

# Understanding Parent Participation in Special Education



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As part of this series, I wrote about the special education law IDEA. One of the key principles of IDEA is “parent participation.” Parent participation, as outlined in IDEA, refers to the active involvement of parents of children with disabilities in the special education process. The law recognizes that parents are essential partners in their child’s education and aims to ensure that they have a meaningful role in decision-making and planning for their child’s education. Here are some key aspects of parent participation under IDEA:

### Informed Consent

Your informed consent is required before the school can conduct evaluations or provide special education services to your child. This means you have the right to be fully informed about any proposed actions and their

implications before you agree to them. Take the time to ask questions, seek clarification, and voice your concerns. Your active engagement ensures that decisions about your child's education are made collaboratively and with your child's best interests in mind. This also means that you have the right to revoke your consent at any point in time. It is best to do this in writing.

## Individualized Education Program (IEP) Meetings

IDEA emphasizes that you, as a parent, are an essential member of your child's educational team. One of the key ways you participate is through the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is a written plan that outlines your child's learning goals, the services they will receive, and any necessary accommodations or modifications. Your input is crucial during IEP meetings as you know your child best. This means receiving a copy of your child's evaluation report or draft IEP prior to the meeting with an appropriate amount of time to review the information before it is shared. (My team sends all reports home at least three business days before the scheduled meeting.)

## Access to Information

IDEA guarantees your right to access relevant information about your child's education. This includes evaluation results, progress reports, and explanations of the available services and supports. Being informed helps you to understand your child's progress, advocate for their needs, and make well-informed decisions.

together with the school team.

## Dispute Resolution

The law includes provisions for resolving disputes between parents and schools regarding their child's special education. You have the right to participate in mediation or due process hearings to resolve conflicts with the school district. Remember that open and respectful communication is key to finding solutions that benefit your child's education.

## Parent Training and Information Centers

IDEA supports the establishment of Parent Training and Information Centers in each state. These centers offer parents information, training, and resources to help them understand their rights and effectively participate in the special education process. Information can be found on your state Department of Education website, search for special education and you can find the information there. If not call them.

## Conclusion

Your participation under IDEA is more than just attending meetings; it's about actively engaging in your child's education, collaborating with educators, and advocating for their needs. Your insights as a parent are invaluable in creating an effective and individualized education plan for your child with a disability. Remember, you are not alone on this journey,

by working together, your child's IEP team can create an inclusive and supportive educational environment that empowers your child to thrive.

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# Nurturing Your Children's Passions



## Nurturing Your Children's Passions

It's a new year! Your children may become anxious about how to fill long dark winter days. What can you do as parents to nurture their passions? When your children tend to shut down on cold winter days, you may feel overwhelmed and frustrated on how your family will get through the winter months without going crazy.

# Questions to Ask Your Kids to Identify Passions

Here are some questions you can ask your children to get them thinking about what they would like to do or explore during their free time:

What do you love most about school?

What would you like to do to keep your body moving on cold winter days?

What is your favorite playtime activity?

What do you like to do outside?

Who would you like to do a project with? What would you do for a project?

What would you like to learn about? How do you want to learn about this topic?

Where would you like to go to learn more about a specific topic?

Is there a museum or activity program that explores or provides training about a topic of interest?

What can I do to support your interests?

What should we research online to identify classes or learn more about your topic of interest?

## Some of the Best Projects Come from Our Children

Children are capable of planning incredible projects when you encourage them with your actions. For example, Maria loves art and shares art projects with her friends. She creates temporary tattoos by drawing creations with marking pens on an absorbent sheet of

paper. Then she places the marking pen art against her skin and dampens the sheet of paper with a paper towel. She is very impressed with transferred tattoos. Her sister, Anna, loves to create finger weaving leashes for her collection of stuffed animals. Rosie, her cousin, designs and sews doll clothes for her doll. She has also has created an Etsy account to sell customized Cricut stickers.

Science experiments generate lots of questions that must be answered. Brandon experimented with various hand sanitizers and surface cleaners to determine which products killed the most germs. Dave learned how to code and created various digital games. Marla won an ecology award for learning how to continuously water trees while conserving water with various irrigation systems.

## Passions Lead to Internships and Careers

Although these art projects and science experiments sound like educational and exciting rainy-day activities, several led to future internships and career choices. Maria now works in a store creating graphic art designs for tee shirts and other products. She plans to major in graphic art design when she starts college. Anna loves project-based learning and wants to inspire kids by becoming a project-based elementary teacher. Brandon has expanded his scientific interests and is currently becoming certified as a train engineer at a local park. Dave is getting ready to apply to colleges. He wants to eventually construct mass transit systems. I loved playing school when I was a kid and am still

teaching students after 40 years in education.

