

STEPS IN THE IEP PROCESS

The Basic Special Education Process Under The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, (IDEA)

Before taking a detailed look at the Individualized Education Program (IEP), it may be helpful to look briefly at how a student is identified as having a disability and needing special education and related services and, thus, an IEP.

Step 1. Child is identified as possibly needing special education and related services.

A child may be identified by “Child Find”; referral or request for evaluation from a school professional, a parent, or an agency. This request may be verbal or in writing. Parental consent is needed before the child is evaluated.

Step 2. Child is evaluated.

The evaluation must assess the child in all areas related to the suspected disability. The evaluation results will be used to decide eligibility for special education and related services and to make decisions about an appropriate educational program.

Step 3. Eligibility is decided.

A group of qualified professionals and the parents review the evaluation results and decide if the child is a “child with a disability,” as defined by IDEA.

Step 4. Child is found eligible for services.

If the child is found to be a child with a disability,” as defined by IDEA, he or she is eligible for special education and related services. The IEP team must meet to write an IEP within 30 calendar days after eligibility. The school schedules and conducts the IEP meeting. **The parents are strongly encouraged to attend.**

Step 5. IEP meeting is held and the IEP is written.

The IEP team gathers to talk about the child’s needs and write the IEP. Before the school may provide special education and related services to the child for the first time, **the parents must give consent.** A copy of the IEP is given to the parents. If the parents disagree, parents can ask for mediation, or the school may offer mediation; file a complaint with the state education agency; request a due process hearing, at which time mediation must be available.

Step 6. Services are provided.

The school makes sure that the child’s IEP is being carried out as it was written. Each of the child’s teachers and service providers has access to the IEP and know his or her specific responsibilities for carrying out the IEP.

Step 7. Progress is measured and reported to parents.

The child’s progress toward the annual goals is measured quarterly, as stated in the IEP. Parents are informed of the progress through written progress reports.

Step 8. IEP is reviewed.

The child’s IEP is reviewed by the IEP team at least once a year and a new IEP is written. If parents do not agree with the IEP and placement, they may discuss their concerns with members of the IEP team and try to work out an agreement.

Step 9. Child is reevaluated.

At least every three years the child must be reevaluated. This evaluation is called a “triennial.” Its purpose is to find out if the child continues to be a “child with a disability,” as defined by IDEA, and what the child’s educational needs are.

Contents of the IEP

By law, the IEP must include certain information about the child and the educational program designed to meet his or her unique needs. This information is:

Current performance. The IEP must state how the child is currently doing in school (known as present levels of educational performance). This information usually comes from the evaluation results such as classroom tests/assignments, individual tests given to decide eligibility for services or during reevaluation, and observations made by parent, teachers, related services providers.

Annual goals. These are goals that the child should reasonably accomplish in year. The goals are broken down into short-term objectives or benchmarks. Goals may be academic, address social or behavioral needs.

Measuring progress. The IEP must state how the child’s progress toward the annual goal will be measured; how the parent will be regularly informed of the progress (for example, periodic report cards; how often the parent will be informed of that progress; what progress your child has made toward the annual goals; and whether that progress is enough to meet the goals by the end of the year.

Special education and related services. The IEP must list the special education and related services to be provided to the child or on behalf of the child. This includes supplementary aids and services that the child needs, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, assistive technology, transportation and other service.

Participation with nondisabled children. The IEP must explain the extent (if any) to which the child will not participate with nondisabled children in the regular class and other school activities.

Participation in state and district-wide tests. Most states and districts give achievement tests to children in certain grades or age groups. If modifications are necessary or if the test is not appropriate, the IEP must state these facts.

Dates and places. The IEP must state when services will begin, how often they will be provided, where they will be provided, and how long they will last.

Transition service needs. Beginning when the child is age 14 (or younger, if appropriate), the IEP must address (within the applicable parts of the IEP) the courses he or she needs to take to reach his or her post-school goals. A statement of transition services needs must also be included in each of the child’s subsequent IEPs.

Needed transition services. Beginning when the child is age 16 (or younger, if appropriate), the IEP must state what transition services are needed to help the child prepare for leaving school.

Age of majority. Beginning at least one year before the child reaches the age of majority (18), the IEP must include a statement that the student has been told of any rights that will transfer to him or her at the age of 18.