

# 18 Tips

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## For Getting Quality Special Education Services For Your Child



### **Before the IEP\* Meeting**

#### **Request Needed Assessments in Writing or Get Independent Assessments**

Your child can be assessed in any area of suspected disability and for any services needed for him to benefit from school. For example: assessments may be done of reading or math levels; on the modifications needed to fully include your child; for therapy services (OT, PT, speech, mental health) and to identify assistive technology like a communication device. If you disagree with the school district's assessment, you can obtain an independent assessment at public expense. Always request assessments in writing. An assessment plan must come in 15 days. Once you sign the plan, the assessment must be completed and the IEP held in 50 days (with some exceptions).

#### **Ask to Obtain Assessment Reports One Week Before IEP Meeting**

Whether you or the school district requested the assessments, ask the school early on to provide you with copies of the written assessment reports a week before the IEP meeting. This is very important so that you can read the reports, discuss them and plan for the meeting.

#### **Plan for the Meeting With a Friend or Advocate**

Your child's Regional Center Service Coordinator should be trained in Special Education advocacy and should assist you to plan for the IEP meeting. There are also other local parent advocacy groups including Family Resource Centers. Or buddy up with another family and assist each other to plan for IEPs.

Review any assessment reports with this person, identify your aims for the meeting, think about what your child accomplished last year and what you hope they will learn next year. Identify the special difficulties or strengths of your child that you want to bring to the school's attention. If you are seeking full inclusion or increased integration, identify how your child interacts with non-disabled children outside of school and what makes it successful.

#### **Consider Full Inclusion or Increased Integration**

The law says that to the maximum extent appropriate, as decided by the IEP team, children with disabilities shall be educated in their neighborhood schools and attend regular classes (with supplemental aids and services). These placements are called "full inclusion." Today many researchers and parents believe all children with disabilities can and should be fully included. You should definitely consider before the IEP meeting whether you want your child fully included or simply want to increase her integration opportunities in classroom and/or extracurricular activities (clubs, field trips, etc.) at her school.

#### **Make a List of the Points You Want to Raise at the IEP Meeting**

However well you plan you may get nervous or distracted at a meeting with several professionals. Thus it is good to make a list of points and questions in advance so you won't forget. You can check off points as they are discussed and jot down the answers to your questions.



## **At the IEP Meeting:**

### **Bring a Friend, Advocate and/or a Person Who Knows Your Child**

You can invite anyone you want to your child's IEP. It is always a good idea to have someone with you. Regional Center Service Coordinators should be available to attend but you need to schedule the date with them in advance. If there is a day-care operator, grandparent, tutor, behavior specialist or other person who knows your child and her learning style, it can be helpful to bring them to the meeting.

### **Don't Be Afraid to Ask Questions, Make Sure You Understand Any "Jargon"**

Schools are required to explain all findings and recommendations in easily understandable language. District staff use the same terms every day, and may forget that the world doesn't know what they mean. Some parents don't ask questions because they feel it makes them appear unintelligent or unsophisticated. The fact is that the most intelligent and sophisticated parents often ask the most questions.

### **Discuss Present Level of Your Child's Performance**

Discuss reports, assessments, yours and the teacher's observations of your child's performance and record his abilities and issues.

### **Develop Annual Goals and Short-Term Objectives**

Review progress on prior goals, then formulate new goals and objectives. If you want your child to have greater integration or full inclusion, then you should request objectives that include interaction with non-disabled students, e.g. "Molly will learn to take turns by playing a game with non-disabled peers."

### **Identify Full Inclusion or Integration Opportunities and the Supports Needed for Success**

The district must provide supplementary aids and services to accommodate the special education needs of students with disabilities in integrated settings including; for example, a trained aid, use of a tape recorder, an inclusion specialist to help the regular education teacher modify curriculum or a behavioral plan to address disruptive behaviors.

### **Describe the Placement for Your Child and Identify Specifically the Supports and Related Services Needed**

All related services, such as speech therapy, should be identified including frequency and duration, for example: twice a week for one hour. The parameters of the placement should be stated clearly; for example, Karen will be fully included in second grade with a full time aid and five hours a week of a full inclusion specialist or John will attend a special day class for communicatively handicapped

students with mainstreaming for science, chorus and all regular school activities. You do not have the right to require the district to provide its services from a particular persons in a particular classroom. Specific placement options should be, however, discussed at the IEP.

### **Sign the IEP Only If You Are Satisfied**

You do not need to sign the IEP at the meeting -- you can take it home to discuss with others and think about it. You can consent to only part of the IEP so those services you agree with can begin. If you sign the IEP and later change your mind, you may withdraw your consent by writing to the special education administrator. If you and the district disagree on services, the last agreed upon IEP remains in effect while a due process hearing is held. This is called "stay-put."



### **After the IEP Meeting:**

#### **Meet Your Child's Teacher(s) at the Beginning of the Year -- Be a Classroom Volunteer If Possible and/or Participate in School Activities**

Parents have different amounts of time and money, analyze your situation and then contact the teacher or school to determine how you could be of assistance. If you work during the day you may be able to help prepare materials in the evening in your home. Not only will you become more familiar with the school and its staff, but your child will feel special.

#### **Support Your Child in Developing Friendships With Her Classmates**

Assist your child to call friends outside of school and to make play-dates. Having friendships with non-disabled and disabled children will help your child be part of their community.

#### **Monitor Your Child's Progress**

You may want to arrange for a regular communication system with your child's teacher such as a notebook which goes back and forth to school. Note projected target dates for your child to master particular skills and ask the teacher to let you know of his progress. Monitor that supplementary aids and services are actually provided.



### **If Things Don't Work Out:**

#### **You Can File a Compliance Complaint If the School District Does Not Follow the Rules or Fails to Provide Services Required in a Signed IEP**

A compliance complaint is filed when you believe the district has violated a part of special education law or procedure. The complaint is investigated by the district or the state Department of Education and a written determination of whether the district was/is "out-of-compliance" is made. See Special Education Rights and Responsibilities, Chapter 6 for details.

## **You Can File for a Due Process Hearing If You and the School District Cannot Agree on the Special Education Services Appropriate for Your Child**

When you and the district disagree about your child's eligibility, placement, program needs, integration or related services either of you may request a due process hearing. At the hearing both parties present evidence to an independent hearing officer (hired by the state). The hearing officer will decide on the facts and the law and issue a written decision. See Special Education Rights and Responsibilities, Chapter 6 for details.



\*Individualized Education Program. Developed at a meeting with at least the parent(s), the child's teacher and a school district administrator.



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**Protection & Advocacy, Inc. Special Education Publications**

### **For more information or support on Special Education topics you can call the Family Empowerment Center at (530) 283-1136 or 1-800-826-0842**

The Family Empowerment Center at Plumas Rural Services was created through a grant from the State Department of Education to serve the four counties of Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, and Sierra Counties. The intent of the Family Empowerment Center is to provide information, training, support and advocacy to parents and guardians of children and young adults with ANY disability (aged birth to 22) in order to:

- Ensure that children and young adults with disabilities are provided a free and appropriate public education and that they receive the necessary educational supports and services they need to complete their education.
- Work collaboratively with the schools and community-based organization that provide services to these families.
- Assist parents to understand their children's disabilities, and their educational and developmental needs.
- Assist parents to communicate with school and service staff, obtain information and participate in school reform and decision-making.