

# Guide to IEP Meetings: The Role of the Parent

---

Alex Penzell



# Why?

---

- Parents are an integral part of the IEP process but many are not aware of their role.
- What role do you usually play at IEP meetings?
- How do you feel when you walk into an IEP meeting and are outnumbered?
- IEP meetings can be extremely stressful and intimidating, and that's ok!
- This guide is to help take the fear out of IEP meetings by providing clear information on the IEP process and what role you play as a parent.



# Components

---

- Barriers
- Overview of the IEP process
- Goals of an IEP meeting
- The Law and Parental Rights/Roles
- IEP Myths & Insider Tips
- Recommendations
- Glossary of Acronyms



# Barriers

---

- What barriers are there between the parents and the IEP meeting/process? Lambie (2008) reports the following:
  - Logistical problems – time constraints and job obligations prevent the ability to attend the meeting. No child care for younger children may also make it difficult to attend.
  - Communication – usually related to both language and cultural barriers. “Home visits, translators, written texts and outreach can be used to counteract these barriers” (Lambie, 2008, p. 417).
  - Confusion about the school system – the school system, and especially the special education system can be very confusing, and this can lead to misunderstanding of parental rights. “In explaining parental rights to parents, professionals should be straightforward, provide in writing what IDEA 2004 requires, and discuss it with them” (Lambie, 2008, p. 417).
  - Feeling overwhelmed/inferior – again, the school system can be extremely intimidating and it is hard to not feel overwhelmed.



# Overview of the IEP process

---

- IEP = Individualized Education Plan
  - IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) (2004) defines the IEP as “a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting...”
  - Defined by the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities as a “written statement of the educational program designed to meet a child’s individual needs” (2013)
  - Keywords:
    - each child, individual
    - written
    - meeting
- The IEP is developed at your child’s first IEP meeting (in Texas referred to as an ARD, or Admission, Review, and Dismissal, meeting) or reviewed and re-developed yearly or as needed at annual or other IEP/ARD meetings.



# Overview of the IEP process

---

- How do we get to an IEP/ARD meeting (initially)?
  1. Request/referral for evaluation for special education services
  2. Procedural safeguards (notice to parents of rights)
  3. Evaluation
  4. IEP meeting
- Or, if your child is already receiving special education services, the IEP is required to be reviewed annually



# Goals of an IEP meeting

---

- Components of an IEP meeting:
  - Review new evaluation information. Includes parent information and concerns.
  - Determination of eligibility
  - What are the student's present performance levels? Where is he/she at currently?
    - PLAAFP - Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance
  - IEP goals
  - Modifications & Accommodations
  - Required state/district assessments
- Additional considerations:
  - Assistive technology
  - Communication needs
  - Limited English Proficiency
  - Behavior Intervention Plan
  - Related services (Speech therapy, Occupational therapy, Physical therapy)
  - Transportation
  - Extended School Year (ESY)
  - Services to be provided and where
  - Placement
  - Agreement



# Goals of an IEP Meeting

---

- Big goals at the annual meeting:
  - Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance
    - What can the student do? What is the student struggling with?
  - IEP Goals
    - Review previous goals. How much progress has been made? If there is a lack of progress, why? What criteria is being used to determine progress? Is it measurable and observable?
  - Schedule of services/related services
    - Where will your child be receiving services? In the general education classroom? In the self-contained special education classroom? How much inclusion will he/she be receiving and when?





# The Law and Parental Rights/Roles

---

- What does the law say?
  - IDEA 2004 has specific regulations in regards to parent participation and inclusion in the IEP process
  - “Each public agency must take steps to ensure that one or both parents of a child with a disability are present at each IEP Team meeting or are afforded the right to participate...” (IDEA Section 300.22.a)
  - Furthermore, the parent is a part of the IEP team that develops the IEP goals
  - **You are just as important to the IEP process as the teachers, therapists, and administrators**



# The Law and Parental Rights/Roles

---

- IDEA Section 300.324 Development, review, and revision of IEP
  - What is important about this section? Parents are a part of the IEP team (Section 300.321) states that “the IEP team for each child with a disability includes the parents of the child.” The team is responsible for developing each child’s IEP.
  - What does this mean? You as a parent have the right to give input on your child’s goals.
  - “In developing each child’s IEP, the IEP team must consider – (i) The strengths of the child; (ii) The concerns of the parent for enhancing the education of their child” (IDEA, 2004).
  - Your concerns as a parent are noted in the law as a necessary consideration in developing the IEP.



