

# What is an IEP?



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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.