



Understanding the IEP

What is an IEP?

The IEP is your child's written individualized Education Program that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting. It contains information about your child's needs, strengths goals for the academic year, services to be provided, supports, modifications, and accommodations necessary to meet those goals.

The IEP also...

- Guides the education of your child or adult student.
- Provides the basis on which the IEP team will determine your child's educational placement.
- Must be written within 30 calendar days of the time your child has been declared eligible for special education services.
- Must be in effect at the beginning of each school year.
- It is not a binding contract in that agencies or teachers cannot be held accountable if your child does not meet the projected goals. However, teachers and related service professionals are accountable for delivering the services as indicated on the IEP.
- Must be written in a team meeting which includes the parents. Some team members will have participated in the evaluation and classification process.
- Must be written prior to your child's placement and the initiation of service.
- It is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with IDEA and the Utah State Special Education Rules.

What is the purpose of an IEP?

1. Serves as a communication vehicle between parents or adult students, and the school personnel. It should enable them as equal participants to jointly decide what the students' needs are, what the students' goals are, and what services will be provided to help each student reach their goals.
2. Provides an opportunity for resolving any differences between parents and school personnel concerning the special education needs of a student with a disability both through the IEP meeting and, if necessary, through the procedural protections that are available to the parents and the school.
3. In writing, gives a commitment of resources necessary to enable a student with a disability to receive needed special education and related services.

4. It is a management tool to help ensure that each student with a disability is provided special education and related services appropriate to special learning needs.
5. Is a compliance and monitoring document that may be used by authorized personnel from each governmental level to determine whether a student with a disability is receiving the free, appropriate public education (FAPE) agreed to by the parents or adult student and the school.

How frequently should the IEP be updated and reviewed?

The law requires at least one annual team meeting where the team should review and update the written IEP document. In the IEP meeting, parents and school personnel jointly make decisions about the educational program of a child with a disability based on the students' needs as determined by the evaluation. The IEP document is a written record of the decisions reached at the meeting.

Notice of meeting

The parent or adult student must receive a notice of the meeting which indicates the purpose(s) of time and location for the meeting and who will be in attendance. It must also inform them of their right to bring in other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise. The notice of meeting to be provided to parents or adult student (age 18+) must include:

- Indication of the purpose, time and location of the meeting, and who will be in attendance.
- Inform them of the provision for participation of other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise about the student on the IEP team.
- For children entering preschool, inform the parents that at their request the Part C service coordinator or other representatives of the Part C system may be invited to participate at the initial IEP meeting for a student previously served under Part C (early intervention, ages 0-3).

Notice of meetings for Transition IEP

The notice of the first IEP meeting conducted when the student is 14 years old or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP team, must also:

- Indicate that the purpose of the meeting will be the consideration of the postsecondary goals and transition services for the student.
- Indicate that the agency will incite the student.
- Identify any other agency representative that has been invited with the consent of the parents or adult student.

Who are the IEP team members?

IDEA is very specific about the required members of the IEP team and who should be in attendance for the entire meeting. The IEP team membership should include:

1. **One or both parents**, a guardian, or a surrogate parent.
2. **The adult student** (Starting the year they turn 14, or younger if appropriate).
3. **No less than one special education teacher** of the student, or if appropriate, no less than one special education provider working directly with the student.
4. **At least one general education teacher** of the child if the child is or may be participating in the general curriculum.
5. **A representative of the Local Education Agency (LEA)**. This is usually the school administrator or a representative. This person is qualified to provide or supervise the provision of special education and is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum. The LEA representative should also be knowledgeable of the resources offered by them (the LEA) and is authorized to commit to the necessary resources, including funding and providing educational services for your child.
6. **An individual who can interpret the instructional implications of the evaluation results.** Sometimes this is someone who is already on the team, such as a teacher.

IEP team attendance

A member of the IEP team is not required to attend a particular IEP meeting, in whole or in part, if the parent of a student or adult student with a disability and the LEA agree, in writing, that the attendance a member is not necessary because of the member's area of the curriculum or related services is not being modified or discussed in the meeting.

