



Teachers' Desk Reference: Practical Information for Pennsylvania's Teachers

Preparing for an IEP Team Meeting

For each student who is eligible to receive special education services, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed at an IEP meeting by the IEP team. Developing a student's IEP is one step in the special education process, following the student's evaluation or periodic reevaluation. As a classroom teacher, you are an integral member of the IEP team and may be responsible to lead activities related to planning and gathering information for the IEP meeting.

This *Teachers' Desk Reference* provides information to assist you in following established timelines and procedures. This publication also offers tips to help you organize preparation tasks that result in sound IEPs that meet state and federal regulations.

Follow Established Timelines

When beginning the IEP development process, the team must adhere to timelines established by state and federal regulations. You should begin planning and set-up tasks for the IEP meeting far enough in advance to allow scheduling that accommodates team members and time to gather the most current, accurate information with which to make critical educational decisions for the upcoming IEP year. Here are a few suggestions for preparation:

When preparing for an IEP team meeting there are many considerations – paperwork, data, and timelines – and each is very important.

- **At least two months before the current IEP expires**, if applicable, or as requested by LEA or parent, contact the appropriate team members to inquire about dates available for meeting.

Considerations

- Is the student reaching the age of transition: preschool, kindergarten, secondary, community?
- Do you need to invite the student to the meeting?

- **At least three weeks prior to the IEP meeting**, (or a reasonable time after the determination of the need for special education is made) send invitations to all IEP team members, as required and appropriate. (The meeting must be held within 30 calendar days of completion of the Evaluation or the Reevaluation Report.)

Considerations

- Do the parents need accommodations in order to attend?
- Is there more than one parent address?
- Are there educational decision-making terms contained in a custody agreement?

- **At least two weeks prior to the IEP meeting,** make sure all formal assessments have been completed and results are available.

Considerations

What assessment data will need to be explained to the team to assist them in making appropriate educational decisions?

- **At least one week prior to the IEP meeting,** draft the sections of the IEP for which you are responsible.
 - Create graphs and charts that illustrate the student's progress.
 - Review the student's current supports.
 - Review assistive technology (AT) needs.
 - Make a list of anticipated questions or concerns.
 - Prepare examples of the student's work to support discussion.

Considerations

- What goals have been met? What goals need to be revised?
- Does the student need additional or fewer services and supports?
- Is there technology that wasn't available at the last IEP meeting that would help the student reach goals?
- Does the student need assistive technology?
- **Prior to the IEP meeting,** make necessary arrangements.
 - Reserve space for the meeting.
 - Make copies of all materials for team members.
 - Obtain coverage for school personnel.
 - Gather hospitality items (water, tissues, note paper, and pens).

Considerations

- Be sure to have enough seats.
- Ensure special accommodations for any team member who requires them.
- Begin with introductions, even if you think everyone has been acquainted.
- Let the team know how much time you have allotted. If any member needs to leave early, a continuing meeting can be scheduled.

Invite Required IEP Team Members

Individualized Education Program (IEP) team members come together for a common goal, to develop and deliver an appropriate IEP. Each IEP team should have the necessary members to proactively plan for instruction and supports for the student.

In addition to required members in attendance at the IEP team meeting, there are many other individuals who may provide valuable input at the meeting. These individuals may include, but are not limited to: an administrator, a social worker, a psychologist, a nurse, related service providers, other agency representatives, and any other individuals that parents would like to invite to the IEP meeting. Required members of each IEP team are:

- The student's parent(s) or legal guardian
- At least one of the student's general education teachers (if the student attends, or might attend, general education classes)
- At least one special education teacher
- A representative of the local educational agency (LEA) who:
 - Is qualified to provide or supervise special education programs
 - Knows about the general education curriculum
 - Knows about the availability of the resources the LEA can offer
- Someone who can explain the evaluation results, who may already be a member of the team
- At the parents' request or that of the LEA, other people who know the student well or who have worked with the student. Parents may bring an advocate to advise them or anyone else who will be able to add information about the student's educational experience. This may be a professional advocate, a family member, a close family friend, a previous teacher, etc.
- The student at age 14 when planning will be done for life after graduation, or any time before that age when it is appropriate
- A representative from a career and technical school if a career/technical program is being considered for the student

One person may fill more than one of the above roles. In most cases there will be at least four people at the IEP meeting: the parent/guardian, the LEA representative, a special education teacher, and a general education teacher. The team members must be able to collaborate on a regular basis to ensure delivery of educational services and instruction to the student. Each person's contribution of information about, and experience with, the student adds to the team's understanding of the student's strengths and needs.

