



Things to Think About!

Check it Out

By Karen Morgan

Visit our website at

www.snrproject.com

and click on "FORMS" to find a number of forms to help you in organizing and preparing for your child's IEP meeting.

A copy of "The Guide to the Individualized Education Plan" can be found at

www.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/iepguide.pdf

Excellent information on Education for disabled children can also be found at

DisabilityInfo.gov
The New Freedom Initiative's
Online Resource for Americans with Disabilities
www.disabilityinfo.gov

If you have any contact info for similar services available in your home state we'd love to add them to our web listings. Anything you would like to see added can be sent via the email address listed below.

Also, if you have a topic you would like to see covered in our newsletter, or have a specific question that we can answer directly, please feel free to contact us anytime through the following email address...

snrproject@hotmail.com

Understanding the IEP Process

By Linda Jorgensen

Individual Education Plan - Meetings



During a recent registration session at our local school a conversation between two parents was overheard. First Parent: "I was just told I have to attend an IEP for my son *Michael and I have no clue what that even is. The counselor just handed me a Parent's Guide, told me to read it and then show up at a meeting and I can't make any sense of this. What do I do?" Second Parent, "I don't know. I can't make any sense of this either. Maybe we had better go ask a teacher..."

That same day a third parent related their feelings about attending IEP meetings for their child this way. "Our IEP meetings feel like a summons to a lynching. I hate going! I never feel like I am getting the services and goals that I need for my child and often come out of the meeting resenting the school staff. This can't be good. What can I do to make the situation better?"

The first step in understanding the IEP process is by putting it into perspective. An IEP is not a punitive action but rather a process designed to help the parent and the child make the most of their education. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) intended IEPs as an opportunity for families and schools to work together for the best benefit of each child with a disability. It is a process tailored specifically for the individual child with special needs.

A little background may be helpful.

Under IDEA, an evaluation determines if a child is eligible for special education and related services. If the child is eligible, the law requires that a team of people (the IEP team) gathers to talk about what special instruction and services the child will need to succeed at school. This team **MUST** include at least one of the child's parents and/or legal guardian, as well as school staff and others as appropriate.

Together, the IEP team then reviews the information they have gathered that tells them how the child is currently doing in school and what his or her special needs are. If the child has difficulty in reading, paying attention, writing, speaking, behaving appropriately, or safety issues that need addressing. The team discusses these needs and ways to meet those needs. These decisions are written down in what then becomes that child's Individualized Education Program or IEP.

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Preparing for Your Child's IEP

Proper preparation by parents can equip them for what may be a lengthy discussion on how to help their child. Keeping the child as the main focus of the meeting often becomes the biggest challenge. When a parent prepares in advance by considering issues, options and courses of action that may be addressed, they are better prepared to keep the conversation civil and focused on their child. The goal of any IEP meeting should be the child, first and foremost. The goal being a productive, effective IEP best benefiting that child. Never let meeting participants forget that this is a REAL child – YOUR child under discussion.

Things To Consider Before the IEP Team Meeting

1. Obtain a copy of the Federal Publication, "A Guide to the Individualized Education Program". (See the link provided in our "Check it Out" column.)
2. Consider ways to involve your child in the IEP process. Start as soon as your child is able to participate in making simple goals if possible. IEP meetings are an excellent opportunity to begin developing self-advocacy skills.
3. Think about the long range vision you have for your child then break that vision down into smaller, shorter range goals that can be used as goals for the upcoming school year. Be reasonable in your expectations.
4. List your child's interests, strengths, weaknesses, medical needs and concerns you may have about their education.
5. Consider how your child's disability affects his or her education. Are there services such as Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy or augmentative services/equipment available to assist them? (See, "A Guide to the Individualized Education Program", pg.9 for complete list of services.)
6. Think about your child's current educational progress. What in the past has worked and what has not?
7. Obtain a written copy of you child's evaluation results and review them. It may be necessary to have a separate meeting with the evaluator in order to understand those results before attending your IEP meeting.
8. Review the evaluation results. Do they fit with what you know about your child? Does the evaluation appear complete and accurate? Are there questions left unanswered? If you disagree with the school's evaluation you may request, in writing, an Independent Education Evaluation (IEE) usually at no cost to you. The school must pay for this evaluation and show through due process that the evaluation is appropriate. The IEE results MUST be considered at your child's IEP meeting. (Bear in mind that if, through board hearings it is found that the schools original evaluation was appropriate, you may be responsible for the costs of the IEE. See IDEA act section 300.502 for full details.)
9. If necessary, plan to bring someone with you to the meeting with knowledge or expertise regarding your child, such as a spouse, relative, friend, related service personnel, parent mentor or even a representative from a local disability organization. (See, "A Guide to the Individualized Education Program", pg. 7 & 8 for a list of possible team members) If these individuals are unable to attend you may bring letters, documentation, Physicians orders etc. that may be relevant to your child's education plan and the setting where that education takes place.

Proper preparation, planning and goal setting by the parent will ensure the best interests of the child are maintained.

The goal of every IEP meeting is to specifically and effectively assist all persons involved in ensuring the best possible education is obtained for your child. Remember. The child, first and foremost.