A member of the IEP team may be excused from attending an IEP meeting, in whole or in part, when the meeting involves a modification to or discussion of the member's area of the curriculum or related services only if:

- The parent or adult student and the LEA both consent to the excusal in writing.
- The member submits, in writing to the parent and the IEP team, input into the development of the IEP before the meeting.
- Determination of the need for a member of the IEP team to attend must be made on a meeting-by-meeting basis.

Parent Participation and Attendance

The LEA must take steps to ensure one or both parents of a student with a disability or adult student are present at each IEP meeting or are given the opportunity to participate, including:

- Notifying parents of the meeting early enough to ensure that they will have an opportunity to attend.
- Scheduling the meeting at a mutually agreed time and place.
- If neither parent can attend, the LEA must use other methods to ensure parent participation, including alternative means of meeting participation such as video conferences or conference calls. The parent of a student with a disability and an LEA may agree to use alternative means of meeting participation.

Preparation for the IEP meeting

A meeting may be conducted without a parent or adult student in attendance if the LEA is unable to convince the parents that they should attend. In this case, the LEA must keep a record of its reasonable attempts to arrange a mutually agreed time and place.

The following are some suggestions for preparing for the IEP meeting:

- Gather information to share. (I.e., medical, psychological and other assessments, tips about what works for the child at home, past helpful accommodations at school, current family struggles or situations.)
- Review your child’s school records and current IEP if there is one.
- List what you see as your child’s strengths and needs.
- Write down your priorities and long-term goals for your child.
- List services that you believe your child needs to attain the foals you have identified.
- Write down your questions.
- Make sure the IEP meeting will be long enough to discuss everything that needs to be discussed. Be reasonable, if the team runs out of time, you can request that another meeting be scheduled to complete the process.

Communicate with your team prior to the meeting

- Inform them of who you may have invited to the meeting.
- Ask to see a draft of the IEP goals.
- Ask for the evaluation data to review.
- If needed, ask for language translation and to receive the materials in your native language.
- Any accommodation needed to participate in the meeting, such as interpreters or materials in a format that you can access.

Effective communication skills for parents

You are your child’s best advocate! You have unique expertise when it comes to your child. Don’t assume that the school has all the relevant information. Sharing information helps you

and your school team understand your child and come up with possible solutions. Talk to your child and explore what his or her experience at school looks and feels like.

There are other factors besides words that affect how others perceive our communication. These include body language, tone of voice, volume, eye contact, expressions, gestures and delivery of the message. Be mindful of these when you are with others.

Become a skilled listener

A skilled listener is someone who...

- Is willing to work at listening.
- Listens to the complete message before reacting.
- Listens for content, not the way the message is delivered.
- Screens out distraction and maintains focus.
- Listens to the main ideas and interests.
- Listens to understand the other person's perspective instead of worrying about formulating a response.

Validate feelings

Validating other's states feelings allows the other person to know that you hear them and that you also hear their emotions. This helps diffuse emotions that block communication.

Use "I" statements

"I" statements focus on your concerns, how you are feeling, and what you are thinking. They keep others from feeling like they are being judged, blamed, or even threatened. When used, others are still willing to listen to you, hear your concerns and work together to come up with solutions.

"I am concerned about..."

"I am frustrated because..."

"I am feeling..."

"I am hearing that..."

"I am worried about..."

Ask questions

Getting clarification can help you...

- Better understand what is being said.

- Gain more information.
- Understand the other person’s expectations, concerns, or perceptions.
- See outlines of what is being done to help.
- Direct the conversation to an area you feel needs more attention.
- Gain more information before drawing conclusions or opinions.
- Slow down the conversation and give you time to process the information.

Signing the IEP

- All participants should sign the IEP.
- All signatures on the IEP show participation and attendance.
- Parents may note on the IEP that they disagree or have concerns.