Mandated members of the IEP team may be excused from the meeting if the LEA and parent/guardian agree in writing. Excusal from attendance applies only to the following team members: the general education teacher, the special education teacher, the LEA representative, and other individuals who can interpret implications of evaluation results. Excusal is agreed upon via the *Parent Consent to Excuse Members from Attending the IEP Team Meeting* form. If an IEP team member is excused and this individual's subject area or specialty is being discussed, this individual must provide written input before the meeting.

Use the Appropriate Forms

The Pennsylvania Department of Education has designed a series of forms, aligned with the IEP process, to ensure that students with disabilities receive a free, appropriate, public education. Each form serves a unique purpose. There are annotated* and non-annotated versions of each form; the annotated version contains explanatory notes and is helpful in understanding the contents and purpose of the form. You will need to become familiar with the following forms:

- **Individualized Education Program (IEP)**—This program will include a description of all the programs and services necessary to help the student make progress in school.
- **Invitation to Participate in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team Meeting or Other Meeting**—This letter is issued to invite the parents and the student, if appropriate, to a meeting to discuss special education programs and services.

- **Parental Consent to Excuse Members From Attending the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team Meeting**—This form is to give the LEA an opportunity to ask for parental consent to excuse a required member of the IEP team from attending an IEP team meeting in whole or in part. The parent must agree in writing for this excusal to occur.
- **Notice of Recommended Educational Placement/Prior Written Notice (NOREP/PWN)**—The purpose of this notice is to summarize for the parents the recommendations of the LEA for the child's educational program and other actions taken by the LEA.
- **Procedural Safeguards Notice**—This notice includes a full explanation of all of the rights available to parents of a child with a disability ages 3 to 21 when their child has been referred for, or is receiving, special education services.
- **Summary of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance**—This summary must include recommendations on how to assist the student in meeting postsecondary goals.

Additional forms (such as a Communication Plan and a Behavior Intervention Plan) will be used as appropriate for each student.

Gather Information to Complete the IEP

As a member of the IEP team, you should familiarize yourself with each section of the IEP so you know the requirements for completing it. Be prepared to answer questions from other members of the team and provide examples and explanations when necessary. An effective way to prepare is by reviewing the Annotated IEP*, which can be found on the PaTTAN website at <http://tinyurl.com/annotatedieepform>. The Annotated IEP provides explanatory notes that will assist you in completing each section of the IEP.

Collect and organize data and information that demonstrates the need for the continuation, elimination, or addition of supports and services in the

*Annotated forms offer assistance and guidance to parents and educators; they are not intended as an exclusive manner for complying with state and/or federal special education statutes and regulations.

student's IEP. Make sure you have on-hand, or have collected from other IEP team members, the information that is described in the following sections:

- **Demographic Information** refers to the socio-economic characteristics of a population that are expressed statistically, such as age, sex, education level, and religion. Additional information may be listed in the "Other Information" section, such as languages other than English that are spoken in the home or a listing of attempts to contact the parent to attend the IEP meeting.
- **Special Considerations** are six yes/no questions that the IEP team must be prepared to answer and to provide examples and explanations when necessary. The thoughtful discussion of these questions is critical, and the answers should drive the development of the IEP.
 - Is the student blind or visually impaired?
 - Is the student deaf or hard of hearing?
 - Does the student have communication needs?
 - Does the student need assistive technology devices and/or services?
 - Does the student have limited English proficiency?
 - Does the student exhibit behaviors that impede his/her learning or that of others?
- **Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance** refers to a summary of input from all of the members of a student's IEP team, including the student's parents or guardian. The information must be data driven and also be relevant, useful, understandable, and measurable. This section guides the development of other areas of the IEP, providing a starting point (baseline) for the development of the student's learning needs stated in terms of measurable annual goals.
- **Transition Services** must begin no later than the first IEP to be in effect when the student turns 14 or younger, if determined appropriate by the IEP team. The transition section of the IEP must contain courses of study needed to assist the student in reaching postsecondary goals.
- **Participation in State and Local Assessments** must be determined by the IEP team, depending upon which state assessment option is appropriate for the student. If the IEP team determines that certain accommodations used in the classroom during instruction and/or assessments are needed for the student to participate in the PSSA, then these accommodations must be listed on the IEP. If the IEP team determines that the student is unable to take the PSSA with accommodations, the reason for this decision must be indicated on the IEP, and an alternate assessment must be indicated.
- **Goals and Objectives** must be written and collected by all team members who provide direct services to the student. The IEP specifies learning goals for students with disabilities, based on their present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, and should be based on or referenced to the Pennsylvania standards. Annual goals, including academic and functional goals, are statements in measurable terms that describe what reasonable expectations can be accomplished within a twelve-month period.
- **Modifications and Specially-Designed Instruction (SDI)** means adapting, as appropriate, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs of the student that result from the student's disability and to ensure access to the general education curriculum so that the student can meet the educational standards.
- **Supplementary Aids and Services** means aids, services, and other supports that are provided in general education classes, other education-related settings, and in extracurricular and nonacademic settings, to enable students with disabilities to be educated with nondisabled students to the maximum extent appropriate.
- **Related Services** refer to transportation and any developmental, corrective, or other supportive service needed to assist a student with a disability to benefit from special education.
- **Supports for School Personnel** may be required to provide needed services for a student with a disability. This section provides an opportunity for the team to discuss and articulate those specific supports or training necessary for the school personnel to provide free and appropriate education (FAPE) for a student with a disability.

