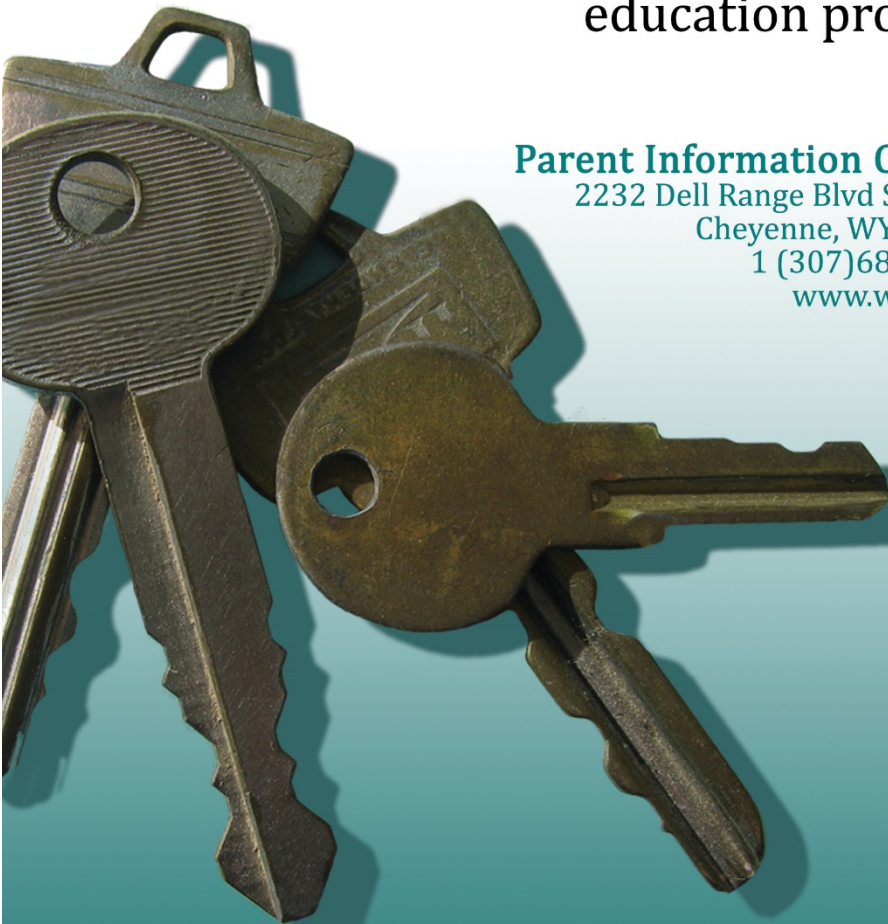


Keys...

to confident & effective parent
participation in the special
education process

Parent Information Center

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www.wpic.org



A Handbook for
Wyoming Families

Revised September 2020

The Parent Information Center (PIC)

serves parents of children with disabilities, ages birth through 26. The project is funded by a grant from the United States Department of Education. PIC provides:

▶ Information . . .

consultation, support and referral on an individual basis about resources across the state. We help with questions parents might have concerning educational needs of their child and attend IEP meetings with families.

▶ Workshops . . .

on parents' rights under special education law, the IEP process and other disability issues presented, at no cost, to families in communities across the state upon request by electronic webinars or in person.

▶ Resources . . .

and publications with fact sheets on parenting and education topics of concern and specific disabilities, an extensive lending library of books and DVDs on disability subjects available for lend to families at no cost, a statewide newsletter twice a year and a monthly electronic (e-news) newsletter.

▶ Networking . . .

with families across the state and nation to connect them to other resources, and state and national organizations.

Dear Reader,

You may have heard the saying “making the decision to have a child - it is momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body” and it is with that thought in mind that we hope this booklet provides information, support and guidance in how to help navigate through the world of special education.

Before becoming a parent – I was absolutely sure the trials and tribulations and potential pitfalls of parenthood would not happen to me! After all, I was involved in early intervention as a teacher, home visitor and preschool director. Now, 19 years later and the parent of three, I can confidently say that we all experience a journey that takes us down paths we did not expect. Part of my journey has been as the parent of a child with a disability. Sitting on the other side of the table while we discussed strengths and challenges, goals and progress, evaluations and outcomes and developed an Individual Education Program (IEP) has been an experience that can be hard to understand unless one has walked in those same shoes.

As parents, we want to have the best and be the best for our kiddos. We know the days are long, but the years can feel short! Enjoy your time, make amazing memories, build on your strengths and skills as the amazing parent you are and remember, we all need a village.

Best wishes and warm regards,

*Erin Swilling
Executive Director and parent of three
Parent Information Center*

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Introduction

Raising children is challenging in the best of circumstances. For a family with a child who has disabilities, the challenges can be overwhelming. Having accurate information and knowledge about services and resources, and support from another parent can be the key to allowing families to participate as confident, effective partners in their child's special education program, as well as other life activities.

Families who have children with disabilities are first of all families -- they face the same stresses that other families face -- plus the additional ones related to their child's disability. In order to be their child's best advocate, families need information. They need to know about their child's rights, and about their own protections and responsibilities, under special education law, and they need problem-solving skills and support. This booklet is an overview of the information families need to be strong advocates for their children.

For the purpose of clarity, "parent" in this booklet refers to any adult who has guardianship or responsibility for a child i.e. foster parent, grandparent, extended family (sibling, aunt, uncle, etc.), court appointed guardian, educational surrogate parent, etc.

Remember

You know the most about your child. You can contribute important information to your child's educational plan. As your child's parents/family, you are the most important and consistent people in your child's life. You can be the key to an effective and appropriate educational program for your child, as well as to his or her happy and successful future.



Early Intervention

Special services for infants, toddlers, and young children

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is made up of multiple parts: Part C which provides services for infants and toddlers, ages birth thru 2, and Part B for the preschoolers, children and youth, ages 3 to 21. The preschool population (3-5) is sometimes referred to as *Part B-619* or "*baby B*" to distinguish it from services provided by the local school district once children have transitioned to school at age 5 or 6 thru 21.

Wyoming's system for providing early intervention services to infants, toddler, and preschoolers with disabilities, birth through five years old, is through fourteen regional child developmental centers (see page 6).

This parent handbook will focus on Part B of the IDEA covering services and support to children ages 3 years old to 21. The Parent Information Center has a parent handbook, called "***Baby Steps***," which is specific to Part C services under the IDEA for infants and toddlers age birth thru 2. Please call PIC if you are looking for information on early intervention as it relates to Part C services at (307) 684-2277. Another great resource is the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center at <http://www.ectacenter.org>.

As parents, we all notice things like how soon our baby smiles, sits up, rolls over, walks, talks, etc. Most children seem to develop these skills naturally by doing, watching, and learning from others. The five primary developmental areas are:

1. Physical development- ability to move, see, hear
2. Communication development- ability to relate, understand others and express needs
3. Social & emotional development-ability to relate to others & express feelings
4. Adaptive development- ability to eat, dress, & take care of themselves (self-help)
5. Cognitive development- ability to think, learn, reason and problem-solve

While all children grow and develop at their own rate, some children experience delays in one or more areas of development. If you have questions about your child's development, there are things you can do.

1. Check with your physician or public health nurse. They should be able to help you determine if your child has delays.
2. Information on developmental milestones for all children is also available on the Parent Education Network's (PEN) website at <http://www.wpen.net> under the Early Learning tab, or call (307) 684-2277 for a copy of the developmental milestones chart.
3. If there are development concerns, contact the regional child development center (these centers are listed at the end of this section on page 6).
 - ▶ Someone on the CDC staff will arrange a meeting with you and your child. This is likely to be the family service coordinator at the regional child development center.
 - ▶ They will set up a screening to look at all of your areas of concern and other areas. The screening and/or evaluation will occur at no cost to your family and can happen only with your permission.
 - ▶ Parents can plan for the screening /evaluation by writing down their questions, concerns, and by being ready to share information about their child's development from medical records, baby book, growth chart, etc.
 - ▶ After the evaluation, parents and other members of the team will discuss the results. If there are areas of delay, your child may be eligible for early intervention services under Part B of the IDEA.

