time that an IEP meeting may be held. Parents or school personnel should request an IEP meeting whenever they believe that the IEP needs to be reviewed or revised. One reason why you should review an IEP during the school year is if your child is not making progress on her IEP goals or is making progress in some areas, but not in others. Your child's IEP team must revise her IEP to address any lack of expected progress toward her annual goals and in the general education curriculum. Under Alabama law, the school must have a meeting within 30 calendar days of one being requested. (See the Appendix for a sample letter requesting an IEP meeting.)

If your child has been newly identified as eligible for special education services, an IEP meeting must be held to develop your child's initial IEP within 30 days of the eligibility decision.

#### Will I be notified about my child's IEP meeting?

The IDEA requires schools to give parents reasonable advance notice of the purpose, time, and place of the IEP meeting. This notice must also tell you who the school has invited to attend the meeting. The IEP meeting must be held at a time and place agreeable to both you and the school. If you cannot attend the actual IEP meeting, the school must find other ways to make sure that you participate in writing your child's IEP. For example, some school districts use conference calls to include parents in IEP meetings.



Your participation at an IEP meeting is so important that the school must make repeated and well-documented attempts to notify you of the meeting and to seek your agreement to attend before it may hold an IEP meeting without you.

### What happens at an IEP meeting?

Typically, the LEA representative leads the IEP meeting, but any member of the IEP Team may take on this role.

No matter who leads the meeting, parents are equal members of the IEP Team. If you have any questions, suggestions or comments - speak up! If you get overwhelmed or do not understand what is going on, say so.

The following is a general guide for what happens at an IEP meeting and what your child's IEP must include.

- **Introductions**  
IEP Team members introduce themselves and briefly state their role in the IEP process.
- **At least once a year, parents must be given a copy of the IDEA's procedural safeguards notice**  
The school must give you a handout that explains your rights under the IDEA. Make sure that you read the handout and ask questions if there is something you do not understand.
- **Develop the student profile**  
The IEP Team should first develop your child's student profile. The student profile should address your child's academic, functional, and developmental strengths and weaknesses, the results of recent tests or evaluations, and the results of state or district-wide tests or assessments.

It should discuss how your child's disability affects her involvement and progress in the course of study that children her age are typically learning and her involvement in school programming as a whole.

It should describe your child's personality, interests, and goals.

If you have any concerns about your child, those concerns should be noted in the profile.

- **Discuss transition plans**  
Transition plans and services are designed to help you, your child, the school, and other agencies plan for your child's move from the school setting to adult life in the community.

A transition plan must include appropriate measurable post-high school training/education, employment, and community and independent living goals.



The IEP meeting must be held at a time and place agreeable to both you and the school.



The development of a transition plan should be guided by your child's goals, interests, and dreams; therefore she must play a key role in the planning process.

For more information on transition planning see Chapter 3.

Your child's goals should be based on her interests and needs and the results of age-appropriate transition assessments. A transition plan must also note the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist your child in reaching those goals.

You, your child and the rest of the IEP Team have to consider many factors to do effective transition planning. Because so many post-high school goals are impacted by decisions related to your child's high school course of study, it's often useful to start transition planning at the IEP meeting held in the spring of your child's 8th grade year - right before she starts high school. However, the IDEA requires that your child's IEP Team must start transition planning when it is developing the IEP that will be in effect when your child turns 16.

Your child should take an active role in answering questions like these:

- What are the post-high school outcomes your child is seeking:
  - Will she attend college or a post-high school vocational school?
  - Will she work in supported employment or get a competitive job?
  - Will she live independently in the community, a group home, or continue to live at home?
- What coursework will she need to take to achieve her post-high school goals?
- What other learning experiences or training will she need in order to achieve the post-high school outcomes? Will she need assistance with such transition areas as: job placement, college supports, money management, personal management, living arrangements, transportation, medical needs, community participation and advocacy/guardianship?
- Will she need help from other agencies to carry out these plans?

The development of a transition plan should be guided by your child's goals, interests, and dreams; therefore she must play a key role in the planning process.

