

Decoding the IEP Form – Step by Step

Creating your child’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP) can be both exciting and stressful. It is exciting to hear how much progress they have made at school. At the same time, it can be stressful when you are trying to ensure that your child has all the supports and accommodations they need to make progress in the curriculum and fulfill their role as a student.

Step one in the process is understanding the IEP form itself. This tip sheet is designed to help you decode the form*, section by section and provide some ideas of what should be included in each part of the IEP form.

*Note: Rules and procedures vary from state to state. We compared the forms from many states to come up with the following guide. The recommendations are generalized in order to apply to most situations. If your IEP looks substantially different or is written in language that isn’t included here, give us a call and we can help.

Demographics

- This section should list your current address, phone number, email, etc.
- Please ensure this information is accurate and up-to-date as the school will use this information to contact you.

Purpose of Meeting

- Meetings can have several purposes:
 - Initial Eligibility: This is for initial qualification for special education
 - Eligibility Re-Evaluation: Usually takes place every 3 years; determines the child’s continued need for special education
 - Annual Review: to review and make changes to goals, objectives, services, etc. each year according to the child’s growth and development.
 - Amendment: An off-schedule meeting to make minor changes to the IEP.

Participants

- This is a list of everyone participating the meeting. This should include all service providers and teachers.
- A general education teacher **must** be present for the IEP meeting to be a legal meeting. The general education teacher should preferably be a content teacher - *not music, gym, technology or the librarian*.
- Essential staff (Such as service providers (therapists etc.) and the general education teacher) must have your written permission to be absent from the meeting.
- There should also be someone from the district present who has the authority to “commit district resources” present. In other words, someone who has the power to say “YES”.

Student Profile

- This section should include information on the following:
 - Student Strengths
 - This section should list all student strengths; academic, social, etc. The information provided should be concrete and observable. Beware of ambiguous language and of sentences that describe the student as “cute” or “sweet”.
 - Parent Input & Concerns
 - This is the parent’s opportunity to list **any and all** concerns they have regarding the child’s education and social development, now and in the future.
 - Current Evaluations
 - This section should list all current assessment data. Evaluations from service providers, progress monitoring data, intelligence testing, and any academic assessments.
 - This section should also include any assessment data the parents have provided from outside evaluators and/or service providers.
 - Eligibility
 - This section details how the child qualifies for special education. Labels often vary from state to state. Students with WS qualify in many different ways:
 - Intellectual Disability (ID)
 - Cognitive Impairment (CI) - variations of this include:
 - MiCI - Mild Cognitive Impairment
 - MoCI - Moderate Cognitive Impairment
 - SCI - Severe Cognitive Impairment
 - SXI - Severely Multiply Impaired
 - Other Health Impairment (OHI)

It is important that your child qualify under the most flexible eligibility status possible based on their personal profile. For many individuals with WS, that status is OHI.

Present Level of Academic Achievement & Functional Performance

This should be the most comprehensive part of your child’s IEP.

- It should be at least 3-5 paragraphs long, and should thoroughly describe the student’s ability to function in the school environment - including academics, social skills, transitions, technology, playground, physical education, etc.
- This section should also include information regarding the child’s disability and learning profile (how they learn). Strategies that work and those that don’t work should be listed.
- Information included here should be concrete and measurable. All data is included.
- This section should also list all of the areas of concern regarding the child’s ability to participate, make progress in the curriculum, and fulfill their role as a student.
 - Each area of concern should then be addressed with either a supplemental aide, support, or service OR with a specific goal & objectives.
- Think of it this way: If you were to move to another district, could the new district read the PLAFP and have enough information to pick up right where your current district left off WITHOUT repeating work or trials that have already been done? If not, this section is incomplete.

Special Factors/Supplemental Aides, Supports, Services

- This section includes information on any accommodations the student might need to fully participate in the school environment and in the curriculum.
- These may include but are not limited to:
 - Preferential seating
 - Sensory breaks
 - Visual Schedules
 - Study guides or guided notes
 - Use of technology for writing, PDF editing, dictating assignments, etc
 - Audio books and/or text-to-speech
 - Set of books at home (reduces weight of back pack)
 - Locker accommodations - digital lock or key lock
 - Pre-teaching & re-teaching of assignment content
 - Ability to produce alternate output, e.g. video or read of 5 paragraph essay
 - Low-tech accommodations for classwork and/or worksheets - stickers, label maker, name stamp, etc.
 - Behavioral supports

State Assessments

- This section lists any state-mandated assessments the child will be given and the accommodations they will be provided while the assessment is administered.
- Accommodations to state-mandated assessments are governed by the state and generally there are strict rules about the type of accommodations allowed.
- State assessments go by many names and are generally administered to all students over the course of a few days or a week.

Accommodations/Alternate Assessments

- This section lists any district and/or classroom assessments the child will be given and the accommodations they will be provided while the assessment is administered.
- Accommodations for district level and/or classroom assessments are often far more flexible than the state assessments.
- Some district assessments, such as NWEA (North Western Educational Assessment), have specific criteria for allowable accommodations.
- Some common district assessments/progress monitoring tools are:
 - DIBELS: Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills
 - DIBELSMath: Math Skill Assessment
 - AIMSweb: Reading & Math Assessment
 - iStation: Reading & Math Assessment
 - STAR Reading
 - STAR Math
- Link to more information on Progress Monitoring Tools:
<http://www.intensiveintervention.org/chart/progress-monitoring>



Goals & Objectives

- This section should address any and all areas of weakness or needed skill development identified in the Present Level Statement.
- **Goals & Objectives should be measurable and concrete.**
 - Goals should be **SMART**



SMART Goals	
S pecific	Know exactly what you are wanting to accomplish.
M easurable	How will you know you met your goal?
A chievable	Make sure your goal is not too far to reach, but far enough to be challenging.
R elevant	Link the goal to something important to you; something that inspires you.
T imely	When do you want your goal to be met?



