

Tips for a Successful IEP Meeting

Before the meeting:

- Build a positive relationship with at least one person on the IEP team, such as a classroom teacher, the principal, school psychologist or Special Education administrator.
- Plan ahead. Put your thoughts down on paper so you won't forget to mention what's important to you during the meeting. Prioritize your thoughts so that during the IEP meeting you can focus on what is most important.
- Know the purpose and format of the IEP meeting and who will be there ahead of time. That way you won't be surprised by the number of people around the table or the process being followed.
- If you plan to share copies of any private assessment reports, send them to the team ahead of time so they can be familiar with the data before the meeting, rather than take valuable time from the meeting to review them.
- Review current reports, last year's IEP (if applicable) and Parents' Rights and Procedural Safeguards sent to you annually.
- Talk to your child about what works well for them at school and what things could be different.

During the meeting:

- Understand that as a parent, you are an integral part of the IEP team. Anything you can do to make yourself comfortable in this meeting will help you to participate more actively.
- Consider bringing a trusted person with you – spouse, partner, relative, neighbor, friend – so you'll have a support system and another set of ears to hear what others have said. It helps if someone else can take notes. You may want to enlist the help of a "Parent Partner" through the Oregon Parent Training and Information Center (OrPTI).
- Be prepared for district staff to present assessment data and their professional opinions about what they've observed and feel is appropriate for your child. This may be different from your input. It is important to "see the big picture" and understand your child as a whole to assist in educational planning.
- Stay focused on the questions you want answered or on what you want provided for your child, not on how to get there – that's the job of the professionals. For example, if you want your child to make more progress in reading, focus on your goal and trust the IEP team to use best practices to meet your child's needs.
- Don't hesitate to ask questions and seek clarification if someone is using terms or educational jargon you don't understand.
- Include your child in some way, or find a way to personalize your child. When you talk about him/her, make him recognizable to all team members. Remember that you know him/her best – his/her strengths, talents, interests and needs. Take in what the professionals have to say, but add your perspective also.
- Involve your child in the IEP meeting to the extent appropriate for his/her age. At age 16, he/she will be expected to participate. When your child turns 18, he/she will be making decisions about his/her own placement. Inclusion in the process, at the appropriate age and level of understanding, is important.
- Ask to take the IEP home to review if you are unable to make a final decision at the meeting. You can agree to parts of the IEP or all of it. You will be asked to sign off on who attended the IEP meeting, but this does not mean that you approve the IEP. Remember that if you ask for more time to consider the IEP, it will likely take longer for the new IEP to be implemented.

After the meeting:

- Review the agreed upon IEP to make sure you understand all of it. If not, contact your student's case manager for clarification. Remember, you always can change your mind on any or all parts of the IEP you agreed to.
- Talk to your child, in terms he/she will understand, about what was discussed at the meeting. Be sure to discuss the progress he/she has made.
- Review goals and objectives so he/she will know what he/she is going to be working on during the coming year.
- Place the IEP in the binder or file where you keep other school notices and reports. This makes it easy to access for future reference.
- Develop a collaborative relationship with the professionals who interact regularly with your child. Meet with the special education teacher to learn how you can reinforce at home the skills and strategies being taught at school.

The Importance of Keeping Records

Parents will need to have quick access to student academic and medical records again and again. Keep them in a safe and easily accessible place. A large three-ring binder can be an effective way to organize these important documents. When one binder is full, another can be started. Other systems also can work -- the important thing is to be diligent in keeping all pertinent information in one place.

Contents of the binder may include the following:

- ✓ Names, telephone numbers, email addresses and schedule of those working with your student
- ✓ Observations of your student's interests, strengths and weaknesses
- ✓ Copies of your student's cumulative record, psychological reports, grades, assessment, IEPs, etc.
- ✓ Copies of all outside assessment or professional opinions regarding your student's unique needs and strengths
- ✓ Communications with school personnel
- ✓ Your child's health history, including any medications your child takes at home or at school (include dosage, prescription number and any adverse reactions or side effects the medication may cause)
- ✓ Birth and developmental history as appropriate
- ✓ List of all medications a child takes at home or at school. Include the prescription name, date and dosage. Note behavior changes and reactions and the prescribing physician's name.
- ✓ Resources and articles about topics which are relevant to your child's needs.

Having records readily available will make the IEP process much easier.