After drafting each transition goal, the IEP Team must describe the types of instruction and services that are necessary to reach the goal, including any necessary community experiences or job development components.

- **Describe your child's present level of academic and functional achievement - how is she doing now?**  
Everything that gets developed in your child's IEP - her annual goals, the special education and support services she's going to be provided, and her placement (where she's going to be taught) - depend on a good understanding of how your child is performing right now academically and functionally.

What are academic and functional skills? Academics are just what they sound like: the subject areas taught in schools like reading, writing, math, science, social studies, art, etc. Functional skills cover a broad range of needs like self-help skills, social/emotional skills, behavior, sensory skills, communication skills, mobility, and vocational skills. An IEP must address all areas of development that affect your child's school performance - both academic and functional.

It's important to write clear and thorough statements of your child's present level of academic and functional achievement. These statements are the foundation of the IEP.

Your child's present levels of achievement should be written in concrete terms that indicate the data or information being used. In describing how your child is doing, these statements should explicitly indicate your child's performance ability and not merely state something general like your child is performing "below grade level" or "on grade level." The information that could be used to determine your child's present level of achievement includes the results of classroom tests and assignments, evaluation information, statewide assessments, or observations made by you, your child's teachers and other school personnel. The statements should explain how your child's disability affects her involvement and progress in the general curriculum.

- **Focus on closing the gap between where your child is now and where she should be.**

How your child is doing right now needs to be viewed in relation to the expectations we have for children in her grade and at her age.

Let's say you have a child going into sixth grade. What are sixth grade students expected to be able to do by the end of the year in each of the state's required subject areas? Given what the Team knows about your child's present academic skills, what special education and support services does she need to help her achieve those grade level expectations **or** to make meaningful progress in closing the gap between her abilities and grade-level expectations?

These grade level expectations are laid out in Alabama's courses of study. These courses of study are broken down by subject and by grade and are available on the website of the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE). If you don't have access to the internet and want to review the courses of study, ask your school for help.

- **Develop goals - what should she be doing by the end of the school year?**

Once the IEP Team has determined your child's present levels of academic and functional performance, it will use this information to write appropriate annual goals for her.

Annual goals must be reasonable - given your child's present levels of achievement, can she reasonably accomplish the goals in one year?



The IEP should cover all areas of development that affect your child's educational performance.





Special education services are defined as the specially designed instruction that your child requires to address her individual needs.

Remember, IEP goals don't have to be limited to just traditional academic subjects. For instance, if your child's disability is affecting her behavior, the IEP Team should include behavior goals and strategies as well.

It is important that the goals be measurable so that your child's progress can be tracked by the school and reported to you. The goals should state a specific number or percentage increase that your child should improve during the school year. Goals like "improve in math" or "have fewer detentions" are not appropriate.

- **Develop benchmarks**

Benchmarks are the individual steps or milestones that your child is expected to reach as she works toward her annual goals. Generally, three or four benchmarks are written for each of your child's goals. Like the annual goal, these benchmarks must be measurable.

Under federal and state law, benchmarks are required only for students participating in the Alabama Alternate Assessment (AAA). Some school districts, under their own policies, require benchmarks for all children receiving special education services. Some districts leave it up to the IEP Team to decide whether benchmarks should be written for a child who is not participating in the AAA. Check your local board policies for more information, but benchmarks are an excellent way to monitor progress throughout the school year and it will only benefit your child to include them in the IEP.

- **Determine appropriate special education services**

Special education is defined as the specially designed instruction that your child requires to address her individual needs. In turn, specially designed instruction means adapting, as appropriate, the content, methodology, and delivery of instruction provided to a child.

Since each child is unique, specially designed instruction means education that is individually developed to address your child's needs that result from her disability.

- **Determine appropriate supplementary aids and services**

Supplementary aids and services are supports that are provided in general education classes or other education-related settings to facilitate your child's education. Some examples include the use of a para-professional, training for school personnel on matters related to your child's learning needs, assistive technology devices, or modifications to the regular curriculum. These aids and services must also address your child's ability to participate in extra-curricular activities. It is important to make sure that the supplemental aid is going to help your child in the long run.

