

# Understanding the IEP

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## What is an IEP?

The IEP is your child's written Individualized Educational Program in the form of a document that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting. It contains information about your child's needs and strengths, goals for the academic year, and services, supports, modifications and accommodations necessary to meet those goals.

The IEP also:

- Guides the education of your child or adult student.
- Provides the basis on which the IEP team will determine your child's educational placement.
- Must be written **within 30 calendar days** of the time your child has been declared eligible for special education services.
- Must be in effect at the beginning of each school year.
- Is not a binding contract in that agencies or teachers cannot be held accountable if your child does not meet the projected goals. However, teachers and related service professionals are accountable for delivering the services as indicated on the IEP.
- Must be written in a team meeting which includes the parents. Some team members will have participated in the evaluation and classification process.
- Must be written prior to your child's placement and the initiation of service.
- Is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Utah State Special Education Rules.



The purpose of an IEP is to:



1. Serve as a communication vehicle between parents or adult student and school personnel, and enables them as equal participants to jointly decide; first, what the student's needs are; second, what goals the student will work to meet, and third, what services will be provided to help the student reach the goals.

2. Provide an opportunity for resolving any differences between parents and school personnel concerning the special education needs of a student with a disability; first, through the IEP meeting, and second, if necessary, through the procedural protections that are available to the parents and the school.
3. In writing, give a commitment of resources necessary to enable a student with a disability to receive needed special education and related services.
4. Provide a management tool to help ensure that each student with a disability is provided special education and related services appropriate to special learning needs.
5. Act as a compliance and monitoring document which may be used by authorized personnel from each governmental level to determine whether a student with a disability is actually receiving the free, appropriate public education (FAPE) agreed to by the parents or adult student and the school.



### How Frequently Should the IEP be Updated and Reviewed?

The law requires at least *one* team meeting *annually* resulting in a written IEP document. In the IEP meeting, parents and school personnel jointly make decisions about the educational program of a child with a disability based on the student's needs as determined by the evaluation. The IEP document is a written record of the decisions reached at the meeting.

### Notice of Meeting

The parent or adult student must receive a notice of meeting which indicates the purpose(s), time and location of the meeting and who will be in attendance. It must also inform them of their right to bring other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise.

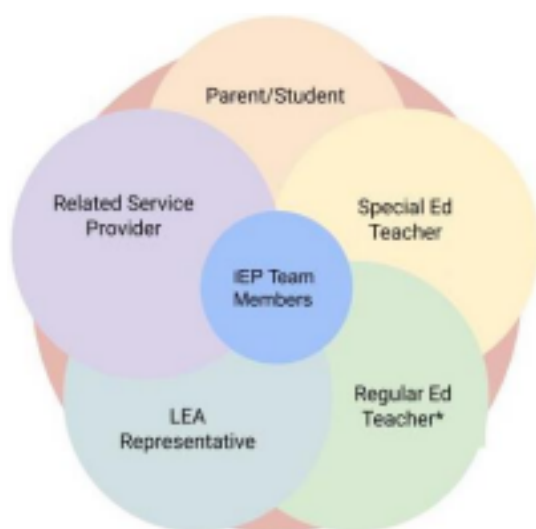
The notice of meeting required to be provided to parents or adult student (age 18+) must:

- Indicate the purpose, time and location of the meeting and who will be in attendance.
- Inform them of the provision for participation of other individuals who have knowledge of or special expertise about the student on the IEP team.
- Is used to inform parents of children entering preschool, who have previously received services under Early Intervention (ages 0-3), about participation for the initial IEP meeting.

The notice of the first IEP meeting conducted when the student is 14 years old, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP team, must also

- Indicate that a purpose of the meeting will be the consideration of the postsecondary goals and transition services for the student.
- Indicate that the agency will incite the student.
- Identify any other agency representative that has been invited with the consent of the parents or adult student.

## Who are the IEP Team Members?



IDEA is very specific about the required members of the IEP team, and who should be in attendance for the entire meeting. The IEP team membership shall include

- One or both parents or a guardian or surrogate parent and adult student during the transition planning (starting the year they turn 14) or younger students, when appropriate.
- Not less than one special education teacher of the student, or where appropriate, not less than one special education provider of the student.
- At least one regular education teacher of the child, if the child is or may be participating in the general curriculum.
- A representative of the Local Education Agency (LEA) who is usually the school administrator or a representative. This person is qualified to provide or to supervise the provision of special education and is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum. The LEA representative is also knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the LEA and is authorized to commit the necessary resources, including funding, to provide educational services for your child.
- An individual who can interpret the instructional implications of the evaluation results. Sometimes this is someone who is already on the team, such as a teacher.
- At the discretion of the parent or adult student or the school, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the student, including related services personnel as appropriate. (The person who does the inviting decides who has expertise.)