Share in the comments section below this blog what passions you may have developed as a child that led to a satisfying career. Much success as you continue to support your children's passions.

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## What Are Your Special Education Rights?



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At every IEP meeting I hold, I ask parents if they wish

a copy of their Parent Rights and Procedural Safeguards. Mind you this is in addition to the electronic copy I send when the meeting is scheduled.

Why you ask? The answer is special education Parent Rights and Procedural Safeguards are essential components of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a federal law in the United States that ensures that children with disabilities have access to a free appropriate public education (FAPE). These rights and safeguards are designed to protect the interests of parents and their children with disabilities during the special education process. Have you read yours? If not ask your school for a copy or go to your state's Department of Education website to search for your Parent Rights. It should pop up.

## The Key Details

### Parental Consent

Special education starts with parental consent. If your child is suspected of having a disability that interferes with their learning, parents must provide written consent (in their primary language) before any evaluation can take place. This consent is the foundation of a partnership between educators and parents to identify and address the unique needs of the child. This ensures that parents are actively involved in the decision-making process for their child's education.



# Evaluation and Eligibility

Once consent is given, the school district conducts a comprehensive evaluation to determine your child's eligibility for special education services. As educators, we rely on various assessments, observations, and input from parents to build a complete picture of the child's strengths and challenges. Collaborating with you during this process helps the team gain valuable insights into your child's experiences outside the classroom and an understanding of what your concerns are.

You have the right to request an evaluation if you suspect your child has a disability that affects their educational performance. The school district must conduct a comprehensive assessment to determine the child's eligibility for special education services. (more on this is coming in a blog post)

# Individualized Education Program

Once your child has been found eligible for special education, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed. The IEP is a legally binding document that outlines the child's unique needs, educational goals, and the services and accommodations the school will provide to help the child succeed. This IEP can be taken anywhere (e.g. a different state or district) and it will be honored.

This personalized document outlines your child's unique learning goals, the support and services the school

needs to provide, and the methods to measure their progress. You play a key role in IEP meetings, where their input and aspirations for your child are vital in shaping the plan. As educators, we value these collaborative discussions to create meaningful learning experiences that cater to each child's specific needs. If you have any questions or concerns, ask IEP meeting participants.

## Participation in IEP Meetings

You are the primary advocate for their child! Special education Parent Rights and Safeguards are there to ensure your input and concerns in the decision-making process are heard. The right to participate in IEP meetings, provide consent, and receive prior written notice ensure that parents' voices are heard and respected. Your participation must be meaningful and if you need an interpreter to participate in this process the school district must provide one. The interpreter also needs to be from outside the school agency to prevent any missed communication.

## Prior Written Notice

Schools must provide you with written notice before proposing or refusing any changes to your child's educational placement, services, or evaluations. This notice includes an explanation of why the school is proposing or refusing the action. In most cases you will receive it after having your IEP meeting or after information was provided.

Effective communication between educators and parents is essential in fostering a strong parent-teacher partnership. Schools must provide parents with prior written notice before proposing or denying any changes to the child's educational placement, services, or evaluations. Transparent communication ensures that parents are well-informed and active participants in their child's educational journey.

## Confidentiality of Records

You have the right to access your child's educational records and the assurance that their child's information will be kept confidential. You are trusting educators with sensitive information about your child's educational needs. The school and the school district must honor this trust by ensuring the confidentiality of records. Respecting the privacy of families builds a foundation of trust, leading to more open communication and collaboration.

This means that the individuals who work with your child know what they need to know. Your child's IEP Snapshot will be shared with his classroom teacher and special education teachers. If your child has a Behavior Plan and rides the bus, then the bus driver would be given a copy of the Plan. This ensures that everyone who works with your child knows what they need to access an environment and be successful. It's the case manager and administration's responsibility to ensure confidentiality is maintained.

A note: An IEP Snapshot only contains IEP goals,

services, accommodations and modifications, and testing needs. Other items that IEP teams also share include Behavior Plans, Communication, and Vision Plans. These are included in IDEA as this information is needed for teachers to do their part as members of your child's IEP team.

## Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE)

If you disagree with the school's evaluation, you have the right to request an IEE at the school district's expense. An IEE is conducted by a qualified professional who is not employed by the school district. Your request must be approved by the school district and your request must be in writing.

## Mediation and Due Process

Though school teams aim for harmony, disputes arise. If there is a dispute between you and the school district, the option is to use mediation or pursue a due process hearing. Mediation is a voluntary process that allows both parties to resolve disputes with the help of a neutral mediator. Due process involves a formal legal hearing to resolve disputes related to the child's education. Your state's Department of Education website can provide you with specific information about this process.