- **Determine if program modifications are needed**

The regular general education curriculum may need to be modified to meet your child's needs. Once again, it is important that any modifications be for the long term benefit of your student and not merely to make it easier for your child or the teacher.

- **Discuss the need for accommodations**

Accommodations don't change what is being taught. Rather, they change how material is presented or tested. Some examples of accommodations include large print books, highlighted text, reformatting assessments, and special seating.

- **Determine appropriate related services**

Some children with disabilities need developmental, corrective, and other supportive services in order for them to be able to benefit from the special education programming they are receiving.

These services are called related services. Related services under the IDEA include, but are not limited to, such things as:

- Transportation
- Speech-language pathology and audiology services
- Interpreting services
- Psychological services
- Physical and occupational therapy
- Recreation (including therapeutic recreation)
- Social work services
- Individualized school nurse services
- Counseling services (including rehabilitation counseling)
- Orientation and mobility services
- Medical services (for diagnostic/evaluation purposes only)
- Early identification and assessment of disabilities

Related services do not include a medical device that is surgically implanted, or the replacement of such device.

Related services identified in your child's IEP cannot be denied or limited because they would be inconvenient or costly to a school district. If a district cannot provide the service itself, it must arrange for another agency or person to provide it. In either case, the service must be provided without charge to you.

- **Consider the need for assistive technology**

Assistive technology (AT) can help children with disabilities participate more independently in school and can help them access and progress in their coursework. AT can be low tech (ex. pencil grips) or high tech (ex. augmentative communication devices or touch screens).

An AT device is any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of a child with a disability. (The term does not include a medical device that is surgically implanted, or the replacement of such device.)

An AT service is any service that assists in helping select, obtain, or use an AT device for a child. AT services can include:



Advocate for a broad, varied and rigorous data collection program to get the best information possible on your child's progress on her IEP goals.



- Evaluating a child's AT needs
- Purchasing, leasing, or otherwise acquiring an AT device
- Selecting, designing, fitting, customizing, adapting, applying, maintaining, repairing, or replacing AT devices
- Coordinating and using other therapies, interventions, or services with AT devices
- Training for the student or her family on the AT device
- Training for school staff who interact with the child using the AT device

The IDEA requires each child's IEP team to consider whether she requires AT devices or services to receive a FAPE. AT devices or services must be considered for all students, not just students with certain disabilities.

If the IEP Team is uncertain if your child needs AT, the Team should pursue an AT evaluation to see whether your child would benefit from AT and, if so, what type of AT is appropriate. The school district is not required to provide a student with the best available AT device if there are other options available that will equally address the student's educational needs.

If an AT device is required by the student to ensure she receives a FAPE, the school must provide it at no cost to the student or her family. Further, parents cannot be required to use their insurance - public or private - to help offset the cost of the AT to the school.

- **Discuss the need for support for personnel**

The staff at your child's school may require special supports or training to assist them in meeting your child's unique and specific needs. For example, if the IEP Team determines your child requires an AT device, her teacher may need to be trained to use the device appropriately. Subject-content workshops (ex. on new reading instruction techniques) and training on the development of behavior intervention plans (BIPs) are other examples of personnel support that might need to be provided to school staff to ensure your child's IEP is correctly implemented. These personnel supports and/or teacher training should be written into your child's IEP.

- **Discuss how often your child's progress will be reported to you and how that progress will be measured**

The school must track and evaluate your child's progress towards reaching her IEP annual goals and report this information to you.

The IEP Team must identify how the school will collect information to assess your child's progress. Common ways to judge a child's progress on her IEP goals include using curriculum-based assessments (many are computer-based now), class tests, teacher observations, student grades, individualized data collection (ex. behavior charts etc.), state assessments or work samples.

Advocate for a broad, varied and rigorous data collection program to get the best information possible on your child's progress on her IEP goals.

You should receive these reports as often as parents of children without disabilities receive progress reports. Depending on your child's needs, receiving more reports may be appropriate.

