

What is the Individualized Education Program (IEP)?

If your child receives special education and related services, he/she is required to have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). As a parent, you are a very important part of your child's IEP team. You, your child's teachers and other school personnel will develop an IEP for your child that will be reviewed at least once a year. The IEP will address your child's unique abilities and needs and describe how he/she will access the general curriculum. The IEP should describe how your child learns, how your child best demonstrates what he or she is learning and what teachers and service providers will do to help your child learn more effectively.

The Facts You Should Know:

- The IEP team includes the parents and school system personnel who have knowledge or expertise about the student and/or the curriculum. Parents and the school may also invite anyone they want who has special expertise or knowledge to offer.
- You will receive a written notice prior to the IEP meeting. This notice will include the proposed date, time and place of the meeting, the purposes of the meeting and who is likely to be in attendance. The IEP meeting should be set up at a mutually convenient time and place. If the time offered does not work for you, suggest alternative times and dates.
- The IEP meeting will be conducted by school personnel, with your input, and will result in the development of the yearly plan for providing special education and related services to your child. IEP meetings must occur at least once per year but may occur more often if the parent or the school requests a meeting.
- The IEP has required components that will be discussed and included in your child's plan, with the consensus of the team, including:
 - Your child's present level of performance (including the results of recent state and local assessments or evaluations, the functional, developmental and academic needs of your child, and the disability's impact on the progress of your child in the general curriculum)
 - A statement of measurable annual goals for your child (and objectives in some cases)
 - How your child will participate in state and local assessments
 - The accommodations and supports that your child needs for instruction
 - How your child will participate in general and special education
 - The related services to be provided and the consideration of extended school year (ESY)
 - For students entering high school or reaching age 16, a transition plan, which will include transition services to post-secondary activities.
 - Once these components are completed, the team will consider where and how the services can be provided. This will be documented as the placement for provision of services (also known as Least Restrictive Environment, LRE).
- The IEP form is designed to document the decisions of the IEP team, so meeting minutes are not required. Some systems do keep written minutes of the IEP meeting. If minutes are kept, they are a part of the IEP.
- Each year, an annual review of the IEP will be held to address your child's progress. The IEP team will review your child's goals and objectives and consider the progress in each area. Your child's education will then be directed by the IEP and will reflect any changes made during this annual review.
- Annual goals and objectives must be measurable so that the IEP team, including parents, can assess the progress of your child. The IEP will tell you when to expect progress reports and how often you will receive them. You should receive them at least as often as students without IEPs receive their report cards. Goals and objectives do not usually repeat the state standards of the curriculum but instead identify goals or skills a student needs to work toward to make progress in the curriculum and to meet the unique needs of his or her disability related to the functional, academic, behavioral or developmental needs of the student.

Tips for Families:

- ✓ Plan before the meeting:
 - Write down what you are recommending for your child and share that with the school.
 - Talk to other parents about their IEP meetings. You will be more prepared when you have heard about other parents' experiences.
 - Write down your questions so you do not forget.
 - Talk to your child. Ask how school is going. Ask what he/she would like to change, what they would like to be different in school. Ask what they like and dislike. Ask what they want and need.
 - Consider when it's right to involve your child in the IEP meeting. Young children might only participate for part of the meeting, while older children might attend the full meeting. When transition out of high school is being discussed, your child must be invited to attend.
 - Ask to re-schedule the meeting if it is planned for a time when you cannot attend. Ask if you can participate by telephone if you cannot be there in person. Parent participation is an important part of IEP meetings and school systems are required to make every effort to include parents in them.
 - Review and prepare paperwork for each IEP meeting.
 - Review last year's records and IEP before the meeting.
 - Request copies of your child's records (in writing) so that you can review them beforehand.
 - Ask a friend or an IEP Buddy to go with you to the meeting.
 - Prepare a draft agenda for the IEP meeting to share your expectations with the school.
- ✓ Stay involved during the meeting:
 - Ask questions if you need to! If you don't understand what is being said, ask for clarification!
 - Control your emotions. You may not agree with the other members of the IEP team but try to work together to get what's best for your child. Focus your energy on solving problems.
 - Focus on what you want for your child (your interests), and not the specifics on how to get there (your position). The rest of the team may have some great ideas you haven't thought of.
 - Ask to take a break during the meeting if you need to talk with your IEP Buddy or other support person who came with you, gather your thoughts or calm down.
- ✓ If you don't agree with the IEP, you don't have to sign it. However, services may begin in an IEP as indicated unless you request a due process hearing to "freeze" the process until the disagreement can be resolved. If you request a due process hearing, the previous IEP will still be in effect.
- ✓ Remember, you can request another IEP meeting at any time if a change is needed or if you have questions about your child's progress. Make your request in writing.

Where to go for more information:

Parent to Parent of Georgia

770 451-5484 or 800-229-2038

<https://www.p2pga.org/>

Georgia Department of Education, Divisions for Exceptional Children

404 656-3963 or 800-311-3627 and ask to be transferred to Special Education

<https://gadoe.org/special-education/>

Georgia Department of Education Implementation Manual

(See chapter on evaluations and reevaluations)

Additional resources: Contact the **Special Education Director** for your school system.