For more information on the statewide system of regional child development centers, contact the Wyoming Department of Health - Behavioral Health Division – Early Intervention and Education Program at: <https://health.wyo.gov/behavioralhealth/early-intervention-education-program-eiep/screen-for-success/> or call (307) 777-6972.

Parents have the choice to accept early intervention services or not. If parents decide to seek services for their child, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) will be developed for children ages 3 through 5.



Remember

Parents and family members are an integral part of the team that develop the IEP

The IEP lets parents help decide how early intervention services can help their child and how the services will be delivered.

All children need the chance to make friends with other children their age. The IDEA encourages the child development centers in Wyoming to give children the opportunity to spend time with other children, with and without disabilities, so they can build a circle of friends.

All children receiving special education services and supports- no matter where they receive their program- have the right to spend at least part of the day with children who do not have disabilities. The least restrictive environment for preschool children can be achieved in different ways, some of which might be:

- ▶ Center based-preschool program at the local child development center that include children with and without disabilities,
- ▶ Preschool program in a regular elementary school,
- ▶ Preschool program operated by other private or public agencies (i.e. Head Start or Early Head Start program).

When your child is nearing age five, it is important to discuss “transition” with the child development center so that the transition of your child from developmental services into kindergarten and the public-school system can go smoothly.

Find PIC’s parent booklet on *Transition to Kindergarten* on our website at www.wpic.org .

Empowering Yourself as a Parent... Knowledge Counts!

Your child will learn a variety of new skills as he or she moves through early intervention and preschool services and supports. As a parent, you will also gain knowledge about yourself, your child, and the educational opportunities and services available in Wyoming. The more information you gather and learn, the more power and control you have to shape your child’s educational future.

As a parent of a child with a disability and /or special health care need, you can become empowered in a couple of ways:

1. Contacting national and state disability groups for more information about your child's disability
2. Reading about special education services, disabilities, other family topics and using your local resources, like the lending library at the Parent Information Center Call (307) 684-2277)
3. Asking questions of the professionals and teachers who work with your child
4. Keeping careful records of your child's medical and educational history
5. Participating in parent training workshops and opportunities

When you do not agree with a service or support the regional development center is providing your child, there are steps you can take. The Wyoming Department of Health: Behavioral Health Division – Developmental Disabilities provides an effective and timely method for investigating and resolving complaints regarding the denial of early intervention services and other violations of federal and state rules and regulations governing services for infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

Families who have a dispute should try to resolve the issue with the local child development program. If this does not work, they should contact the Part C Coordinator at (307) 777-5246 or the Part B Coordinator at (307) 777-8762 at the State Behavioral Health Division, Early Intervention and Education Program.



Regional Child Development Centers

Region I (Park, Big Horn Washakie & Hot Springs County) (307) 587-1331
Children's Resource Center

Region II (Sheridan & Johnson Counties) (307) 672-6610
Child Development Center

Region III (Weston & Crook Counties) (307) 746-4560
Weston County Children's Center

Region IV (Teton & Sublette Counties) (307) 733-1616
The Learning Center

Region V (Lincoln & Uinta Counties) (307) 782-6602
Lincoln-Uinta Child Development Association

Region VI (Fremont County) (307) 332-5508
Child Development Services of Fremont County

Region VII (Sweetwater County) (307) 875-0268
Sweetwater County Child Developmental Center

Region VIII (Carbon County) (307) 324-9656
Project Reach

Region IX (Natrona County) (307) 235-5097
Child Development Center of Natrona Co, Inc.

Region X (Converse, Niobrara, Goshen & Platte Counties) (307) 836-2751
Wyoming Child & Family Development, Inc.

Region XI (Albany County) (307) 742-6374
Developmental Preschool & Day Care Center

Region XII (Laramie County) (307) 632-2991
Stride Learning Center

Region XIII (Campbell County) (307) 682-2392
Children's Developmental Services of Campbell Co

Region XIV (Wind River Reservation) (307) 332-3516
Early Intervention Program Shoshone & Arapahoe Tribes

School Age Students

If you feel your child is having trouble in school there are steps you should follow.


- ▶ **Building Intervention Team (BIT) or Building at Risk Team (BART):** If your child is having a problem at school, discuss it with his or her teacher. Perhaps some simple accommodations can solve the problem. Some examples of accommodations which can be made are: allowing additional time for tests; adjusting assignment size; teaching study skills; adjusting the student's schedule; peer tutoring; and/or using a behavior intervention plan. A group of teachers and possibly administrators will meet to brainstorm possible accommodations that may be helpful. Every district is required to have some type of team that looks at students who are struggling in some way or other, and are "at risk" of not doing well in school. The names of these teams vary from school district to school district.

They also might refer you to a pyramid of services that might be called the **Multi-Tiered System of Support** or **MTSS**. This system walks students through different levels of interventions and supports, depending on their need, and prior to being referred for a special education evaluation. It is important to know your district's system and programs. Continue to ask them to explain all their programs to you.

No matter what the name, this intervention team is a function of regular education - meaning they are to support all students who might be at risk for achieving academic success. ***The strategies and interventions decided on by these teams are the step before referral to special education.***

Remember

A "Prior Written Notice- Consent for Evaluation" form must be signed by parents (or guardians) before a child can be evaluated.

- 
- ▶ **Referrals:** If you feel that the problem is not being solved, even with the interventions, you should request that your child be referred for an evaluation to see if he qualifies for special education supports and services. **It is best to put the request in in writing.** List your concerns, be specific about the problems your child is having in school, and request that your child be referred for evaluation. Once you request the evaluation, you will also need to sign a form giving consent to evaluate. The school will not be able to proceed without this signed form. Ask them for the proper form to sign.
 - ▶ **Evaluation:** This is the process of gathering and interpreting information about your child and should be done by members of a multidisciplinary team. This team should include parents, teachers, special educators, therapists, and psychologists, etc. They will look at the five areas that might affect learning. These five areas are:
 1. Physical--health history, vision and hearing, fine and gross motor skills
 2. Communication--speech production, expressive and receptive language
 3. Social/Emotional skills--the way the child interacts with others at school, home & in the community
 4. Intellectual--the child's reasoning, judgment, memory, attending skills, perceptual and adaptive abilities
 5. Educational--achievement in math, reading and language, rate and style of learning, developmental levels and self-help skills

Checklist of parent's role in the evaluation process

Parents:

1. Must be notified before an evaluation is performed, and have the right to grant or refuse permission to have their child evaluated;
2. May offer their own information and observations to the evaluation process;
3. After consent for evaluation form is signed, the evaluation must be completed within 60 days; If the request is denied, parents must be informed of the reasons for denial;
4. May see and obtain copies of evaluation data and all other information in a child's school records;
5. Must have a qualified staff person explain test results;

6. May refuse any special education services and supports
7. Request an independent educational evaluation (IEE) if they disagree with the school's evaluation results. The IEE should meet the required agency criteria of the district and there should be no cost to parents.
8. If the school does not agree and parents still feel the independent evaluation is necessary, parents must pay, or go to due process to have the school provide an independent educational evaluation.
9. The results of an independent evaluation may be placed in the child's school records and should be considered when planning the child's educational program.

Remember

**No single test can assess a child.
No single person can evaluate- it is a team effort.
Parents must have input into this process.**

If your child is found to be eligible for special education services, he/she must meet eligibility criteria under one of the following categories:

- ▶ Autism Spectrum Disorder
- ▶ Cognitive Disability
- ▶ Deaf/Blindness
- ▶ Developmental Delay (age 3 through age 9 in Wyoming)
- ▶ Emotional Disability
- ▶ Hearing Impairment, including deafness
- ▶ Multiple Disabilities
- ▶ Orthopedic Impairment
- ▶ Other Health Impaired
- ▶ Specific Learning Disability
- ▶ Speech or Language Impairment
- ▶ Traumatic Brain Injury
- ▶ Visual Impairment, including Blindness

If a child is determined to be eligible for special education services a meeting will be held to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP).



