



Attending Meetings to Plan Your Child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Parents of children with disabilities can prepare for special education IEP planning meetings using the following tips.

Before the IEP planning meeting:

- Review the meeting notice. Who is invited?¹ What is the purpose of the meeting?
- Consider the future and present year visions you have for your child
- List your child’s strengths, needs, and interests. The school needs to know your child’s interests and activities and what your child is like at home and in the community.
- List your major concerns about your child’s education
- Consider how you think your child’s disability affects their education
- Think about your child’s educational progress.² What has been working and what has not?
- Request a written copy of your child’s current evaluation results or a meeting with school staff to discuss the evaluation before the IEP meeting; take this opportunity to understand the evaluation before the IEP planning for your child
- Consider the evaluation results. Look for recommendations of the services or accommodations your child needs.
- Consider a variety of ways to involve your child in planning his or her IEP; it’s important to help your child develop self-advocacy skills starting at a young age³. Invite your child to the meeting if appropriate.
- If you think it might be helpful, you may invite someone to go with you to the meeting such as a spouse, relative, friend, or representative from a local disability organization; inform the school that you have done so. Invite your son or daughter to the meeting if appropriate.
- Make a list of your priorities and concerns before the meeting. Define the issue clearly in your own mind. You may want to share your list with your child’s IEP case manager and ask that your items be included on the agenda.⁴

At the IEP planning meeting:

This meeting is very important. You, the school staff, and any other persons attending the meeting will review and discuss information about your child. It provides an excellent opportunity to ask questions and share important insights about your child whom you know better than anyone else does.

- Make sure others at the meeting never forget that the meeting is about a real child; remember that diagnostic tests and assessments do not present the total picture
- Share your visions for your child, both short-term and long-term
- Discuss your child’s strengths and needs and your concerns about your child’s education

¹ For information on who must be on your child’s IEP team see <https://www.PACER.org/parent/guide-to-iep/introduction.asp>

² See “How Will I Know if My Child is Making Progress?” at <https://www.PACER.org/parent/php/php-c78.pdf>

³ See “How Can My Child Be Involved in the IEP Process” at <https://www.PACER.org/parent/php/PHP-c77.pdf>

⁴ Consider using the “IEP Team Meeting Planner” at <https://www.PACER.org/parent/php/PHP-c184.pdf>

- When you believe that the teacher and school personnel are doing a good job, tell them so; praise, when deserved, is a great thing
- Be a good listener; ask questions
- Make sure you understand; if you don't understand something, ask to have it explained in a way that you can understand
- Expect that what you know about your child will be used in making decisions
- Use school data, your child's progress reports, and other information you know about your child to help make decisions

After the IEP planning meeting:.....

- Take the proposed IEP document home to review or ask that a copy be sent to you. You probably will not want to agree to a proposed IEP before you've actually reviewed it; you have 14 calendar days from the time the IEP is sent or given to you to agree or disagree with the program in writing, and return the consent form to the school.
- Your child's IEP must be reviewed at least yearly to determine whether the annual goals have been achieved and to revise the IEP if necessary
- You must be informed regularly about your child's progress, at least as often as parents who have children without disabilities are informed about the progress their children are making. You will be informed about whether your child is making progress toward meeting the IEP goals, and whether the progress is enough to reach the goals. If your child is not making adequate progress, an IEP meeting should be held to review the IEP and make needed changes.
- When you have concerns, you may request another IEP meeting

Finally, keep in mind that teamwork creates better outcomes for children. You are the expert on your child and the school has expertise in education. Together you can help your child succeed in school.⁵

⁵ For more communication tips, request a copy of "Working Together: A Parent's Guide to Parent and Professional Partnership and Communication Within Special Education" from PACER Center