Carefully monitor your child's progress on her IEP annual goals and benchmarks. A standard report card that reports letter grades in your child's different classroom subjects is not good enough - the reports must specifically reference your child's progress on her IEP goals so the IEP Team can make necessary adjustments in the IEP if it appears that she's not making adequate progress.

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## Health Services and Transportation as Related Services

School health services must be provided to your child if they are needed for her to benefit from special education. These services may be as simple as administering a prescription drug to your child or they may be as complicated as providing one-on-one nursing services to her for the entire school day. The health services must be able to be provided by a nurse or other qualified person.

Medical services that can only be provided by a physician do not have to be provided to your child except as needed as part of the evaluation and eligibility process. All health services agreed to by your child's IEP Team must be included in her IEP.

Transportation must be provided to your child if she needs it to benefit from the special education provided to her. Transportation services include:

- Travel to and from school and between schools (including travel to job sites for vocational training and job development opportunities included in your child's IEP)
- Travel in and around school buildings
- Specialized equipment (such as special or adapted buses, lifts, and ramps), if required to provide special transportation for a child with a disability.

If a school does not provide transportation to the general student population, the issue of transportation for students with disabilities must be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Neither the IDEA nor Section 504 impose a maximum travel time for students with disabilities, but your child's individual needs need to be considered.

It is illegal for school districts to schedule transportation for children with disabilities so that their school day is shorter than that of children without disabilities.



*Helena rides a specially equipped bus. Because of the bus schedule, by the time she arrives at school she misses 10 minutes of her first period class every day. In addition, she misses the breakfast served in the cafeteria under the school's federal nutrition program. School personnel bring breakfast to her in her classroom, further cutting into instructional time.*

*This schedule is illegal. Helena is entitled to the same amount of instructional time and access to programs like breakfast as a child without a disability.*



In order to be provided with FAPE, some children must receive special education services beyond Alabama's standard school day or school year.

- Discuss involvement in statewide and local assessments**  
If the IEP Team decides that your child needs accommodations to take statewide and local assessments, this information must be written into the IEP. This is very important, because even if your student receives accommodations in the classroom, if the IEP does not include them for state testing she will not get them.
- Discuss your child's involvement in non-academic and extracurricular activities**  
Your child may require supports in order for her to participate in non-academic and extra-curricular activities at her school - things like after-school clubs, field trips, marching band, and sports. The IEP Team must discuss any needed supports and note them in the IEP.
- Determine your child's placement - where will your child receive her education services?**  
The IDEA requires that your child attend school in her least restrictive environment (LRE). The LRE for your child is the school setting where she can successfully reach her IEP goals and, at the same time, be involved with students without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate.

LRE decisions are as individualized as every other part of the IEP - your child's unique needs determine her classroom placement.

When deciding on your child's LRE, the IEP Team must first consider whether she can reach her IEP goals, with appropriate supplementary aids and services, in a regular classroom in the school she would attend if she did not have a disability (i.e. her home school). While the IDEA does not mandate regular class placement for every child with a disability, it presumes it will be the **first** placement option that the IEP Team considers. Placement decisions must be based on your child's needs, and not on factors such as type of disability, the availability of special education and related services, the availability of space, or administrative convenience.

If the IEP Team decides your child cannot reach her IEP goals in a regular classroom, then the Team can look at more restrictive placements, always considering how additional supports could be provided to support your child to ensure her success in the lesser restrictive placement before moving on to more restrictive settings. Examples of other placements are: resource rooms or special education classrooms, a special education classroom in a separate school, a special education classroom in a private school, or a residential facility.

Your child's IEP must include an explanation as to why the Team decided upon a particular LRE placement and why your child could not be educated in her home school in a regular classroom.



- **Discuss extended school year services**

In order to be provided with FAPE, some children must receive special education services beyond Alabama's standard school day or school year. These services are called extended school year (ESY) services.

The most common time that ESY services are provided is over your school's summer vacation but, depending on your child's needs, ESY services may be necessary over shorter breaks.