Your Child's Rights

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 2004 guarantee all students with disabilities between the ages of 3 and 21 the right to a free, appropriate public education designed to meet each student's individual needs. There are six principles under IDEA that guarantee the rights of children with disabilities and their families.

1. Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

- ▶ Free -- at no cost to parents
- ▶ Appropriate -- suited to the individual needs of the child
- ▶ Public -- provided or paid for by, the public school system
- ▶ Education (including non-academic and extracurricular activities) -- what this law is all about!

2. Appropriate Evaluation

- ▶ Evaluators must be knowledgeable and trained.
- ▶ A variety of instruments and procedures must be used to gather relevant functional, developmental and academic information about the student- including information provided by the parent.
- ▶ No single person, no single test makes the decision for your child. All decisions are team decisions.
- ▶ Assessments must be selected and administered so they are not discriminatory on a racial or cultural basis.
- ▶ Assessments and other measures must be valid and reliable.
- ▶ Child must be assessed in all areas of suspected disability.

3. Individualized Education Program

- ▶ The term "individualized education program" or "IEP" means a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed and revised according to the law.

4. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

- ▶ The spirit and intent of LRE is that children with disabilities are most appropriately educated with students who do not have disabilities.
- ▶ Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment should occur only when the nature or severity of a child's disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.
- ▶ School districts must ensure that consideration has been given to the full range of supplementary aids and services that could be provided to the student in the regular educational environment to accommodate the unique needs of the student with a disability, before moving the student into some place rather than the regular education environment.
- ▶ The student must be educated in the school that he or she would attend if nondisabled unless the services in the IEP cannot feasibly be provided in this setting.

5. Parent and Student Participation in Decision Making

Ways in which parents participate:

- ▶ Give consent for initial evaluation for eligibility and placement of their child.
- ▶ Provide information about their child during evaluations.
- ▶ Be part of the team who make the decision as to eligibility.
- ▶ Be part of the team that decides educational placement.
- ▶ Provide informed consent for reevaluation.
- ▶ Participate in **all** meetings with respect to evaluation, identification, educational placement in the provision of FAPE to their child.
- ▶ Receive progress reports and participate in the revision of the IEP.
- ▶ Notify the public agency if they intend to remove their child from the public school and place him or her in a private school at public expense or if they intend to file for a state complaint or for a due process hearing.



Ways in which student participates:

- ▶ Helps to design the IEP.
- ▶ Expresses preferences and interests, particularly during transition planning (transition service needs must be included in the IEP at age 16 -- the student must be included in the transition planning).
- ▶ At age 18, parent's rights transfer to the child as an adult.

6. Procedural Safeguards


As the parent of a child who may receive special education, you have certain rights and protections, which are guaranteed by the IDEA. The rights include:

- ▶ **Prior written notice** -- must be in your native language and provided to you a reasonable time before the school district proposes, refuses to initiate, or changes the identification, evaluation, educational placement or provision of a free appropriate education to your child.
- ▶ **Informed parent consent** -- you must be fully informed of all information relevant to the activity for which consent is sought, understand, and agree to the carrying out of the activity, and that written consent is voluntary and may be revoked at any time.
- ▶ **Revocation of Consent** -- Sometimes parents decide that they no longer want their child to receive special education and related services. Before making this final decision, it is important to weigh all the pros and cons and remember that revoking special education services is your right as a parent. However, it also means that the protection and considerations granted under IDEA no longer apply.

If you decide to revoke services, the school must send you written notice as soon as the special education services have ended and your child's program changes. If, at a later time, you decide that you would rather have kept your child in Special Education, they will have to go back through the referral and evaluation process to determine eligibility.

Also, if you revoke consent for special education and related services after the initial provision of those services to your child, the school district is not required to amend your child's education records to remove any references to special education.

- ▶ **Access to all educational records** – you have the right to inspect, review and receive copies of all educational records with respect to the identification, evaluation and education placement of your child. Families also have the right to review records without any unnecessary delay and prior to any meeting regarding an IEP or hearing relating to the identification, evaluation or placement of your child. This must happen no later than 45 days after you request to see the records.
- ▶ **Evaluation Procedures** – you have the right to a full and individual evaluation of your child’s educational needs prior to initial placement in special education. Your child should be assessed in all areas of suspected disability, and the evaluation must be based on a variety of assessment tools, including information provided by parents. The assessment must be made by a multidisciplinary team, including at least one person who is knowledgeable in the area of suspected disability. Your child must be reevaluated at least every three years or more frequently if conditions warrant, or if you or your child’s teachers request it.
 - ▶ **Re-Evaluation:** A re-evaluation most often takes place every three years. However, parents may request that an evaluation take place as often as once a year or in some cases, the school and parent can choose to not conduct a re-evaluation. When there is no question that the student on an IEP continues to qualify for special education, the 3 year re-evaluation is not required for eligibility purposes, but can be used to gather additional relevant data for developing an appropriate IEP.
- ▶ **Independent educational evaluation (IEE)** – you have the right to request an independent educational evaluation, at public expense, if you disagree with the educational evaluation provided by the school district. The school district must provide you with information, upon request, as to how and where to obtain an independent educational evaluation and ensure that the criteria under which the evaluation is obtained, including the location of the evaluation and the qualifications of the examiner, are the same as the criteria that the school district uses when it initiates an evaluation.



Before paying for such evaluation, the school district may initiate a due process hearing to show that its evaluation is appropriate. If you obtain an independent educational evaluation at your own expense, the school district must consider the results of the independent educational evaluation in any decision it makes about your child's educational program.

- ▶ **Private school placement by parents** – children with disabilities voluntarily placed by their parents in private elementary and secondary schools must be provided an opportunity to participate in special education services. However, they have no individual right to special education or related services. The school district where the private school is located must ensure that a proportionate share of Federal special education funding is used to provide services to this population of children. There must be a process established between the school district and private school to define how they will consult, and how, where, and by whom special education services will be provided to students placed by parents in private schools. In Wyoming, home schooling falls into the definition of private school.
- ▶ **Surrogate parents** -- the school district appoints a surrogate parent when the parents of the child are not known, if after reasonable efforts, no parent can be located, or the child is a ward of the state. The surrogate parent protects the rights of the child in all matters relating to FAPE.
- ▶ **Dispute resolution** -- every attempt should be made to resolve differences with the local school district as soon as they arise. If they cannot be resolved, you may request mediation, file a state complaint or request a due process hearing (mediation or due process may be requested by parents OR the school district).
 - ▶ **Mediation** -- a process to assist you and the school in resolving disagreements regarding a student's special education program. A trained mediator works with both parties to guide them toward a mutually satisfactory solution in the best interest of the student, at no cost to parents.

- ▶ **State Complaints** -- Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) has established procedures to provide for the filing of complaints by individuals or organizations alleging that a school district has failed to follow state and/or federal law in providing a student with disabilities a free appropriate public education. To file a complaint, the complainant must send a written and signed complaint to the Wyoming Department of Education. These forms can be found at <https://edu.wyoming.gov/in-the-classroom/special-programs/dispute-resolution/>
- ▶ **Due process hearings** -- an administrative hearing on any matter relating to the proposal or refusal of a school district to initiate or change the identification, evaluation, educational placement or free appropriate public education of a child. The hearing must be conducted by an impartial hearing officer, and scheduled at a time and place reasonably convenient to parents.

See **page 29** for more details on mediation, state complaints and due process hearings.

The IEP

Your child's "tailor-made" educational program

Every child is unique. Your child's individualized education program should not be exactly the same as anyone else's, even those of other children with the same disability. The plan should fit your child's particular needs and abilities, as determined by the evaluation and other relevant data. The IEP Team meets, at least annually, to develop, review, and revise the IEP.

Who develops the IEP?

The IEP Team develops your child's Individual Education Program at an IEP meeting. The IEP must be reviewed at least annually or more often if you or the professionals feel it to be necessary. You may request an IEP at any time throughout the year.