Some states offer facilitated meetings. Facilitation is an option for using an impartial third party to promote effective communication and assist the IEP team in

developing an IEP based on the student's needs. State-sponsored facilitation is a voluntary process; both the parent and the district need to agree to facilitation. This may be harder to find on your state's Department of Education website, so you may need to call.

It's important for you to understand these Rights and Procedural Safeguards to advocate for your child. These Rights and Procedural Safeguards vary slightly from state to state, so it's essential to review the specific regulations in the state where the child attends school. You can contact their local school district or state Department of Education for more information about special education rights and procedural safeguards in their area.

You can also get a fresh copy from them if you can't find a copy.

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## Acts of Kindness Monthly Calendar



# Acts of Kindness Monthly Calendar

Happy new year 2024! Each year many of us make new year's resolutions and will fail fulfilling them within the first few weeks. This year I made the commitment to help our younger family members give back to their community. Planning should not overwhelm our family when considering their demanding schedules. To overcome this challenge, we convened family meetings with Brandon, Anna, and Maria.

## Kindness Acts Calendar

We decided to focus on one act of kindness each month. Listed below is our proposed schedule of activities that might work for your family:

January: It is cold outside and homeless shelters are filled with families. Donate a few hours at a soup kitchen or give a sack of groceries to our local food bank.

February: Create 10 handmade valentines for a local senior center or senior nutritional lunch program. Give people who work hard in our community some chocolate candy.

March: Distribute flowers to the neighbors to celebrate the start of spring.

April: Make pretty Easter eggs with greetings and deliver to neighbors.

May: Think of all the mothers we know and wish them a happy Mother's Day.

June: Make a lemonade stand and give away tee-shirts to cool off during the hot season.

July: Clean up the streets from 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebrations.

August: On the first day of school, say good morning to everyone. Tell them that we hope they are happy with their teacher and friends in their class.

September: Be kind to our parents and do things that our parents love to do with us on Labor Day.

October: Try not to scare people with our costumes.

November: Collect donations for the food bank to buy turkeys.

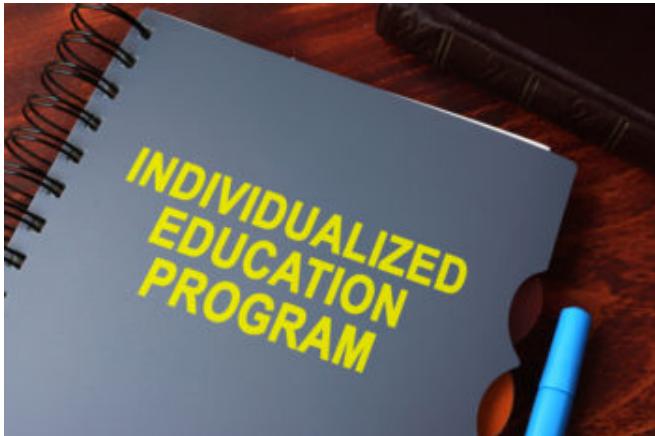
December: Give new or nearly new toys to the Toys for Tots program.

## Activity Reflection

After completing all of these acts of kindness, our family should feel fulfilled, tired, and happy! Much success by sharing your acts of kindness with others.

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# What is an IEP?



## What is an IEP?

An IEP, short for Individualized Education Program, is a comprehensive and tailored document designed to support students with disabilities in their academic pursuits. This personalized roadmap is created through a collaborative effort involving teachers, parents or guardians, school administrators, and, when applicable, specialists such as therapists or counselors. The main purpose of an IEP is to ensure that students with disabilities receive appropriate and tailored educational services and support to help them succeed academically and make progress toward their educational goals. The IEP serves as a blueprint for your child's educational journey.

The IEP is legally mandated under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the United States. This law ensures that eligible students with disabilities have access to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and that their educational needs are



met through the development and implementation of an IEP. Other countries may have similar laws or educational support systems in place for students with disabilities.

## What does it mean when a student has an IEP?

When a student has an IEP, it means they are eligible to receive special education. To receive Special Education, you must have an IEP. If you have an IEP, you are receiving Special Education.

IEP refers to the actual document that details what type and frequency of Special Education Supports and Related Services they will receive.

IEPs are defined by IDEA. Your local school district develops and implements an IEP. The IEP age range is 3-21. Prior to age 3, children get an IFSP.

To get an IEP, your school team of evaluators must have evaluated your child and found them to be eligible under one of the IDEA 14 Categories of Disability.

Whether or not you refer to your child as 'disabled' is up to you and your child. I do not think 'disabled' is a derogatory term, nor does much of the disability community.

# The IEP Process

It's a common myth that IEPs give students an advantage over students without one. This is not true. It is to level the playing field and address any disabilities that are affecting your child's ability to access and benefit from their education.