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- Objectives generally relate to each goal and the trend is to make each objective align to a marking period or quarter.



- **Pay close attention to whether or not your child is achieving their goals and objectives.**
 - Goals and objectives should be met each year.
 - You may want to keep a chart or a spreadsheet of your child's progress in reading and/or math skills to be sure they are continuing to make progress in these areas.
 - If progress stagnates or stops, the team should examine the interventions and/or strategies that are being used to ensure they are effective for the student.
- **GOALS ARE NOT THE CURRICULUM** - They are areas that the team feel the child needs extra support and/or skill development in order to make progress in the curriculum.
 - You should receive a report card (with grades) that shows your child's progress in the overall curriculum, as well as progress reports on their IEP goals.
 - This applies whether or not your child is in the general education classroom. No matter the placement, the child should be provided a research-based curriculum in all basic subjects: reading, math, science, and social studies.

Programs & Services

- Services
 - These may be any of the following:
 - Occupational Therapy
 - Physical Therapy
 - Speech Therapy
 - Music Therapy
 - Adaptive Physical Education
 - Social Work
 - Academic Teacher Consultant services
 - Teacher Consultant for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing
 - Teacher Consultant for Visual Impairments
 - There should be specific information regarding the amount of time the service provider is working with your student and the type of service provision they are providing:
 - Direct: may be one-on-one or small group
 - Indirect or Consultation: the provider works with the teacher or the parents to ensure the child is properly supported.
 - Generally speaking, service providers are NOT allowed to pull students from academic time: math and reading.
- Programs
 - This section includes information about any special education program in which your child will be participating. This may include:
 - Resource Room
 - Program for students with cognitive impairments: these go by many different names depending on the state. They may be called Lifeskills classes, Special Day Classes, etc.
 - Access to General Education
 - This section lists the amount of time your child will and will not be a part of the typical curriculum and with their general education peers.



- **Pay close attention to this section.** Parents often are not aware of the total amount of time their child is out of the general education classroom and not participating with their peers. Parents need to add up the amount of time in the program room and the amount of time with service providers in order to have a full understanding of the total time spent in special education.
- Reduced Day
 - Sometimes, children need to attend school for a reduced day. This is often the case when there are health or behavioral concerns.
- Extended School Year (ESY)
 - If the team has documentation of skill regression over any school vacation/break time; the child may be provided with ESY services in order to reduce the likelihood of skill loss.
- Transportation
 - This section describes the type of transportation being provided to the student. This can vary according to the child's needs and may include any of the following:
 - door to door - the child is escorted from your door to the school's door
 - curb to curb - the child is picked up from the curb near your home and dropped at the curb of the school
 - Your child is not required to take special transportation and can take the regular bus if you feel it is more appropriate.

Notice Regarding Provision of Special Education

- FAPE: Free and Appropriate Public Education
 - This statement means that the school believes this IEP is "appropriate" for your child.
 - It must be signed by someone with authority from the school.
 - You may or may not have to sign the IEP, depending on the state.
 - Generally, the IEP goes into effect the next day unless otherwise specified somewhere in the IEP.
 - If you do not agree, it is important that you let the district know **WITHIN 7 DAYS** of the IEP meeting. You must let them know in writing and list your concerns. If not, the IEP goes into effect as written.
- Options Considered
 - This is an important section that is often overlooked or not filled out at all.
 - It is important to list the things that the team talks about and then rejects for whatever reason. by doing this you have documentation that can save future teams from wasting your child's learning time by trying something you have already rejected.

Other Information from IDEA 2004:

<http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cstatute%2C>

“Since the enactment and implementation of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, this title has been successful in ensuring children with disabilities and the families of such children access to a free appropriate public education and in improving educational results for children with disabilities.

(4) However, the implementation of this title has been impeded by low expectations, and an insufficient focus on applying replicable research on proven methods of teaching and learning for children with disabilities.

(5) Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by--

(A) having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom, to the maximum extent possible, in order to--

(i) meet developmental goals and, to the maximum extent possible, the challenging expectations that have been established for all children; and

(ii) be prepared to lead productive and independent adult lives, to the maximum extent possible;

(B) strengthening the role and responsibility of parents and ensuring that families of such children have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home;

(C) coordinating this title with other local, educational service agency, State, and Federal school improvement efforts, including improvement efforts under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, in order to ensure that such children benefit from such efforts and that special education can become a service for such children rather than a place where such children are sent;

(D) providing appropriate special education and related services, and aids and supports in the regular classroom, to such children, whenever appropriate;

(E) supporting high-quality, intensive preservice preparation and professional development for all personnel who work with children with disabilities in order to ensure that such personnel have the skills and knowledge necessary to improve the academic achievement and functional performance of children with disabilities, including the use of scientifically based instructional practices, to the maximum extent possible;

(F) providing incentives for whole-school approaches, scientifically based early reading programs, positive behavioral interventions and supports, and early intervening services to reduce the need to label children as disabled in order to address the learning and behavioral needs of such children;

(G) focusing resources on teaching and learning while reducing paperwork and requirements that do not assist in improving educational results; and

(H) supporting the development and use of technology, including assistive technology devices and assistive technology services, to maximize accessibility for children with disabilities.”