In developing the IEP, the team should consider

- ▶ The strengths of the student
- ▶ The concerns of the parents for enhancing the education of their child
- ▶ The results of the initial evaluation or most recent evaluation
- ▶ The academic, developmental and functional needs of the child and how they affect the child's progress and involvement in the general education curriculum
- ▶ In the case that behavior is getting in the way of a child's learning, positive behavioral interventions and supports to address that behavior
- ▶ In the case of a child who is blind or visually impaired, instruction in braille, unless found to be not appropriate
- ▶ In the case of a child who has limited English proficiency, consider the language needs.

Who is on the IEP Team?*

- ▶ Parent (s)
- ▶ No less than 1 regular education teacher- if the child is or may be participating in the regular education classroom
- ▶ No less than 1 special education teacher
- ▶ Building Administrator or Designee who has knowledge about the available resources
- ▶ An individual who can interpret the evaluation results
- ▶ Others:
 - Persons who provide related services
 - The child (when appropriate)
 - Representatives of transition agencies
 - Other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child
 - Any other support the parent feels is necessary

* Any member of the IEP team may be excused from attending the IEP if their area of curriculum or service will not be discussed if the parent and the school agree. The parents must put their agreement or consent in writing.

Informed Decisions

One of the more important highlights under IDEA is that parents must make **Informed Decisions** about their child's education. Making an informed decision means that you **understand ALL of the options** before you make your *final decision* and that you **understand why** that *particular option* was chosen.

What must be included on my child's IEP?

Where are we now?

- ▶ **Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance** describes how well your child is doing in academic areas (such as math, reading, writing, etc.) and in other areas (such as social and emotional development and motor, language, vocational and recreational skills).
- ▶ **Strengths and Needs** are what your child does well and what he/she needs to be successful academically.

Where are we going?


- ▶ **Measurable annual goals** are specific goals for academic and functional skills that the IEP team expects your child to achieve during the year.
- ▶ The goals must meet the needs of the child to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum.

How are we going to get there?

- ▶ **Delivery of Services** includes the projected date for the beginning of services and modifications as well as the anticipated frequency, location and duration of those services and modifications, and by whom.
- ▶ **Placement** describes where your child will receive services in the least restrictive environment.

What does success look like?

- ▶ **Methods for determining progress** describe how the school will measure your child's progress toward annual IEP goals, and when periodic reports on that progress will be provided.

- 
- ▶ **A statement of any individual appropriate accommodations** that are necessary to measure the academic achievement and functional performance of the child on the state and district wide assessments- including the alternate assessment and statement of why the child cannot participate in the regular assessment.

The following information must also be included in the IEP:


- ▶ **Special education and related services** including the special instruction and related services (such as physical or occupational therapy) your child will receive, how often and for how long those services will be provided. It also includes who will provide the services and in what instructional setting they will be provided (**see related services page 25**).
- ▶ **Amount of specialized instruction** is the amount of time your child will receive special education services.
- ▶ **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)** indicates the amount of time your child will be taught in regular and special education settings. It should be assumed that your child will receive supports and services in the Least Restrictive Environment which starts in the regular education classroom. If the IEP team determines that your child's educational needs cannot be met in the regular educational setting, with appropriate, supplementary aids and supports, the team may consider a more restrictive environment. This may include short periods of time in the special education classroom and move towards a full day in a resource room or self-contained setting. The most restrictive setting would be residential placement.
- ▶ **Reasons for special education setting** should describe the extra help and services your child will need to be successful in the regular education classroom. Supports and services in the regular education classroom should be considered before your child is placed in a special education setting (such as a resource room, special education classroom/building or an out-of-district placement).
- ▶ **Accommodations** are any changes in the teaching methods, materials or any physical aids that will help your child get the most out of his or her education program.
- ▶ **The person(s) responsible** for the implementation of each goal of the IEP and how it will be measured.

- ▶ **Transition** goals, beginning at age 16 (or earlier if necessary), about what the student, school and parents are considering for the student for graduation and beyond (i.e. postsecondary education, career/employment).

Preparing for the IEP meeting

Parents are important members of the IEP Team. Teachers and other professionals who work with your child take certain steps in preparing for the IEP meeting and so should you. Here are suggestions of steps to take as you prepare to be a valued and contributing member of the Team.

- ▶ Ask to have written evaluation results/reports before the IEP meeting. This gives you an opportunity to go over the results, have them explained to you by a qualified staff person if necessary, and make notes of comments or questions you wish to discuss at the meeting.
- ▶ Know your child's rights under IDEA -- review this booklet and/or attend a basic rights workshop available through the Parent Information Center.
- ▶ Talk to your child regarding his or her feelings about school, what he/she likes best, what he/she likes least, what opinions your child has about changes that could make school better.
- ▶ Gather records or information you feel are important and pertinent to your child's program -- evaluations or reports done outside the school, medical records that relate to the child's performance at school (i.e. medication the child takes that make him sleepy or irritable, recent surgeries, or conditions that affect his/her ability to sit still or to need more frequent bathroom calls, etc.).
- ▶ Review your child's records -- both your home file and your child's school file. Look at last year's IEP to be familiar with it and to make sure you understand and get the correct information that will be presented on how your child has made progress toward meeting his/her goals.
- ▶ Make notes about information you want to contribute at the meeting, including your child's level of functioning at home -- your child's interests and hobbies, how your child relates to other members of the family, to friends and in the community. List goals you have for your child and things you would like your child to be working on.

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- ▶ Put your notes and information into a short report form and ask that copies be provided to everyone who will be attending the meeting -- so they can familiarize themselves with your concerns and requests before the meeting, just as you have with their evaluations. **Remember: If it is not written, it is as if it was not said and most likely will not be done!** (See Sample Report Form on page 20)
 - ▶ Find out who will be attending the meeting...the notice of meeting should have them listed. If there are school personnel involved with your child's program who are not on the list, and who you feel should be included, ask to have them at the meeting.
 - ▶ If you experience a conflict, or are confused about what your child might need, ask a support person to accompany you to the meeting -- a friend, relative, or advocate. The Parent Information Center Outreach Parent Liaisons are available for this. It is not unusual for parents to feel overwhelmed and alone when confronted with a roomful of professionals discussing their child in a clinical manner. Notify the school who will accompany you to the meeting.

Sample Parent Report

Child's Name: _____

Child's School & Grade: _____

1. List three (3) or more of your child's strengths and most positive qualities.

2. What do you believe your child needs in order to be successful in life?

3. What does your child need in school to be successful?

4. What are the most useful tools and strategies you use to resolve conflicts at home?

5. Are there any transitions that need to be addressed?

6. What are your dreams for your child?



At the IEP meeting


- ▶ **The image you portray will affect how school personnel react toward you.** Dress in a simple, professional manner. Arrive on time for the meeting. Walk confidently into the room and introduce yourself. Have copies of pertinent materials with you.
- ▶ **If there are people in the room that you don't know, ask them their name and their role.** Write down their names and position at the table, so you can address them by name.
- ▶ **Remember, you are an equal member of the team. You are the expert regarding your child and your input is very important.** Listen with an open mind, taking special note of important points raised at the meeting. If you do not understand something, ask to have it explained – you have the right to clear explanations in language you understand.
- ▶ **When speaking during the meeting,** take a deep breath to help project your voice clearly and confidently and maintain eye contact with the person to whom you are speaking.
- ▶ **Use “I feel” statements when speaking of your child’s needs.** (i.e. “I really feel my son needs Occupational Therapy because his handwriting skills need so much improvement.”) Nobody can argue with your feelings.
- ▶ **Repeat what you are asking for as often as necessary, and explain simply and concisely if you don't agree with something.** Remember that you are not at the IEP meeting to discuss the limitations of the school budget. You are there to determine what your child needs to have an appropriate education.
- ▶ **Minutes are not required to be taken at IEP meetings,** although many school districts do take them. If they are not taken, be sure any concerns or requests you have made are reflected somewhere in the IEP. Ask them to show you where they documented them.
- ▶ **Make all reasonable attempts to come to an agreement with the school, or to come to a mutually acceptable compromise.**

- ▶ **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.
- ▶ **Be sure to ask for a copy of the IEP**, the minutes (if taken) and all reports presented at the meeting.
- ▶ **If, after all reasonable steps have been taken, the school refuses to include needed services in the IEP**, parents have the right to start the process of dispute resolution. This process has a couple of options and is a last resort. Parents should be sure they have done absolutely all they can to reach an agreement before considering the next steps of dispute resolution.