One factor that may be used to determine your child's eligibility for ESY services is a regression/recoupment (R/R) standard. Under this standard, the IEP Team considers whether your child will lose skills related to her IEP goals over a school break (regression). Then, the Team determines whether it will take an unreasonable amount of time after the break for her to get those skill levels back to where they were when the break began (the recoupment period). If the recoupment period would be unreasonably long, then your child is eligible for ESY services. However, any decision regarding your child's right to FAPE must be individualized according to her needs and circumstances. Thus, it may be inappropriate to use a single criterion like R/R to determine your child's eligibility for ESY. There may be other factors unique to your child that the Team should consider when determining her need for ESY services.

Often, school personnel will simply comment, without a meaningful review, that your child doesn't need ESY. This is inappropriate. The IEP Team should explore your child's need for ESY services early and regularly every school year and devise a plan for how it is going to determine her need for the services. If you believe your child may need ESY, keep notes on any regression or other problems you notice with your child as a result of weekend, holiday, or summer breaks and share this information with the Team. Discuss with the Team how it should review your child's eligibility for ESY given her unique learning needs.

ESY services must be provided at no cost to you. They must be as individualized to your child's needs as any other IEP service; schools may not unilaterally limit the type, amount, or duration of the services.

All the due process protections which apply to the regular school year program apply to the ESY program. For this reason, discussions about ESY services should occur early enough in the school year so that you have enough time to resolve disputes prior to the start of school breaks.

- **Sign the IEP**

When you sign the IEP, you are recording your attendance and participation in the IEP Team meeting. Sometimes, parents do not agree with the IEP and do not want to sign it for fear their signature will be interpreted as a stamp of approval. If you choose not to sign the IEP, the district may still note your participation at the meeting on the form. Some parents sign the form and make a notation next to their name or in an



Once a year, your child's school must provide you a copy of the procedural safeguards available to you as a parent of a child with a disability under the IDEA.



You have a right to one IEE at public expense each time your child's school conducts an evaluation with which you disagree.

attachment that explains their position regarding the IEP. Signing it and noting your concerns leaves a record of your active participation in the process.

### **Do all IEP team members always have to attend an IEP meeting? If my child's IEP needs to be revised during the school year, can it be changed without having a meeting?**

When the IDEA was rewritten in 2004, Congress sought to streamline the IEP meeting process by allowing Team members to be excused from meetings under certain circumstances and by allowing changes to be made to an IEP without the benefit of a meeting.

An IEP Team member is not required to attend an IEP Team meeting if you and the school agree in writing that her attendance isn't necessary because her area of the curriculum (or related services) isn't being changed or discussed in the meeting.

A Team member also may be excused from attending an IEP Team meeting even when the meeting involves a modification to that Team member's area of expertise. However, the Team member may be excused only with your written consent. Prior to obtaining your permission, the Team member must submit her written input regarding the development of the IEP to the IEP Team, including you. If you aren't satisfied with the provided information, you don't have to consent to the Team member's excusal.

Once you've had an annual IEP Team meeting for a school year, you and your child's school mutually may decide to make changes to your child's IEP without convening an IEP meeting. If changes are made to your child's IEP without a meeting of the Team, the school must obtain your written agreement to such changes and must ensure your child's IEP Team is informed of those changes. You must be provided with a revised copy of the IEP with the incorporated changes.

You should carefully consider any request to have Team members excused from meetings, or to have changes made to an IEP without a meeting. Will the IEP meeting accomplish what you want it to accomplish without the presence of all the Team members? Do you understand what changes are being proposed, or do you want to meet in person at an IEP meeting to discuss them? If you are uneasy about such requests, you can refuse to give your written consent.

### **May I audio or video tape my child's IEP meeting?**

The IDEA does not address the use of audio or video recordings at an IEP meeting and Alabama law leaves it up to an individual school district to decide whether IEP meetings may be recorded.

However, if a school has a policy that prohibits or limits the use of recording devices at IEP meetings, the policy must provide for exceptions if the recordings are necessary to ensure that a parent understands the IEP or the IEP process.

