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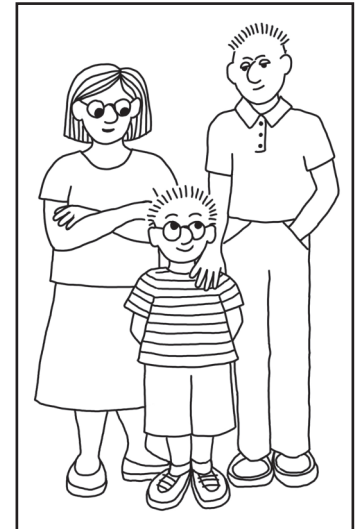


University of Iowa Health Care

IEP on IEPs: Information Especially for Parents on Individualized Education Programs

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It's back to school time again. Every parent hopes the school year will be happy and successful for their child. If your child is a special education student, you have access to a system for developing an individualized program to support those high hopes and help ensure that your child has every opportunity for a great year. Whether you are brand new to the world of special education, or are a seasoned veteran, the better you understand the IEP process, the more effective you can be in making it work well for your child. Let's look at the basics:



What is an IEP?

IEP stands for Individualized Education Program and each student who is in special education must have one. The IEP is a written document developed by a team (the IEP Team) of people who know the student well, including the parents, teachers, therapists, and other educators or service providers. Students can also be involved in planning their own IEP. After the student's first IEP is developed, the IEP team meets to review the plan at least once a year, and revises it as the student makes progress or as additional needs are identified.

The most important word in describing the IEP is individualized. The student's educational plan is created just for that particular student. The plan must be based on the student's strengths (the things they do well) and needs (the things they need help with). It must be designed to offer the student an opportunity to make progress in academics (core classroom subjects such as English, math, and science) and in functional skills. Functional skills are those needed to successfully participate in the various activities of life. They include social skills, communication, and basic skills of living and working such as self-care, cooking, and managing time and money.

How does the IEP process work?

The IEP Team is formed: when a student is first identified for special education, the school is responsible for inviting the people who will form the student's IEP team to a meeting. Over time, the members of the IEP team will change as teachers and others who work with your child will change. As parents, you are the only team members who will remain constant throughout your child's education. That makes your guiding influence especially important.

The IEP team is required to include:

- the student's parents
- at least 1 regular education teacher of the student
- at least 1 special education teacher of the student
- a representative of the school district who is qualified to provide or supervise the provision of special education, is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum, and about the resources of the school district
- a person who can interpret evaluation results
- other individuals invited by the school district or the parents who have knowledge or special expertise about the student
- the student, whenever it is appropriate

Annual IEP Meetings: IEP team meetings must be held at least once a year and may be held more often at the request of the school or the parent if issues arise that the team needs to discuss. An IEP meeting can be called by any member of the team and should be scheduled at a time that is as convenient as possible to all participants, including parents. Parents are also entitled to receive notice of the meeting and the issues to be discussed. The notice should give you reasonable time to prepare for the meeting.

What should be considered in designing a student's IEP?

The IEP Team must discuss certain basic considerations for all students in planning an appropriate program:

- the strengths of the child
- the concerns of the parents
- the results of an initial evaluation or the most recent evaluation
- the academic, developmental and functional needs of the child

There are also special considerations that the team must think about and discuss IF they apply to the student:

- behavioral interventions or supports if the child's behavior interferes with learning
- language needs if the child is not proficient in English
- instruction in Braille if the child is blind or visually impaired
- language and communication needs if the child is deaf or hearing impaired
- the need for assistive technology devices or services



What should the IEP contain?

Think of the components of the IEP as the “game plan” for your child’s education. You have a starting point, an ultimate goal, and a plan for getting there. The team sets goals, follows the plan, celebrates achievements, and makes adjustments as needed:

● HOME BASE

A statement of the student’s Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP).

Academic achievement means how the student is doing in classes like reading, English, math, science, and social studies. This statement should tell you if your child is doing grade level work, or is behind other students of the same age. Functional performance means how the student is doing in practical skills of daily living. This statement



should tell you how your child is developing in non-academic areas. It should also explain how your child’s disability affects his or her learning and progress in the general education curriculum—that’s the core set of courses all students must pass to graduate.

This is the place in the IEP to record your child’s strengths, interests, and preferences and the concerns you have for improving your child’s education. The PLAAFP should include information about the student’s progress, needs, and expectations for the future. That information should then be used to develop the IEP goals and plan appropriate services. It is very important that parents and students have their thoughts and ideas included in the PLAAFP so they will be reflected in the child’s educational goals.

● GOALS

A statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals that are designed to:

- enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum
- meet the child’s educational needs that result from a disability

Concentrate on the word MEASURABLE – How will you and the other members of the IEP team be able to tell how much progress your child is making? The goals should make that clear.