Meeting strategies

You attend IEP meetings to advocate for your child. You want to be persuasive and effective. There are certain realities about IEP meetings that are worth remembering. Likewise, there are certain strategies that might help you better advocate for your child. Here is a list of considerations to keep in mind:

- ▶ **Power** – Some people on the team will have the authority to grant or withhold whatever it is that you want for your child. Know who they are. Know and understand what they have the power to give.
- ▶ **Respect** – Some people will have special training, knowledge or experience. You do not have to agree with them, but it will help to show respect for their opinions. Respect given is usually returned. Disrespect is also usually returned.
- ▶ **Compromise** – is inevitable, a certainty and a necessity. Know your bottom line. What is the least you can live with? Where will you draw the line? Try to make decisions that allow for a win-win situation for all, at some level.
- ▶ **Rights** – Know your rights. The law provides mechanisms to protect your rights, but only to the point where other people's rights are not violated.

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- ▶ **Politics** – It is easier to get something from a friend than from an enemy. Try to find a common ground with the people you are asking for services. Give credit to any person who thinks of a solution to the problems you are discussing. Be polite and always thank those who helped you. A note or letter of thanks can be worth its weight in gold.
 - ▶ **Attitude** – Assume that you will get what you want. Be positive. Remember that what you are asking for is reasonable and logical. Present it that way. Focus on the issues and the actions needed, not on personalities.
 - ▶ **Time** – Set firm dates and times for meetings and follow-up. Don't assume any agreement will automatically be followed. Remember you can call a meeting at any time.
 - ▶ **Time out** – Ask for time if you need it. If the meeting begins to feel out of hand or is getting emotional, ask for a break and get a drink of water. A little break can help everybody regroup and refocus on the needs of your child.
 - ▶ **Money** – The truth is that services and supports cost money, and resources can be short in your school district. Absolutely advocate for the services you believe your child needs, while being a good steward of funding. Try to be careful not to push for services that your child does not need. Ultimately, you and the district must work together.
 - ▶ **Focus** – Stay focused on your child. The IEP meeting is not the place to resolve personality issues with individual teachers or therapists. Remind the team that it is your child's future that has brought everyone together for this meeting.
 - ▶ **Dreams** – Always remember your dreams for your child and bring them to the IEP meeting.

Things to consider

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): Your child has the right to be educated in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

The IEP team must determine what is the most appropriate placement for your child. Every child has the right to begin in the least restrictive situation -- i.e. in the regular classroom with peers who do not have disabilities. The team will then decide what supports and related services the child will need to be successful in this setting.

Amendment to the IEP

If either the parents or school decides changes need to be made to the IEP after the annual IEP meeting is held, they may choose to make an amendment or modification without holding another IEP meeting. This can only be done with parental consent. As parents, you can request a revised copy of the IEP with the amendments to services at any time.


Related services

The IEP Team determines the need for related services. The IEP should state each related service, the date of when they will start and anticipated duration, how many times per week, for how long, and by whom the service will be provided, who is responsible for what – i.e. who is responsible for supervising the aides, who will provide speech therapy, or who will schedule necessary medical evaluations.

A student cannot receive just related services- they are used only when combined with special education.

Some examples of related services are:

- ▶ Audiology/speech & language services
- ▶ Physical therapy
- ▶ Occupational therapy
- ▶ School health/nursing
- ▶ Counseling/psychological services
- ▶ Social work services
- ▶ Special transportation
- ▶ Counseling (including rehabilitation counseling)
- ▶ Assistive technology services
- ▶ Parent counseling & training
- ▶ Orientation and mobility training
- ▶ Transition services
- ▶ Instructional aide or paraprofessional
- ▶ Peer tutors



Do goals and objectives meet the "SMART" test?

Specific,

Measurable,

Attainable,

Relevant,

Timely

Important Keynotes

Listed below are a few highlights of IDEA that are important for parents to remember. For more detailed information contact the Parent Information Center at (307) 684-2277 or email us at info@wpic.org .

- ▶ You must give your written consent before the school district conducts an initial evaluation or a re-evaluation of your child.
- ▶ You should receive a copy of your child's evaluation report that determined special education eligibility—ask for a copy prior to the IEP meeting so you can have the opportunity to read and digest the information before the meeting.
- ▶ Your child's IEP should state how they are going to participate in the general education curriculum, or if they are not, the IEP should have a clear statement of why.
- ▶ The IEP should list modifications and/or accommodations necessary for your child to participate in the general education classroom.
- ▶ Your child's general education teacher should attend all IEP meetings about your child.
- ▶ You should be at the meeting that decides where the location of services for your child will take place.


- ▶ At age 16, your child's IEP must include a statement of needed transition services. This statement should identify services, supports or programs that your child may need which will enable him/her to go directly into the job market, to post-secondary education or training, to live independently and to become contributing members of society.
- ▶ You should be regularly (at least quarterly) informed of your child's progress on the IEP goals and objectives.
- ▶ You have a right to review all school records relating to your child.
- ▶ If you have a disagreement with the school that cannot be resolved, you can request free mediation from an impartial person to help resolve the differences.

What to do if the Partnership Breaks Down-the Dispute Resolution Process

Informal solutions

There are many ways to resolve conflict. Ideally, we want to solve problems without destroying relationships. Informal ways of resolving conflict work best. Here are some steps to take that will help:

- ▶ **Identify the problem** – Before you can solve a problem, you need to identify it. Often times, the issues and problems are interrelated and become blended. Break it down and identify each problem and decide which needs to be solved first. Make a list. It often helps to see it on paper. Be as clear and succinct as possible.

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- ▶ **Identify your goal** – Know exactly what you want for your child and why he/she needs it. Be able to describe the problem and how you think it can be resolved. Clarifying what you want may take some thinking, but it will help you be able to state things clearly when you talk to school personnel.
 - ▶ **Identify the cause of the problem, a solution to the problem and who can help solve the problem** – Find out who has the power and authority to make the decision you want. Ask how you can help them in making it work for your child. If they are unwilling or unable to help, find out who can. Often times it is not because they do not want to help, but because it is not within their capability to do so.

Start at the lowest possible level in the chain of command. Discuss the problem with the teacher and follow up your discussion with a letter, stating the problem and the results of your discussion, along with what agreement was reached as to the time frame for resolution.

If the problem is not resolved within a reasonable amount of time, follow the same process with the building Principal, sending the teacher a copy of the letter you write to the Principal. The next step would be the Special Education Director, and finally the Superintendent. It is very important to follow the chain of command without skipping anyone. Meet with each person and follow-up with a letter or email. Take someone with you to listen, take notes, and provide support.

Formal solutions

Parents and schools don't always agree about a child's special education eligibility, evaluation, program, or placement. If parents and schools cannot come to agreement and find solutions, there are options.

Mediation

As a parent you may request a Mediation Session to resolve issues regarding your child's Special Education services that have not been resolved through the IEP process. Both the school and the parents making the request must agree to participate. For families the choice of participating in mediation is voluntary. Mediation is a useful tool before asking for due process but is not meant to stall or deny due process or any other parental rights under IDEA. The Wyoming Department of Education is responsible for bearing the cost of hiring a qualified

mediator whom is not employed by the Department of Education, or the local school district.

Parents or schools can ask for mediation. A trained mediation officer will meet with the parties, both together and separately; to hear both sides of the situation and help the parties come to an agreement. The mediation officer is impartial and independent. The information that is given during mediation is confidential. What is said cannot be repeated during future proceedings, and the mediator cannot be called as a witness in future proceedings. The terms of a mediated agreement must be entered into your child's IEP.

A request for mediation may be made to the Wyoming Department of Education Special Programs Unit by calling (307) 777-2961. A request form is also available online at <https://edu.wyoming.gov/in-the-classroom/special-programs/dispute-resolution/>.


