



Special Education
Parent
Advisory
Committee

Diving into the IEP Waters for the First Time?

Here are some things other parents wish someone had told them before they jumped in and got their feet wet!

KEEP NOTES and bring into any meeting at school so you remember to get all your questions and concerns addressed.

COMMUNICATION is key to IEP success. Do not be afraid to reach out and ask questions at any time. You do not need to wait for the school to schedule a meeting.



**Tips, Insights, Advice, and Answers
TO Parents FROM Parents.**

"What I Wish I Would Have Known!"

1

What is the difference between a 504 and an IEP?

A 504 plan does NOT provide specialized instruction through special education programs and services. The sole focus of a 504 plan is to provide a student with accommodations.

An IEP, on the other hand, requires specialized instruction as well as accommodations. An IEP identifies each student's needs, outlines reasonable learning goals, and documents the services the school district will provide to help the student achieve those goals.

2

Can programs or services be added or reduced over the course of my child's education based on his/her needs?

The school keeps track of how your child is doing in meeting his or her educational goals. Results are reviewed at your child's annual IEP along with regular reports of progress on goals and objectives.

The IEP team, including you, meets at least once per year to review the IEP. Your child's progress and needs are examined as your child continues to grow, and the team makes appropriate updates to the IEP. Parents can also request an IEP at any time.

3

At any time during the IEP meeting, can I ask who the people are around the table? Can I ask what their role is and how they can help my child?

Is it okay to ask for clarification about anything said at a meeting?

Is it okay to ask for a break or take a minute to step out and breathe?

As a parent, you are an integral member of the IEP team.

At any time, you may ask:

- For clarification if there is something said that you don't understand.
- The other team members around the table to clarify the role they play at the school and in the educational plan for your child.
- To step outside of the room to take a quick break or breathe. This can be overwhelming and emotional.

Taking care of YOUR needs briefly will help you be a better contributor to the plan for your child.



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Answers and insights to help keep your head above water from parents who have been there!



4

How many people are actually at an IEP? (This can be concerning or overwhelming the first time!)

Depending on the needs of the child, an IEP meeting could have a LOT of people attend. The size of the IEP team is determined by the potential needs of the child. For a parent attending an IEP team meeting for the first time, this can be unexpected and overwhelming. Remember that every person around the table is there to do their best to help your child be successful.

5

Do I need a medical diagnosis AND an educational diagnosis? (Sometimes a medical diagnosis takes longer to get)

A medical diagnosis is obtained by a medical practitioner who utilized Clinical Diagnostic Assessment Tools. An educational diagnosis is obtained by a team that minimally includes a school psychologist, social worker and speech pathologist. The educational diagnosis is obtained when the disability affects the child's involvement and progress in the general education curriculum. Having a medical diagnosis does not automatically qualify a student for an educational diagnosis which is required to access school based services for Autism.

6

What's the difference between outside vs. school-based therapy services? How do I obtain both?

Outside therapy services may sound similar to school based therapy services, but they are different and usually work toward different goals - all focused to best help your child. Here are some things to know:

- You need a medical diagnosis and doctor's referral to receive therapy services in an outpatient environment.
- When it comes to Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), ABA therapy is best covered by insurance, but not always the right thing for your child. Physical therapy/occupational therapy/speech therapy can be more beneficial, but check with your insurance company to verify coverage.
- School therapy goals are usually focused on affecting academic performance.
- Outpatient therapy goals are focused on physical capabilities, cognitive capabilities, and day to day function, but can include school related items.
- When proper paperwork is filled out, the school therapists and outpatient therapists can communicate with each other and this will likely help with your child's success.

Resources & Information

FAMILY MATTERS: www.michigan.gov/specialeducation-familymatters



Age Specific Questions:



AGES 0-5

What are the options for preschool? (GSRP, ECSE, private preschool). Are other services provided? (Play and Learn, Great Start, etc)

Parents have several options when determining their child's first school experience. Before the age of three, families can engage with Play and Learn groups or Great Start programs. At the age of three or beyond, families and IEP teams can explore options such as GSRP, ECSE, or private preschool with walk-in services. If you or your doctor are concerned about your child's development, Early On is a great organization that can evaluate them for extra support needs.

ELEMENTARY:

How do I find community services that are supportive of my child?

Don't be afraid to reach out and inquire if local businesses and organizations have specialized times/accommodations for your child. Places like indoor trampoline parks, museums, and movie theaters will offer sensory friendly opportunities or be willing to make other accommodations so that all kids can enjoy their spaces. You may also reach out to your local Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC) representative for suggestions.

SECONDARY AND BEYOND:

How do we navigate the transition from elementary to secondary school?

Moving from elementary to middle school can be a hard transition - both for your student AND for you. That is OKAY! We grow from navigating hard things. Here are some topics you can discuss with your student to mitigate some of the challenges with this transition:

- There are more teachers and less recess time. Discuss how this will affect them.
- Buy a combination lock and help them practice opening it. Being able to get a locker open makes the transition to middle school easier.
- Discuss opportunities for extra curricular activities and how they might join them.
- Look at the lunch schedule and prepare them for how they make their lunch choice.
- Request a tour of the building in advance and ask how things like passing time and lunch work in the secondary setting. You can walk your student's schedule, but ask about the possibility of it changing before the first day of school. Many schools are still getting organized right until the moment students enter the building on the first day.
- Remember to model flexibility for your student and encourage them to be flexible as well.

What are some things I need to know about as we plan for life beyond high school?

As your student progresses through middle and high school, the IEP team (including you and your student) will begin to discuss Transition Planning. Here are some things to remember:

- At the IEP held during the school year your student will turn 16 (or possibly before), the team will begin to ask what their future plans are and create a Transition Plan to help them reach their goals.
- Depending on the needs of your student, other community agencies may be able to assist you in this transition planning. Your student's teacher will reach out and ask for consent to invite some of these agencies to join the IEP team. Do not be afraid to invite them to the table and begin to understand how they can help you and your family.



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