- **Extended School Year** (ESY) eligibility must be determined at the IEP meeting. If the IEP team determines that the student is eligible for ESY services, they must determine the specific goals or services to be addressed.
- **Educational Placement** must ensure that a student with a disability is educated with students who are not disabled, to the maximum extent appropriate. IEP teams must consider the general education classroom as it currently exists and as it could be modified through the provision of supplementary aids and services before considering a more restrictive environment.
- **Type of Supports** refers to the amount of time in a typical school day that the student receives special education supports from special education personnel. The type(s) of special education supports provided to a student are based on the learning needs of the student.
- **Location of Student's Program** is where the student will attend school and receive services. The first consideration for placement of the student is always the student's neighborhood school, which is the school the student would attend if the student did not have an IEP.
- **PennData Reporting** refers to the requirement to provide to the U.S. Department of Education an annual report of specific data related to the education of students with disabilities. In Pennsylvania, these data are gathered through the Penn Data reporting system.

Create an Agenda

To make the most efficient use of time while ensuring that all aspects of the student's IEP are addressed, you should prepare an agenda that includes the following actions:

- Introduce all team members.
- Set the purpose for the meeting; set time limits/constraints.
- Review all sections of the IEP. It may help to create a checklist of the IEP sections.

- Summarize the meeting; review the necessary forms and signatures, including the *Procedural Safeguards Notice* for parents' rights.
- Thank everyone for attending the meeting.

Communicate With Parents

Effective communication is essential to parent participation. You must find out the best means of communicating with each individual family. Does the family have access to the internet? Can they read forms written in English? Do they understand the important role they play in the IEP team? When preparing for an IEP meeting you should use effective communication: open, honest, two-way conversation using active listening skills and checking for clarity and comprehension with all parties.

It is important for you to invite the student's parents at a time and location that is convenient for them. Be aware of circumstances that would make attending the meeting difficult, such as the need for childcare for a younger sibling, transportation to and from the meeting, or an interpreter. These considerations are the initial steps toward a productive meeting.

Begin the meeting with positive comments about the student; this is a good way to engage parents in a discussion about the student's education program. Develop a list of the student's strengths and interests. Have data on the student's current levels of achievement, especially areas of improvement or growth. If possible, bring examples of the student's work to the meeting.

Follow Through After the IEP Meeting

- **Approval**—When the IEP meeting is concluded, you may be required to give the parent(s) a *Notice of Recommended Educational Placement (NOREP)/Prior Written Notice (PWN)* form. This will depend upon the change that is being proposed (some changes require parental consent) as well as the procedures within your LEA. Consult with the special education administrator on dissemination of this form.

Considerations

- Be advised, in advance, of any custody agreements regarding which parent has the educational decision-making authority for agreeing to the proposed IEP recommendations.
- A parent may decide not to approve the NOREP. This provides an opportunity for further discussion of the proposed IEP. In addition, if the parent does not provide a completed NOREP or does not express written disagreement, the action proposed in the NOREP may be implemented, as regulations apply (within 10 days of the IEP meeting).
- If the parents request a meeting to discuss the proposed action/recommendation, the LEA should try to accommodate the request in a reasonable timeframe.
- Attempts should be made to contact the parents if the NOREP is not returned in a timely fashion. If, after a reasonable amount of time, the LEA does not receive the approved NOREP, the LEA may proceed with the changes proposed in the pending IEP (except if it is the student's initial IEP/ change of placement).

- **Implementation**—Once the parents agree and sign the NOREP, each member of the team should be notified and be prepared to implement the IEP. It is the responsibility of the LEA and IEP team to implement the IEP with fidelity. Progress monitoring should occur as indicated in the IEP. The team should review the IEP at least annually and recommend and implement modifications to the student's IEP as needed.

Conclusion

When preparing for an IEP meeting there are many considerations – paperwork, data, and timelines – and each is very important. It is essential for teachers to keep in mind that these meetings are about someone's child. Skillfull planning, preparation, and communication will promote successful IEP team meetings, which in turn will support students' achievement.

Additional Resources from PaTTAN

Teachers' Desk Reference: Inclusive Practices

Teachers' Desk Reference: Special Education Overview

Teachers' Desk Reference: Your Role on Data Analysis Teams

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Tom Wolf
Governor



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