

# Participating in Your Child's Individual Education (IEP) Program Meeting

As the parent /guardian of a child with special education needs, you are a valuable, in fact the most valuable, person on the team. As such you should learn how to assist the other team members in making the IEP process effective in obtaining appropriate.

## What is an IEP?

Federal (The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, i.e. IDEA) and state law mandate a free appropriate education for all children with special education needs, from ages three to up to 21 years of age. The IEP document is the written record of your child's services aimed to provide that free appropriate education. You, as the parent, know your child better than anyone else. Therefore, your input during the IEP process is essential and invaluable.

State and federal law require a written IEP be developed and reviewed at least annually to meet your child's unique education needs.

The IEP is developed at a specific meeting, with attendance and participation of:

- The parents of the child
- Not less than one regular education teacher of the child (if the child is, or may be, participating in the regular education environment);
- Not less than one special education teacher of the child, or where appropriate, not less than one special education provider of the child;
- A representative of the public agency (referred to as the LEA) who
  - Is qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities;
  - Is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum; and
  - Is knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the public agency.
- An individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results, who may be a member of the team described above
- At the discretion of the parent or the agency, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child, including related services personnel as appropriate; and
- The child with a disability if appropriate,
  - For a transition meeting (at least in the year the child will turn 16 years old) the child must be invited in writing
  - Transition services are consideration of the postsecondary goals for the child and the transition services needed to assist the child in teaching those goals

A valid and well written IEP should consist of:

- A statement of your child's present educational performance level.
- Annual goals for your child in the identifies areas of need and based on what can be reasonably achieved in a year's time
- Specific educational services to be provided – again based on what his/her needs are, example: instruction in reading comprehension or instruction in math reasoning
- Specific related/supportive services to be provided based – such as speech therapy
- Projected date and duration of all services

- The extent, if any, of your child's participation in the regular education program of the school.
- The extent, if any, of your child's participation in the summer program (ESY)
- Appropriate criteria, evaluation procedures, and the schedules for determining annually (at least), whether instructional goals have been achieved.

The IEP can be implemented in a variety of ways – determined by the IEP team

- A regular class in a public school, with appropriate supportive/related services.
- A special class in a public school, with appropriate supportive/related services
- A special public school (Ex: The School for the Deaf and Blind)
- A special education program in private day or residential school which meets state standards (if this is needed to meet your child's educational needs).
- A special home or hospital program if your child is absent from school more than two consecutive weeks.
- A special education program in a state residential facility.

## AT THE IEP MEETING

- Invite others to come with you. It is common for parents to feel overwhelmed and alone when confronted with a room full of professionals discussing their child
- The meeting should begin with introductions and an explanation of your procedural safeguards
- The IEP should start with a report on how well your child is doing and where the areas of need are. Ask questions, especially if you really don't understand what is being said. You have the right to clear explanations in “normal” words and language.
- Listen with an open mind, taking special note of important points raised at the meeting.
- If you would like, pass around a sign-in sheet so you have the names and positions of everyone at the meeting.
- If you cannot come to an agreement, are running out of time, or need time to consider the situation, you have the right to request another meeting. Do not feel pressured to make a decision on the spot. Know that the District can do the same for the same reasons.
- If you disagree with an evaluation that was presented by the school personnel, you have the right to request an independent evaluation through the special education director. The director will give you parameters of the evaluation
- Neither Federal nor state law require that you sign the IEP.
- Ask for a copy of the IEP
- An IEP has to be held at least annually, but can be held more if there is a need and a request to do so.