● SCORING

A description of how the child’s progress toward meeting the annual goals will be measured and when progress reports (report cards or other periodic reports) will be made to parents.

Parents of students with IEPs must receive progress reports at least as often as parents of general education students. The child’s IEP team may determine that progress reports are needed more often, and if so, what form those reports should take.

● STRATEGIES

A statement of Special Education and Related Services and supplementary aids and services that are to be provided to the student so that the student can:

- make appropriate progress toward attaining annual goals
- be involved in and make progress in the general curriculum
- participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities
- be educated and participate in activities with other children, both with and without disabilities

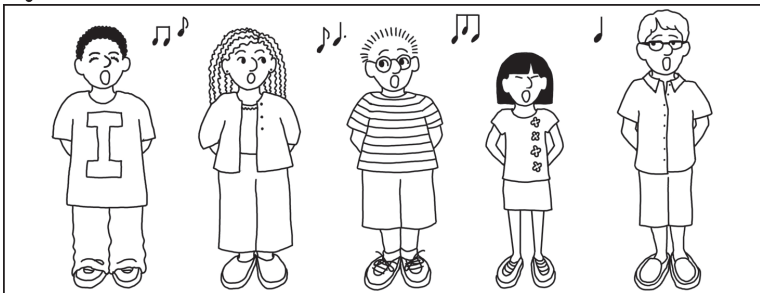
This statement should describe the modifications, services, and aids that are specific to your child. It

may also include things like specialized training or supports needed by a teacher or associate to provide for your child's disability-related needs.

● PLAYERS

An explanation of the extent, if any, to which the student will not participate in regular classes and activities with non-disabled children.

Who is your child going to spend time with at school? If your child is going to be in a special education classroom or otherwise be removed from the general education classroom where students without disabilities are instructed, the reasons must be fully explained. Children with disabilities should be included in all activities, including lunch, recess, P.E., music, art, and after-school activities, with their non-disabled peers unless there are specific reasons they cannot participate. Those reasons must be due to the needs of the child, not the convenience of others.



● PLAYOFFS

A statement of any accommodations that are necessary for the student to participate appropriately in State and district-wide assessments to measure the academic achievement and functional performance.

This refers to standardized tests that all students in the district or the state periodically take, such as the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), the Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITEDS). Depending on an individual student's level of comprehension or other skills, the IEP team may determine that the student should take an

alternative assessment instead. If that happens, the IEP must include a statement explaining why the student cannot participate in the regular assessment, and what particular alternate assessment is appropriate. Generally, only about one percent of students take alternate assessments. For students who will take the regular tests, but need accommodations, those testing accommodations must be identified in the IEP.

● SCHEDULE

The projected date for services and modifications to begin and the anticipated frequency, location, and duration of those services and modifications.

This should be a clear plan for delivering services, modifications, and supports your child needs in school. It should explain:

- What services, modifications, and supports will be provided?
- Who will provide them?
- When will they start?
- Where will they be provided?
- How often will they be provided?
- How long will they be provided?

● GOING PRO

A post-secondary transition plan: In Iowa, beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the student turns 14.

If the student is age 14 or older, the IEP must include the student's and the family's goals for life after high school. At least by age 14 you need to be thinking about and discussing what you expect for your child as an adult. As part of the IEP process, the team will then develop the expectations you and your son or daughter have for living, learning, and working into a plan for transition services. That plan is intended to ensure that the IEP goals are designed to help the student reach his or her desired after-high school goals.

The transition plan should include:

- measurable post-secondary (after high school) goals related to training, education, employment, and (if needed) independent living skills
- a description of the transition services (including the courses of study) needed for the student to reach his or her post-secondary goals
- by age 17, a statement that the student has been informed of his or her rights under the IDEA that will transfer to the student on reaching legal adulthood (at age 18).

A Little Final Coaching for Parents

- Parents and the student have important roles in developing and revising the IEP and must have the opportunity to give meaningful input
- Parents are involved in decisions about both the program and the child's placement
- The key word is INDIVIDUALIZED – your child's IEP must be designed for his or her particular strengths and needs.
- The instructional program (WHAT and HOW your child will learn) must be designed BEFORE the IEP team decides WHERE it will happen (general education classroom, special education classroom, or other setting):
 - ★ Educational program FIRST
 - ★ Placement SECOND
- The IEP must contain objectively measurable goals and be designed to offer meaningful progress in academic achievement in the general education curriculum and in functional performance
- The bottom line is that the IEP process is your opportunity to have a strong voice in your child's education and help design a program that is effective in meeting your child's needs. The better you understand the process and your role in it, the better advocate you can be for your child.

For more information contact:

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