TIP SHEET: UNDERSTANDING THE IEP PROCESS, TERMINOLOGY, AND LEGAL RIGHTS

What is an IEP?

An **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** is a legal document that describes the special education services, supports, and goals your child will receive at school. It ensures your child has the support they need to succeed.

The IEP Process: Step by Step

1. **Referral/Evaluation** – Request for evaluation to determine strengths, needs, and eligibility.
2. **Eligibility Meeting** – Team decides if a child qualifies under IDEA.
3. **IEP Meeting & Development** – Plan is created with goals, accommodations, and services.
4. **Implementation** – Services and supports begin.
5. **Review & Updates** – Annual review and re-evaluation every 3 years or 2 years if the student has an Intellectual Disability.

Key Terms to Know

- **IEP Team** – Parents, teachers, specialists, administrators.
- **Accommodations** – Supports to help access learning (extra time, seating).
- **Modifications** – Changes to what is expected to learn.
- **FAPE** – Free Appropriate Public Education.
- **LRE** – Least Restrictive Environment.
- **Related Services** – Speech, OT, counseling, transportation.
- **Progress Monitoring** – Tracks progress toward goals.
- **ESY** – Extended School Year.
- **NOREP** – Notice of Recommended Educational Placement

RAISE

The RAISE Center is a project of the SPAN Parent Advocacy Network and is funded by the US Department of Education's Rehabilitation Service Administration. The contents of this resource were developed under a cooperative agreement with the US Department of Education (H235G200007)). However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education and should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

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Your Legal Rights

Parents are vital members of the IEP team.

You have the right to:

- Be informed before changes to services.
- Consent to evaluations and services.
- Participate in meetings and bring support.
- Access records.
- Request IEP meetings anytime.
- Use dispute resolution if disagreements arise

Tips for Parents

- **Keep Records** – Save evaluations, IEPs, communication.
- **Prepare for Meetings** – List concerns/questions.
- **Ask Questions** – Clarify anything unclear.
- **Be Collaborative** – Share your insights.
- **Know Your Rights** – Learn IDEA and state laws.

Remember: The IEP is a living document — it should grow and change with your child's needs. You are your child's strongest advocate!

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