## IEP Team Attendance

A member of the IEP team is not required to attend a particular IEP meeting, in whole or in part, if the parent of a student or adult student with a disability and the LEA agree, in writing, that the attendance of the member is not necessary because the member's area of the curriculum or related services is not being modified or discussed in the meeting.

A member of the IEP team may be excused from attending an IEP meeting, in whole or in part, when the meeting involves a modification to or discussion of the member's area of the curriculum or related services if:

- The parent or adult student and the LEA both consent to the excusal in writing, and;
- The member submits, in writing to the parent and the IEP team, input into the development of the IEP prior to the meeting.
- Determination of the need for a member of the IEP team to attend must be made on a meeting by meeting basis.



## Parent Participation and Attendance

The LEA must take steps to ensure that one or both of the parents of a student with a disability or adult student are present at each IEP meeting or are given the opportunity to participate, including:

- Notifying parents of the meeting early enough to ensure that they will have an opportunity to attend.
- Scheduling the meeting at a mutually agreed on time and place.
- If neither parent can attend, the LEA must use other methods to ensure parent participation, including alternative means of meeting participation such as video conferences and conference calls. The Parent of a student with a disability and an LEA may agree to use alternative means of meeting participation, such as video conferences and conference calls.



A meeting may be conducted without a parent or adult student in attendance if the LEA is unable to convince the parents that they should attend. In this case, the LEA must keep a record of its reasonable attempts to arrange a mutually agreed on time and place.

## Preparation for the IEP Meeting

Preparing for the IEP meeting can help parents share better information with the team and participate more appropriately and confidently in the process. Parental participation is an important factor in determining the appropriate services for the child.

Following are some suggestions for preparing for the IEP meeting:

Gather information to share: medical, psychological, other assessments, tips about what works for your child at home, past helpful accommodations at school, current family situations or struggle

Review your child's school records and current IEP if there is one.

- List what you see as your child's strengths and needs.
- Write down your priorities and long range goals for your child.
- List services that you believe your child needs to attain the goals you have identified.
- Write down your questions.
- Make sure the IEP meeting will be long enough to discuss everything that needs to be discussed. Be reasonable, but if the team runs out of time, you can request that another meeting be scheduled to complete the process.

## Communicate with your team prior to the meeting:

- Inform them of who you may have invited to the meeting.
- Ask to see a draft of the IEP goals.
- Ask for the evaluation data to review.
- If needed, ask for language translation and to receive the materials in your native language.
- Any accommodations needed to participate in the meeting, such as interpreters or materials in a format that you can access.

## Effective Communication Skills For Parents

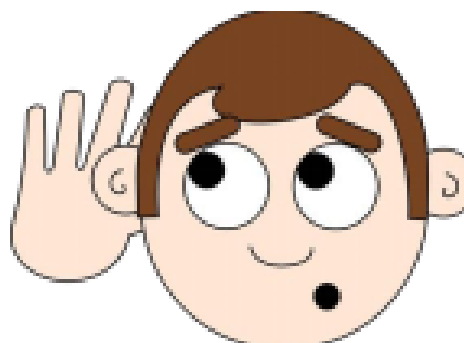
You are your child's best advocate. You have unique expertise about your child. Don't assume that the school has all of the relevant information. Sharing information helps you and your school team understand your child and come up with possible solutions. Talk to your child and explore what his or her experience at school looks and feels like. There are other factors besides words that affect how others perceive our communication. These include body language, tone of voice, volume, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures and delivery of the message. Be mindful of these when you are with others.



## Become a skilled listener

A skilled listener is someone who...

- is willing to work at listening.
- listens to the complete message before reacting.
- listens for content, not the way the message is delivered.
- screens out distractions and maintains focus.
- listens for the main ideas and interests.
- listens to understand the other person's perspective, instead of worrying about formulating a response.



## Validate Feelings

Validating others stated feelings allows the other person to know that you hear them and that you also hear their emotions. This helps diffuse intense emotions that block communication. Try using the following lead-in phrases:

- It seems that you feel that . . .
- I sense you are feeling . . .
- Is it your feeling that . . . ?

## Use “I” Statements

“I” statements focus on your concerns, how you are feeling, and what you are thinking. They keep others from feeling like they are being judged, blamed or threatened. When used, others are still willing to listen to you, hear your concerns and work together to come up with solutions for your child.

- I am concerned about...
- I am frustrated that...
- I am feeling that...
- I am hearing that...
- I am worried that...

## Ask Questions

Getting clarification...

- helps you understand what is being said and gain more information.
- allows you to check out the other person's expectations, concerns or perceptions.
- outlines what is being done to help.
- can help you to direct the conversation to an area you feel needs attention.
- helps you gain information before you give your opinion or draw conclusions.
- can be used to slow down the conversation and give you time to process the information.

## What Your Signature Means:

- All participants should sign the IEP.
- All signatures on the IEP show participation and attendance.
- Parents may note on the IEP that they "disagree" or have concerns.



Utah Parent Center