An agreement to mediate will be sent to both parties involved and the process will begin in a timely manner determined by the availability of mediators. Again, the mediation process is voluntary and confidential.

State Complaint

Parents who feel that their children's special education rights under the IDEA have been violated may file a State Complaint with the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE). Complaints must include the following:

- ▶ Describe a problem that occurred no more than one year ago.
- ▶ Provide the name and address of the student.
- ▶ Suggest a way to resolve the problem.
- ▶ A copy of the signed complaint should be sent to both the district or agency responsible for the child and the Wyoming Department of Education in Cheyenne at the following address:

State Director of Special Education
Wyoming Department of Education
Individual Learning Division
2300 Capitol Avenue
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82002
Phone: 800-228-6194
Fax: (307) 777-6234

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- ▶ Once the Wyoming Department of Education receives a complaint, a Complaint Investigator will:
 - ▶ Ask the local school district for a response to the complaint.
 - ▶ Review student records, including the IEP.
 - ▶ Collect information and interview parents and school staff.
 - ▶ Decide whether the school district did or did not violate any rights under IDEA.

If the school district is found to have violated student or parent rights under the IDEA, the school district must submit a corrective action plan (CAP) to the Wyoming Department of Education. A corrective action plan outlines how the district will correct their problem. The complaint is closed when the school district complies with the corrective action plan. In the event that there is no violation of the IDEA, the complaint is closed without action. The Wyoming Department of Education mails a copy of the decision to the parent.

Due Process

Parents or Schools may request a Due Process Hearing on any matter relating to the identification, evaluation, educational placement, or any other issue related to FAPE. The person requesting Due Process must claim that a violation of IDEA has taken place no more than two years prior to the request.

Timeline:

- ▶ Within 5 days of this request, the Wyoming Department of Education must appoint a hearing officer that is not employed by the WDE to hear all matters related to the alleged violation. This officer is always an attorney in good standing that has knowledge of IDEA.
- ▶ After the hearing, a response to both parents and the school district must be made within 10 days.
- ▶ Within 15 days of the due process request, a resolution meeting must be scheduled at a convenient time for the parties involved.

A Due Process request form may be found at <http://edu.wyoming.gov/in-the-classroom/special-programs/dispute-resolution/> or by calling the Wyoming Department of Education at (307) 777-2961.

Transition

Planning for the move from high school to the world!

The IDEA **requires** that transition planning and services be started for special education students by the age of sixteen (or earlier if necessary).

Transition services are a coordinated set of activities that promote movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or community participation. They must be based on the individual student's needs, taking into account his or her preferences and interests.


Transition services must include instruction, community experiences, and development of employment and other post school adult living objectives. If appropriate, daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation may also be included.

Before the student leaves school the IEP must also contain, if appropriate, a statement of each public agency and each participating agency's responsibilities or linkages (including financial) for the transition activities. In other words, transition planning refers to all the things the school and parents need to do to prepare the student to leave school and enter the adult community.

At age **sixteen**, the student's IEP should include a statement of how the educational program planned for that student will help the student meet post school goals or outcomes. It should also include a statement of the transition services the student needs to prepare for higher education, employment, and adult living.

The transition statement in the IEP should include the functional skills the student will need to live independently. These functional skills may include:

- ▶ Money management / keeping a checkbook
- ▶ Good work habits (being on time, completing tasks and working neatly)
- ▶ Appropriate social skills and being able to access recreational and leisure activities in their community

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- ▶ Housekeeping and cooking skills
 - ▶ Taking charge of personal health and hygiene needs
 - ▶ Pre-vocational and vocational exploration and job skills

Parents and students are integral members of the IEP team; therefore have a strong role in developing the statements of needed transition services. It is imperative that the student's desires and interests be considered when planning for the future. There are steps parents can take throughout their child's school years to prepare their child for successful transition. Some of these are:

- ▶ Give your child age & ability appropriate tasks and responsibilities.
- ▶ Allow children to experience the consequences of their actions -- excuses are not going to help them when they are adults!
- ▶ Involve your child in the ordinary activities of running a home -- mowing the lawn, taking out the trash, doing laundry, etc. Your child may not be physically able to do these things, but knowing how and why they are done is important.
- ▶ Let your child make as many decisions for him/herself as possible.
- ▶ Allow your child to take risks and learn by trial and error. Sometimes this means helping him/her learn to deal with the results of their own bad judgment.
- ▶ Help your child set reasonable goals.
- ▶ Give your child positive messages build their confidence & self-esteem!

There are a number of areas that should be addressed on the transition section of their IEP's:

- ▶ Ongoing instruction such as academics, vocational development, social and interpersonal skills, study skills, career exploration/education and related services;
- ▶ Supportive community experiences such as health facilities; social and recreation facilities; transportation; community orientation and mobility training;
- ▶ Development of employment objectives, exploration of career awareness; vocational aptitude and interest assessments, work experiences;

- ▶ Development of post-school residential objectives – self-advocacy, money management, independent living;
- ▶ Daily living skills such as hygiene, nutrition, maintaining living environment.

This transition time is when families should explore the kinds of adult services that are available in their area. Visit service providers, look at the kinds of services they have available, explore residential possibilities, consider educational and technical training opportunities, and look at the kinds of services the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation under the Wyoming Department of Workforce can provide.


There are generally many options for services for young adults with disabilities, and it is important for families to look at all of them. Schools can help, but the ultimate responsibility and decisions are up to the family. IDEA recognizes that parents and families have a wealth of information about their children's traits, interests, aptitudes, behaviors, abilities and dreams, and that this information has great significance in creating a plan for transition.

As we help our children prepare to move from school to work and the community, we also help ourselves go through our own transitions. Our children see our involvement and know that we care, that we are with them as they move through the necessary changes in their lives. Although schools have certain responsibility, transition planning must happen by the time your child graduates. Ultimately, responsibility for the child's future rests on the family.

Transfer of rights at age 18

When your child reaches age 18, he / she becomes an adult in the eyes of the law. The school district must continue to provide meeting notices to both of you; however, all other rights transfer to your child.

The school district must inform you and your child that the rights will transfer at least one year before your child reaches 18. Parents should become legal guardians, if parents know that at the age of 18, the child will not be capable of making choices and decisions that are in their own best interest parents must become the child's guardian(s). This is a legal action, and has nothing to do with the child's school program.



Many parents think that because their child has disabilities, they are automatically that child's guardians no matter what their age. This is not the case. If a young person is not capable of taking care of personal safety, money management, or healthcare decisions, then parents must take steps to be the legal guardians in order to be able to make those decisions.

Communication Tips

1. Keep in touch with your child's teacher(s) frequently, either by e-mail, phone, notes or personal visit. Ask questions about things you do not understand. Inform the teacher about any situations at home that may affect school behavior.
2. Express your feelings. Let the staff know when you feel they are doing a good job and when you feel things are not going well. Offer positive suggestions for change.
3. Attend all meetings relating to your child's education. Be an active, interested and involved parent. Build the partnership with educators.
4. Be a good listener. Encourage the staff to keep you informed about your child's progress, relationships with other children and any problems or concerns the staff may have. Listen to their professional opinions about your child. Remember that school personnel can be good advocates for your child, too!
5. When differences of opinion arise, talk them out. Look for ways to reach a compromise, but keep your child's needs uppermost in your mind!
6. Help your child develop a positive attitude toward school.
7. Try to share the good things that happen, the successes, more often than you share the concerns.

How to be a good advocate for your child

- ▶ Know your rights!
- ▶ Save important e-mails regarding your child program. Make notes on phone conversations and meetings. Summarize the discussion, list the date and names of people involved. If decisions are made, write up a summary, send it to the person with whom you spoke and keep a copy for your file.

- ▶ Make notes on questions you want to ask or information you want to offer before you go to meetings.
- ▶ Always put requests in writing (follow up verbal requests with written ones) and keep copies of all correspondence.
- ▶ Keep a master calendar of meetings, dates by which certain actions should be taken, reminders to follow up.
- ▶ Get to know other parents of children with disabilities. If there isn't an active parent group in your area, organize one. Contact people who are advocates for children. Learn more about your child's disability and services needed.