# IEP Myths & Insider Tips

---

- “As the parent, I am required to sign the document at the end of the IEP meeting, whether I agree with what was discussed and developed or not.”
- **FALSE**
  - You are not required to sign if you do not agree with any part of the IEP.
  - Texas Project First agrees: “ARD meetings can be overwhelming experiences for parents trying to make the right decision for their children. Ask questions so that you are fully informed before making decisions. **Do not sign ‘agree’ if you do not agree to the terms of the IEP.**”



# IEP Myths & Insider Tips

---

- “The IEP meeting has a time limit and everything must be discussed and agreed upon within that time frame” or “It is 9am and the administrator told me he wants this to be a ‘quick one’ because they have another IEP meeting at 10am.”
- **FALSE**
  - There is no rule stating that the IEP meeting must be finished within a certain frame of time. This leads to you as the parent feeling pressured to “get everything done” within that timeframe the school has presented. Referring back to the previous myth, you do not have to sign that you agree. If the rest of the team insists that the meeting has to end, ask for a recess to be called so that everyone can meet again to discuss the IEP paperwork. Schools may not tell you this because they often schedule numerous meetings in one day and the teachers/administrators need to get to the next meeting. Remember, this is about **your** child; elements of the meeting should not be skipped or you should not be forced to sign agreement simply because the school wants to be expedient.



# IEP Myths & Insider Tips

---

- “When discussing the IEP goals, the teacher said she had already created them and they could not be changed during the meeting.”
- **FALSE**
  - The meeting is a collaborative process for the whole IEP team, including the parent. Best practice recommends to conference with the teacher developing the goals beforehand so that you may give input or having the teacher send home a copy of the proposed goals prior to the meeting with enough time for you to review. Of course not all schools incorporate this practice but you can request it. Again, do not feel pressured in agreeing to the goals if you do not approve of them for your child.



# Recommendations

---

- Bring another family member or close family friend with you for support during the meeting. When faced with 8 professionals talking about PLAAFPS, LEP, and FBA, it can be extremely intimidating. Feel free to bring someone who is “on your side.”
- If you do not feel comfortable with the meeting being conducted in English, and an interpreter will be used, try to have the person that you bring with you be bilingual as well. This way they can tell if what the interpreter is saying is correct. Furthermore, if the various school personnel are talking to each other, they may not deem it necessary that those parts are interpreted into your language. You deserve to hear everything they are discussing.



# Recommendations

---

- Request a parent conference to discuss IEP goals prior to the IEP meeting or request that the teacher send home the goals (with enough time for you to review) prior to the meeting.



# Glossary of Acronyms

---

- **ARD** – Admission, Review, and Dismissal. Refers to the meeting (ARD meeting) or committee (ARD committee), that reviews the IEP annually, determines student eligibility, and develops IEP goals.
- **BIP** – Behavior Intervention Plan. The BIP is a written plan that specifically addresses behavioral concerns that interfere with the student's learning.
- **ELL** – English Language Learner. An ELL student is one who does not have a home language of English or who is still learning English.





# Glossary of Acronyms

---

- **ESY – Extended School Year.** Students receiving special education services are eligible to receive services in the summer (ESY services). Whether a student qualifies for ESY services is determined by the IEP committee. Services are provided to those students that may experience substantial regression over the summer, without the ability to recover in a reasonable amount of time.
- **FBA – Functional Behavior Assessment.** An FBA is a process that is conducted in order to determine the function of challenging behaviors. A Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) is developed from the results of the FBA.
- **FIE – Full Individual Evaluation.** The evaluation that determines the presence of a disability and need for special education services. Consists of a variety of tests.



# Glossary of Acronyms

---

- IDEA – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Federal law that gives children with disabilities the right to a “free and appropriate education.”
- IEP – Individualized Education Program. A written statement, reviewed annually, for each student served in special education.
- LEP – Limited-English Proficient. This is the same as ELL, a student who does not have a home language of English or is in the process of learning English.
- LRE – Least Restrictive Environment. Children with disabilities are required to be educated, to the maximum extent appropriate, with children without disabilities.



# References

---

- Lambie, R. (2008). *Family systems within educational contexts: Understanding children who are at risk or have special needs* (3rd ed.). Denver, CO: Love Publishing.
- National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities. (March 2013). *The short-and-sweet IEP overview*. Retrieved from: <http://nichcy.org/schoolage/iep/overview>
- U.S. Department of Education. *Building the legacy: IDEA 2004*. Retrieved from: <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cregs%2C300%2CD%2C>
- Texas Project FIRST – Families, Information, Resources, Support & Training. *Glossary*. Retrieved from: <http://www.texasprojectfirst.org/GlossaryA.html>
- Texas Project FIRST – Families, Information, Resources, Support & Training. *Using the ARD/IEP agenda to understand the special education process*. Retrieved from: <http://www.texasprojectfirst.org/ARDIEP.html>