If your child has been evaluated and found eligible for an IEP, that means they have been identified as a child with a disability. And that disability is interfering with their education.

For an IEP, there is General Education and Special Education. With an IEP, you can receive Special Education in the General Education setting. Receiving Special Education does not mean you forfeit regular education.

## Who writes an IEP?

It is developed by an IEP team. Before an IEP can be written, your child must be eligible for special education. Per IDEA, a multidisciplinary team must determine that your child is a child with a disability and your child requires special education and IEP-related services to benefit from the general education program.

IDEA defines who must attend an IEP meeting as:

Parents – As a parent, you have valuable information and insights about your child's needs and strengths,

as well as ideas to enhance his education.

General Education Teacher/s – They share information on your child's performance versus the expectations in the classroom.

Special Education Teacher/s – The teacher has the experience and training in educating kids with disabilities. They also work with other teachers in planning accommodations.

Results Interpreter – The person who interprets your child's evaluation results that can help in planning for the appropriate instructional program.

School System Representative/LEA – The school system representative knows special education services well and is authorized to commit resources.

Knowledgeable Experts – people with special expertise or knowledge about your kid invited by the school district or by you.

Transition Service Agency Representative – When related services are discussed, representatives from transition service agencies may be invited.

The Child – When discussing transition, and whenever appropriate, the child may also be invited. Yes, it is considered a 'best practice' to include them (depending on their age).

## What must be included in my child's IEP?

### Present Levels of Performance

Parents, teachers, and school staff tasked to evaluate the child present information on the child's needs and strengths. It also includes comments on how your child

is doing within the general education classroom, interventions, and any data that has been collected.

## Setting Goals and Objectives

Once the team has a clear understanding of your child's strengths and needs, the next step is to set measurable, achievable, and yet ambitious goals. These goals encompass both academic and functional aspects, with the intention of fostering growth and progress. By setting realistic objectives, we empower our students to reach their full potential. The goals are based on the discussions, data-based, and documentation in the current educational performance levels. The goals are not meant to help the child achieve above grade level or to maintain skills.=

## Specialized Support and Services

Perhaps one of the most valuable aspects of an IEP is its provision of specialized services and support. These services can range from specialized instruction to various related services like speech therapy, occupational therapy, or counseling. Moreover, the IEP may include the use of assistive technology and accommodations tailored to the student's unique needs. These adaptations ensure that students can access the curriculum on an equal footing with their non-disabled peers. In addition to the above, an IEP includes:

The limit of your child's participation with kids without disability in regular school and class activities.

When will the services be given, where, how often, and for how long?

The necessary transition services (by age 14/16 or the initial IEP to take effect on the child's 14/16th birthday).

Strategies and supports for behavioral management if the behavior affects the child's or other children's learning

Language requirements concerning the IEP in case the child has limited English proficiency or mastery

Communication needs

Assistive technology services or devices needed to receive FAPE

Needed classroom accommodations in general education

## Inclusion and General Education

An essential consideration in the IEP process is determining the extent to which the student will participate in the general education setting. Inclusion is highly encouraged whenever feasible, as it not only fosters a sense of belonging but also allows for valuable social interactions and opportunities to learn from peers.

Upon completion of the IEP, the team decides on the implementation. The school district must provide the FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education) under an LRE (Least Restrictive Environment). The IEP team will consider the most appropriate for both in educating your kid together with children without disability.

The team identifies the services your child requires to

reach the objectives and goals, as well as the delivery. General classroom education is preferable for most kids. However, there are various options available. These include special day classes.

## Progress Monitoring and Flexibility

An IEP is a living document, subject to regular reviews and updates. Educators continuously monitor your progress and make necessary adjustments to ensure the plan remains effective and relevant. Flexibility is key in responding to the evolving needs of your child and adapting strategies accordingly. This progress should be reported and shared timely but you can request this data at any point if you have questions about your child's progress.

## Transitions and Beyond

For students approaching the threshold of adulthood, the IEP also includes a crucial transition plan. This plan outlines the steps for transitioning from school to post-secondary life, including further education, vocational training, employment opportunities, and essential life skills development.

## Next Steps

Your first IEP is written once your child had been found eligible. At that point, you will come back together and rewrite the IEP every year. The annual meeting is something you'll hear parents talk about a lot if you are in this space. Per IDEA, a child's IEP is reviewed

and updated at least annually. As stated above, IDEA clearly defines who must attend an IEP meeting. Anyone on the team can request a meeting to review or make changes at any time.

No, you don't have to think about or communicate with your teachers daily. But if you only think about or act on your child's IEP once a year at renewal time, I can almost guarantee you that it will be a stressful experience.

Engage and stay involved all year long.