Remember


With information, knowledge and understanding, parents can become their child's best advocates

Communicating through letter writing

As long as your child is in school, there is always a need to communicate with your child's school, teachers, administrators and others concerned with your child's education. Some of this communication will be informal, such as phone calls, e-mails, comments in your child's notebook, a chat at the bus stop or at a school function. Other times communication will need to be more formal and will need to be written.

Letters provide both you and school staff with a record of ideas, concerns, and suggestions. Putting your thoughts on paper gives you the opportunity to take as long as you need to state your concerns specifically, to think over what you've written, to make changes and perhaps to have someone else read over the letter and make suggestions. Letters also give people the opportunity to go over what's already been said. Most confusion and misunderstanding can be avoided by writing down requests and concerns. It also gives everyone a record of the issues, what was said about it, and what you are requesting.

Always keep a copy of each letter you send!



You should receive an answer to your letter in a “timely manner” or within a “reasonable” period of time. If you have not heard from the school within ten working days of sending your letter, call the person to whom you sent your request to be sure your letter was received and ask when you can expect an answer. If you have asked for a meeting or other services that may require coordinating with several other people, the response to your request may take more time. If you need an answer quickly, it would be useful to call the school, tell them that the letter is coming and that you need an answer by a specific date. Be sure to state the same thing in your letter.

It is important that your letter be short and to the point. Ask yourself the following questions, and state them in your letter:

- ▶ Why am I writing this?
- ▶ Specifically, what are my concerns?
- ▶ What would I like the person to whom I am writing do about this situation?
- ▶ What are my questions?
- ▶ What sort of response do I want: a letter, a meeting, a phone call, or something else?

Sample Letter: Working out Concerns/Differences at the Local Level

Be sure there is a DATE on your letter and that your child’s full name and class placement is stated. You should also give an e-mail address and/or daytime phone number or cell phone number where you can be reached. Be sure your question or request is stated clearly in the letter, so the person can answer you adequately. Say what you want to see happen— rather than what you do not want.

Your Full Return Address

Today's Date (include month, day & year)

Full name of Person to whom you are writing

(Local level contact begins with the teacher first and the Principal at the next step in this problem-solving process)

Title

Name of School

Street Address

City, State, ZIP Code

Dear (Name of person, use title and last name)

In this paragraph explain who you are, give the full name of your child and his or her current class placement, and, **VERY BRIEFLY**, explain the reason you are writing.

In this paragraph explain what you would like to have happen or what concern or difference you are experiencing. You may **BRIEFLY** say what you would not like but spend most of the paragraph saying what you need for your child.

Say what type of response you want. For instance, do you need to meet with someone; do you want a return letter, or a phone call?

Finally, give your daytime telephone number, address, e-mail address and let them know you expect to hear from them soon (or give an exact day—i.e. by next Weds the 10th).

Sincerely,

Your full name

cc Special Education Director (local school district)
Parent Information Center

An **invaluable** step in maintaining a good relationship is positive feedback. Be sure to write to your teacher, principal, or school when things are going well. If a program, teacher, therapist, or other school staff member has provided an excellent opportunity for your child, **write a letter**. Positive feedback supports, encourages, and will keep good things going!



Record Keeping

It is important for parents to keep a home file on each child. Your child's special needs and specific circumstances will suggest what materials should be kept in the file, but there are some basics, which should be in every one. Some people use file folders and others prefer to use a three ring binder. The Parent Information Center has developed a care coordination notebook to help families keep the important information in order. Called "*Packaging Wisdom*," the document can be found on our website at www.wpic.org to help guide you into what records to keep and give you a place to keep them. Whatever your preference, here is a list of what should definitely be included:

- ▶ Recent IEP's, report cards, etc. (Keep past IEP's in a separate file folder)
- ▶ Medical records
- ▶ A medication log (include names of medications & any reactions)
- ▶ Reports on evaluations and assessments
- ▶ Copies of transition plans, vocational plans, job exploration activities
- ▶ Notes on conversations with teachers, doctors, others involved with your child
- ▶ A list of all doctors, dentists, therapists, teachers, etc. who are now or have ever provided treatment or services to your child
- ▶ Current samples of your child's work
- ▶ A file of all correspondence regarding your child
- ▶ Information on your child's disability
- ▶ It is also a good idea to include a recent photograph of your child and a card with their fingerprints
- ▶ A copy of the current WY Chapter 7 Rules Governing Students with Disabilities

This file or notebook could prove invaluable should something happen to you and someone else have to care for your child. It also provides you with a record of services, what is decided and when, and the conversations you have with professionals about your child.

Other materials that can be kept in a home file include notes and handouts from trainings and conferences you have attended and a file of resources for the various services or treatment your child may need in the future. One other file that you may want to include is a file of "success stories." Articles and information about families who have overcome difficulties or found ways to live more successfully with their child's disability. Re-reading the materials in this file can help you get through those days when nothing seems to be going right!

***T**he Emotional Rollercoaster*

Parents of children with disabilities find they experience emotions much like the grief that accompanies the death of a loved one. No two people experience the same emotions in the same way or at the same time -- but all go through similar ups and downs. Some of the emotions you may feel include shock, sadness, anger, guilt, searching (for answers/information), depression, and acceptance.

Intense emotions will be present at the time your child is diagnosed with a disability. This is a time when parents feel very alone and overwhelmed -- there is the feeling that no one else is experiencing the same overwhelming emotions.

Shock and denial

When they first hear the news that their child has a disability, most parents say they feel shock. One father described these feelings about receiving his son's diagnosis. "His words hit me like a sledge hammer to the chest. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't think. All my hopes and dreams for my son had suddenly and irrevocably been shattered. They lay in fragments at the bottom of my heart."

In addition to shock, parents often deny that there is anything wrong with their child. They are sure that the doctor's diagnosis is wrong -- in fact, some go from doctor to doctor hoping one will tell them that their child is just fine.



Guilt, anger, and depression

Guilt is often a silent emotion -- parents worry that something they did caused their child's disability. Sometimes they feel so guilty about those worries that they don't share them with anyone. One mother reported being sure that her child had a birth defect because she drank carbonated beverages during her pregnancy, another mother was sure that her son had a chromosome abnormality because she hadn't eaten enough green vegetables while pregnant.

Anger is a feeling most parents experience -- anger at the medical or educational professional that diagnosed the disability, at a friend whose well-meaning remark hits a sore spot, at each other, or at themselves.

Many parents report difficulties in controlling their emotions. Some cannot stop crying, others withdraw, and others have difficulty finding healthy coping skills. It is important to remember that helping your child requires a lot of focus, determination, and support. Some parents find that seeking support from a counselor or clergy member is helpful in combating depression.

Finding your way through the fog towards acceptance

There are several things, which help parents find acceptance of their child's disability and of the changes in their lives. One is talking to someone who can understand what you're feeling. Another parent who has a child with disabilities has first-hand experience with the emotions you are feeling. Joining a parent support group, or connecting with another parent can be helpful because you will meet another parent who has a child(ren) with disabilities. One thing parents should remember is that they are likely to go through all of the emotions, in varying degrees, at every milestone in their child's life -- times such as transitions, prom, graduation -- and probably every IEP meeting!

Take care of yourself!

For many parents of children with disabilities, just keeping up with the daily schedule is exhausting. We take little time for ourselves -- to take care of our own health and well-being. However, if we don't take care of ourselves -- we aren't going to be able to continue to take care of our children.

Caring for ourselves is not selfish. It is necessary. It renews us and keeps us healthy so that we can continue to take care of the people who depend on us. It also teaches our children an important lesson. How can our children learn to value themselves if they see us consistently making our own needs the last priority? We must take some time each day to meet our own needs: to eat healthy foods, to get some exercise and to participate in activities that we enjoy.

We must also give ourselves time each day to be with our children -- to read, cuddle or really talk with them -- and not allow all of our time with them be given to supervising homework, doing home therapies or taking them for doctor's appointments. It is important for parents to make time to just be Mom or Dad and we have to be assertive about protecting that time. Sometimes we have to tell the therapists or teachers that we cannot do one more home therapy program.

