

What is an IEP?

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), every child who receives special education must have an **Individualized Education Program**, or IEP. An IEP is a written education plan developed by a team of professionals and the child's parents, after the child has been evaluated and found to be eligible for special education supports and services. The plan outlines the types of supports that will enable the child to participate in and benefit from the general education curriculum. Once an IEP is developed, schools are required to follow it as outlined. If the child changes schools, the receiving school must continue to follow the current IEP until a new IEP is written, again with parent participation.

An IEP must be reviewed at least once annually; however, additional meetings may be requested by the parent to discuss or make changes to the current plan. Meetings must be at times that are convenient for parents; conference calls or other ways can be used to allow parents to participate.

Who is Involved in an IEP Meeting?

An IEP team consists of the following:

- The parent(s) or guardian(s) of the child.
- The student (must be invited at age 15 when discussing transition, or before, as appropriate)
- A regular education teacher.
- A special education teacher or provider.
- An administrator, or representative of the district who is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum, qualified to provide/supervise special education services, and able to commit resources.
- A related service provider(s) who can interpret the evaluation results, such as a school psychologist or diagnostician.
- Others: family members, advocates, specialist as invited by the parents.

What does an IEP contain? Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFPs):

These describe the level at which the child is currently performing. They should:

- Describe the child in a positive way.
- Reflect parents' concerns & priorities.
- Include strengths and needs.
- Include results of the most recent evaluations.
- Include the student's level of academic achievement and developmental and functional performance in all developmental and functional areas.

Annual Goals: Goals must be measurable, meaningful and attainable in one year. Goals must enable the child to be involved in and make progress toward the general education curriculum. Goals must address other educational needs that result from the child's disability, *including behavior*, and academic and functional goals.

Statements of Progress: Along with goals, the IEP should include:

- How often progress reports will be provided to parents that show the progress a child has made on his or her goals.
- How progress toward goals will be measured and by whom. *If a child is not showing progress on a goal, then the team must discuss if changes to the IEP are needed.*

Services: The IEP should list the services that will be provided, such as special education, speech, physical or occupational therapy, etc. Each service should have start/finish dates; frequency; duration; location; who will provide the services; and delivery method (individual or as a group in class). The supports it will take to include the child in non-academic and extra-curricular activities should also be listed.

Accommodations: These are adjustments that are made to the child's environment to enable him or her to more successfully participate in the learning experience. (i.e. extended response time, use of a calculator, and having instructions read aloud).

Participation in Assessments: The IEP will indicate which of the state and district-wide assessments (such as PAWS or PAWS-Alt, and/or MAP) the child will participate in and what, if any, accommodations will be available on those assessments.

Special Factors: This section addresses needs such as behavior, limited English proficiency, Braille and communication for students with visual and hearing impairments, and assistive technology.

Transition: For students ages 16 and older, the IEP must contain postsecondary goals to address the child's needs after high school.

How are decisions about the IEP made? What if I disagree?

IEP decisions are made by consensus, not a team vote. Every member of the IEP team has input in IEP decisions, *including the parents*.

IEP decisions should not be based on the "feelings" of individual or collective team members. Rather, IEP decisions should be supported by data related to the child's progress, behavior, etc. When questions arise, team members should ask, "Where's the data?"

Basing IEP decisions on data minimizes disagreement among team members. If disagreements do arise, they can often be solved within the team through tactful communication and problem-solving.

However, if parents need help resolving disputes, they may:

- Talk with the child's teachers, case manager, and/or principal.
- Submit concerns in writing, providing copies to the school team.

- Request an additional IEP to discuss concerns.
- Consult a parent advocate and invite them to the IEP meeting (Call PIC!)
- Contact the district's special education director. Follow up by putting the concern in writing and send it to the special education director.
- If the dispute is still not resolved, contact the WY Dept of Education to request a due process hearing.

How Can I Make the Most of My Child's IEP Meeting?

Request copies of the IEP and evaluation reports in advance. When reviewing the IEP, consider the following:

- Are the goals measurable?
- Do the goals make sense?
- Is my child in the general education classroom for all or part of the day? Why or why not?
- Does the IEP list appropriate modifications and accommodations?
- Is the school expecting the kind of progress I believe my child can make?
- Is my child expected and able to meet graduation requirements?

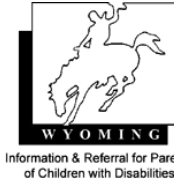
Before the meeting:

- Make a list of questions, topics to discuss, and concerns to address during the meeting.
- Visit your child's classroom(s) and talk with his or her teacher(s).
- Get input from your child as far as what he or she likes and dislikes about school and what he or she would like to have changed.

Other tips:

- Know your child's rights.
- Build *positive partnerships* with school.
- Ensure that what is needed and agreed upon is written down.
- Follow up and follow through!

For more information
about IEPs and the IDEA
CONTACT:



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Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

Disability Brochure #22



Making the Most of
Your Child's Program

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