

PREPARING FOR YOUR CHILD'S IEP MEETING:

Listed below are some suggestions to help you feel more at ease and able to participate as a full member of the team that plans your child's special education program.

Before the Meeting

- Build a positive relationship with at least one person on the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, such as classroom teacher, principal, or school psychologist, before the meeting. Such a relationship will help you feel more comfortable and know someone else hears your point of view.
- Plan ahead and put your thoughts down on paper, so you won't forget to mention what is important to you during the meeting.
- Know the purpose and format of the IEP meeting and who will be there ahead of time. That way you won't be surprised by the number of people around the table or the process being followed.
- Send copies of any private assessment reports to the team ahead of time so they can be familiar with the data before the meeting, rather than take valuable time away from the meeting to review them.
- Review current evaluation reports, last year's IEP (if applicable), and the Parents' Rights and Responsibilities booklet given to you annually.
- Educate yourself about the objective realities of your child's disability so you can talk to other team members as peers.

During the Meeting

- Understand that as the parent, you are an integral part of the IEP team. Anything you can do to make yourself more comfortable in this meeting will help you to participate more actively.
- Find a way to personalize your child. When you talk about him, make him recognizable to all team members. Remember that you know him best—strengths, talents, interests and needs, so take in what the professionals have to say, but add your perspective also.
- Be prepared for district staff to present assessment data and their professional opinions about what they've observed and feel is appropriate for your child educationally. This may be different from your input but is just as valid. It's important to "see the big picture"—understand your child as a whole to assist in educational planning. Listen actively, especially to the things you do not want to hear.
- Keep focused on what you want answered or provided for your child, not on how to get there—that's the job of the professionals. For example, if you want your child to make more growth in reading, keep that foremost, and don't get stuck on asking for a specific method of teaching you heard about from a friend. Be willing to face the reality of your child's abilities when discussing outcomes.
- Don't hesitate to ask questions and seek clarification. In any profession, people talk in jargon at times. If you prefer, write down your concerns and meet with one of the team members later for more explanation.
- Help the team design Specific, Measurable, and Realistic IEP Goals
- Ask to take the IEP home to review if you're unable to make a final decision at the meeting. You can agree to parts of the IEP or all of it. At the meeting, you should sign where it shows you attended the meeting. You have 15 days to review the document before it becomes finalized, unless you sign the last page allowing services to begin earlier.

After the Meeting

- If you have serious doubts or concerns regarding the IEP, put them in writing and contact your case manager, or request another IEP meeting.
- Review the agreed upon IEP to make sure you understand it. If not, talk to one of the other meeting participants for clarification. Remember, you can always change your mind and withdraw permission for any or all of the parts of the IEP you previously agreed to.
- Talk to your child, in terms he'll understand, about what was discussed at the meeting. Be sure to discuss the progress he's made. Review goals and objectives so he'll know what he's going to be working on during the coming year.
- Place the IEP in the binder or file where you keep other school notices and reports. This makes it easy to access for future reference.