Sometimes we must pause, look at the chaos in our lives and realize that we must find a place of balance, a way to ward off the breaking point, that place of physical and emotional collapse -- or at least that feeling of constant edginess. We must allow ourselves to stop and validate the feeling that keeping up with the demands of education, therapy and medical needs for our children is no picnic, and that we do have the right to say we've had enough and need a break. We need to explore every avenue for respite, for support and for encouragement. Remember that you don't have to ride the emotional roller coaster alone!

Call the Parent Information Center at (307) 684-2277 for information about connecting with another parent of a child with a similar disability, or in the same area of the state. Other services that can be helpful in Wyoming are listed on page 44.



Laws and Children with Disabilities

Several laws support the rights of a child with a disability to a free and appropriate education and support the parents' role as an advocate for their child. The spirit of all the laws is that parents should be equal partners and team members with professionals.

Listed below are the laws that support your child's rights:

- ▶ **Individuals with Disabilities Education (Improvement) Act (IDEA '04)** Originally passed by congress in 1975 as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act and re-authorized by congress in 1990, when the name was changed to IDEA. In 1997 and 2004 it was reauthorized again. This law is presently referred to as IDEA '04. It mandates that a free appropriate public education be made available to all children with disabilities regardless of the type or severity of the disability.
- ▶ **No Child Left Behind (NCLB)**- In 2002, Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) – the main federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school, and President Bush gave it the name of NCLB. The ESSA now replaces NCLB.
- ▶ **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)**. In December 2015, NCLB was reauthorized under President Obama's administration, and is now called ESSA. ESSA includes provisions that will help to ensure success for students and schools. The law:
 - ▶ Has a focus on high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers.
 - ▶ Ensures that vital information is provided through annual statewide assessments that measure students' progress toward those high standards.
 - ▶ Increases access to high-quality preschool.

- ▶ Maintains an expectation of accountability and action for positive change in our lowest-performing schools, where groups of students are not making progress, and where graduation rates are low over extended periods of time.
- ▶ **Assistive Technology Act of 1998- amended in 2004 (Tech Act)** – Requires public schools to consider the assistive technology needs of students with disabilities. If parents or the IEP team feel the student would benefit from assistive technology they can request an AT evaluation.
- ▶ **Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 2006** - Provides an increased focus on the academic achievement of career and technical education students, strengthens the connections between secondary and postsecondary education, and improves state and local accountability.
- ▶ **Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)**– Guarantees parents the right to inspect and review their child’s school files and to receive copies of the information contained in the files. States that only people who need to see the file can and allows parents to challenge information in the file if they feel it is inaccurate or misleading. Also states that school districts must have parents’ written permission before they can release records to any other entity. (Parents may not have a right to see a teacher’s personal notes as long as nobody else has ever seen them either.)
- ▶ **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments of 2008** – A federal law that forbids discrimination, on the basis of disability, in any program or activity receiving federal money from the U.S. Department of Education. With regard to education, this law guarantees a child with a disability the right to participate in activities that are available to other children. It also means that schools may be responsible for providing accommodations to students who qualify as having a disability under Section 504. A student may qualify for services under Section 504, even though the student may not be eligible for special education under IDEA.



Who Can Help?

Parent Information Center (PIC)

2232 Dell Range Blvd, STE 204
Cheyenne, WY 82009

www.wpic.org

(307) 684-2277
fax 1 **(888) 389-6542**
info@wpic.org

Wyoming Department of Education

www.edu.wyoming.gov

Special Education Unit
Services / Visually Impaired
Outreach / Hearing Impaired

1 (800) 339-6023
(307) 777-2870
(307) 857-9267
(307) 777-9252

Protection and Advocacy

www.wypanda.com

Developmental Disabilities Program
Mental Health Program
Client Assistance Program
Individual Rights
Assistive Technology Program

1 (800) 624-7648
1 (800) 654-7972
1 (800) 821-3091
1 (800) 632-3491
1 (800) 280-4922

Department of Health

www.wdh.state.wy.us

Behavioral Health Division-
Developmental Disabilities
Community and Public Health Division
(Includes Children's Special Healthcare)

(307) 777-7115
(307) 777-6004

Governor's Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities

<https://wgcd.wyo.gov/>

1 (800) 438-5791
(307) 777-7230

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

www.wyomingworkforce.org/vr/

(307) 777-7364

UPLIFT

www.upliftwy.org

1 (888) UPLIFT3

Wyoming Families for Hands & Voices


www.wyhandsandvoices.org

(307) 782-3276

Alphabet Soup of Acronyms

PIC frequently receives questions about the acronyms and educational terminology, which are used by educators and agencies. Listed below are acronyms and terms used most frequently in Wyoming:

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
AYP	Adequate Yearly Progress
BIT	Building Intervention Team
BART	Building At-Risk Team
BHD	Behavioral Health Division
BOE	Body of Evidence
BOCES	Board of Cooperative Education Services (schools)
CDC	Child Development Centers
CDS	Child Development Services
CEC	Council for Exceptional Children
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations (a Federal law)
CMS	Centers for Medicaid & Medicare Services
COP	Community of Practice
CPIR	Center for Parent Information and Resources
CSHCN	Children's Special Health Care Needs
CST	Child Study Team
DD	Developmental Disability
DVR	Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
EIC	Early Intervention Council
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act (of 2015)
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESY	Extended School Year
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education
FBA	Functional Behavior Assessment
FOEG	Full Educational Opportunity Goal
FERPA	Family Education Rights and Privacy Act
GCDD	Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities
HCB	Home and Community Based Waiver
IBA	Individual Budget Amount (for DD Waivers)
ICAP	Inventory for Client & Agency Planning
ICFMR	Intermediate Care Facility/Mental Retardation



IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEE	Independent Education Evaluation
IEP	Individual Education Program
IFSP	Individual Family Service Plan
IPC	Individual Plan of Care
IPE	Individual Plan for Employment
IQ	Intelligence Quotient/relationship between chronological age and mental development
JEC	Joint Education Committee
LEA	Local Education Agency (school district)
LEP	Limited English Proficient
LICC	Local Interagency Coordinating Council
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
MAP	Measure of Academic Progress
MCH	Maternal & Child Health
MDAT	Multi-Disciplinary Assessment Team
MTSS	Multi-Tiered System of Support
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Education Act
OCR	Office of Civil Rights
OSEP	Office of Special Education Programs (US Department of Education)
P & A	Protection and Advocacy, Inc.
PBIS	Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports
PHN	Public Health Nurse
PIC	Parent Information Center
PLC	Professional Learning Community
Rtl	Response to Intervention
SRC	State Rehabilitation Council
SEA	State Education Agency/State Dept of Education
SSDI	Social Security Disability Insurance
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
SSP	State Supplementary Payments
VI	Visual Disability
VR	Vocational Rehabilitation
W.S.	Wyoming Statute (a state law)
WAPSD	WY Advisory Panel for Students with Disabilities
WASEA	WY Association of Special Education Administrators
WATR	WY Assistive Technology Resources
WIND	WY Institute for Disabilities
WY-ALT	Wyoming's Alternate Assessment
WYCPES	Wyoming Content and Performance Extended Standards
WY-TOPP	Wyoming's Test of Proficiency and Progress

Acknowledgments

Materials for this booklet were adapted from the following:

"Special Education- Rules, Policies, Procedures and Guidance Documents" (includes Chapter 7 -Services for Children with Disabilities)" WY Dept of Education (July 2010)

"A Family's Introduction to Early Intervention in Wyoming"
published by Wyoming Regional Preschools

"Home Files/Records" Specialized Training of Military Parents (STOMP)

"The Handbook of Parental Rights & Special Education Procedures" Parents Reaching Out, New Mexico

Wrightslaw Special Education Law- 2nd Edition 2007

For more tips and information on how to confidently support your child through the special education process, contact PIC at (307) 684-2277 or visit us online at www.wpic.org.