Any recording of an IEP meeting that is maintained by the district becomes part of the child's education record within the meaning of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and would be subject to the confidentiality requirements of FERPA and the IDEA.

### How are draft IEPs used?

Parents and schools often find it helpful to share ideas and information, either verbally or in writing, before the IEP meeting takes place so that the actual meeting is more focused and productive.

Since writing a good IEP takes time, creativity and teamwork, these efforts at sharing and brainstorming can be tremendously useful. Some school districts use questionnaires, asking parents to note any particular concerns or suggestions they might have regarding services for the upcoming school year. These responses are then shared with the school members of the IEP Team so they can think about them before the meeting.

Sometimes, parents or school members of the IEP Team will draft a proposed IEP and use it at the meeting as a point for discussion. If a draft IEP is used, make sure you still discuss and understand every section. Parents should not feel pressured into accepting a draft as the final IEP. You should feel comfortable discussing and making changes to a draft at an IEP meeting.

### Who will receive a copy of my child's IEP?

The school must give you a copy of the IEP. Usually, you will get a copy at the end of the IEP meeting or by mail soon after. It's better to leave the meeting with a copy, even if it's in rough form. Many IEPs are filled out on a computer as the meeting occurs. It is very easy to have the school print a copy for you at the conclusion of the meeting. This will allow you to review the IEP right after the meeting when the discussions are fresh in your mind and to follow up with the school quickly if you have any concerns about its contents.

Keep the IEP handy and refer to it regularly to check on how the school is following it and how your child is progressing with her goals and benchmarks.

Since your child's IEP is part of her educational record, access to it at the school will be restricted. However, anyone at your child's school who will work or have contact with your child must understand the role she plays in helping your child reach her IEP goals and must have access to the IEP.

### How should I prepare for my child's IEP meeting?

Although you may feel that you have little to contribute in an IEP meeting, and may see yourself as an amateur and school personnel as professionals, you play a vital role in writing your child's IEP.

Below are some suggestions for how you can prepare for and participate in your child's IEP meeting.

#### Before the IEP meeting

- Keep a file or notebook of all of your child's educational records. Things to include:



Before the IEP meeting keep a file or notebook of all of your child's educational records.





After the IEP meeting check to see that the IEP is filled in correctly and that it accurately represents what the IEP Team decided.

- IEPs, progress reports and report cards, grade transcripts, standardized test scores, disciplinary notices
  - Reports of evaluation results by the school and private evaluators
  - Meeting notices, rights forms or other official forms
  - Copies of letters or e-mails you write and receive about your child
  - Names, addresses, and phone numbers of persons you talk to about your child
  - Dates of visits and phone calls, and subjects discussed
- Visit your child's classroom.
  - Make a list of all the things you would like to see in your child's IEP. Include skills you would like to see your child learn or behaviors you would like to see improve.
  - Make a list of things you observe about your child at home: interests, responsibilities, self-care skills.
  - Ask your child how she feels about school, what she likes and dislikes.
  - Make a list of questions you want to ask about your child's IEP.
  - Get a copy of the IDEA's procedural rights notice and read through it. If there is something that you do not understand, ask the school to explain it to you at, or before, the IEP meeting.
  - Ask a relative or friend to go to the IEP meeting if it would make you feel more confident to have someone with you.
  - Review your child's current IEP to see how far she has come towards reaching her annual goals. Note both successes and failures so the team may be able to discover what is and is not working for your student.
  - Read the suggestions made by the people who tested or evaluated your child. If there is something that you do not understand, ask about it at the IEP meeting.
  - Learn about the roles of the IEP Team members and their relationship to your child. It is unlikely that all of your student's teachers will attend the meeting. This does not prevent them from providing input. Talk with them about their recommendations.

### During the IEP meeting

- Discuss your child's educational and life goals. Involve your child as appropriate to her age. At least by the time she's 16 years old, your child should attend her IEP meetings so she can participate in transition planning. Given your child's needs, it may be appropriate for her to start attending earlier.
- Have the school explain the results and recommendations from any tests or evaluations conducted on your child.
- Speak up! Don't be afraid to disagree or ask questions.