



IEP Meeting Guide

Navigating the IEP process can feel overwhelming, but families do not have to do it alone. This guide offers practical tips, common terms, and helpful resources to support your child's educational planning.





Resources for Navigating Your Child's or Young Adult's Individualized Education Plan in Pennsylvania

Beginning the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process can feel overwhelming, especially when families are navigating unfamiliar terminology, documentation, and important decisions. This guide is designed to provide clear information and practical insights to help families prepare for IEP meetings, ask informed questions, and actively participate in their child's educational planning.

Terms You'll Hear

The education process often includes terminology that can feel unfamiliar or confusing. Becoming familiar with some of the common terms you may hear can help you better understand who is involved, what each step means, and what to expect along the way.

Evaluation Team: In Pennsylvania, an evaluation team gathers information to determine whether a child has a disability and needs special education services. This team may include educators, school professionals, specialists, and the child's parent or guardian.

Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE): The Pennsylvania Department of Education oversees education across the state. Within PDE, the Bureau of Special Education supports schools, educators, families, and other partners in providing special education services and opportunities for students with disabilities.

Extended School Year (ESY): Extended School Year services are special education and related services provided beyond the regular school year when the IEP team determines they are needed for the student. ESY services are included in the student's IEP when appropriate.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): IDEA is the federal special education law that helps ensure students with disabilities receive appropriate education and services based on their individual needs.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) is a legal right under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that ensures students with disabilities receive special education services tailored to their individual needs at no cost to their families. This includes instruction, supports, accommodations, and related services that allow the student to access their education and make appropriate progress.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a written plan developed for a student with a disability who qualifies for special education services. It is tailored to the student's unique strengths, challenges, and educational needs, and outlines the specific goals, special education services, related supports, accommodations, and program modifications the school will provide to help the student make meaningful progress.

Continued >



IEP Team: The IEP team works together to develop, review, and update the student's IEP. The team includes the parent or guardian, special education teacher, regular education teacher when appropriate, a representative of the local educational agency, someone who can interpret evaluation results, the student when appropriate, and others who have knowledge or expertise about the child.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): Least Restrictive Environment means that students with disabilities should be educated alongside peers without disabilities to the greatest extent appropriate for their individual needs. When making placement decisions, the IEP team first considers whether the student can be successfully supported in the general education classroom at the neighborhood school they would attend if they did not have a disability, with appropriate services, supports, and accommodations in place.

Bureau of Special Education (BSE): The Bureau of Special Education is part of the PDE. BSE supports and oversees special education programs, services, compliance, and resources throughout Pennsylvania.

Educational Placement: Educational placement refers to the setting where a student receives special education services. The IEP team determines placement after developing the student's plan and considers how services can be delivered in the least restrictive environment.

Notice of Recommended Educational Placement/

Prior Written Notice (NOREP/PWN): A NOREP/PWN is a document used when a school or district proposes or refuses certain special education actions, such as changes to a student's plan or placement. Families should review this document carefully and ask questions if they do not understand what is being proposed.

Out of District Placement: An out-of-district placement is a specialized educational setting outside of a student's home school district that may be recommended when a student's needs cannot be appropriately met within the district's available programs. These placements provide individualized academic instruction and may include therapeutic, behavioral, or other specialized supports designed to help the student make meaningful progress in a structured environment.



TIP #1 Get Organized

Special education often involves a significant amount of paperwork, and having important information organized in one place can help families feel more prepared and less overwhelmed during the process. Whether you prefer a binder, digital folders, or a combination of both, keeping key documents easily accessible can make it easier to prepare for meetings, track progress, and reference important information when questions arise. Consider organizing the following materials in a way that works best for your family.

Current and Past IEPs: When you receive a new IEP, it can be helpful to compare it with previous versions. This can help you track changes, analyze progress, and identify areas of continued growth.

Letters or Communications: Keep copies of emails, letters, notes, or other communications with your child's school, district staff, doctors, therapists, or other professionals involved in their care or education. Having a record of these conversations can help you stay organized, reference past decisions, and track important updates or next steps over time.

Evaluation Reports, Testing Results, and Recommendations: Keep copies of evaluation reports, assessment results, and professional recommendations in one place. Your child may be supported by a variety of school-based and

community professionals, and this information can provide valuable context to help inform IEP discussions, planning, and decision-making.

Notes and Questions: Keep a running list of questions, concerns, observations, strengths, and updates from home. Bringing notes to meetings can help you clearly share your perspective, ensure important topics are addressed, and make it easier to remember questions in the moment.

Community Resources: You may receive brochures, handouts, or information about community programs and services. Keeping these materials together can help you refer back to them if your child may benefit from additional support.

Contact Information: Keep a list of phone numbers and email addresses for the people involved in your child's education and support, such as:

- Teachers
- School leadership
- School district special education director or special education contact
- LEA representative or school-based contact
- Medical providers
- Therapists or related service providers
- Advocates or other support professionals

Staying organized helps you spot patterns, connect information, and update others on your child's progress. As their needs evolve, adjust your system and give yourself grace.



TIP #2 Prepare for an IEP Meeting

Let's be honest: the idea of sitting in a meeting with a group of professionals and a detailed document about your child's academic, behavioral, social, or emotional needs can feel intimidating. If you are feeling nervous, remember that an IEP meeting is meant to be a conversation about your child's strengths, needs, progress, goals, and services. It is also an opportunity for you to ask questions and share what you know about your child.

Here are answers to common questions families may have.

What happens in the first IEP meeting?

After the evaluation team completes the Evaluation Report and determines that a student is eligible for special education, the IEP team meets to develop the student's IEP. In Pennsylvania, the IEP must be completed within 30 calendar days after the Evaluation Report is issued. The IEP must be put into action as soon as possible, but no later than 10 school days after it is approved.

What should I wear?

Whatever makes you comfortable! School team members will typically attend in their normal school attire.

How does a child get evaluated for special education?

A parent may request an initial evaluation by asking the school to evaluate their child for special education. The school should provide a Permission to Evaluate form within 10 calendar days after receiving the request. Once the parent gives written consent, the evaluation must be completed within 60 calendar days, not including summer vacation.

What is an annual IEP meeting?

An annual IEP meeting is held to review the student's progress, goals, services, supports, and placement. The team discusses what is working, what may need to change, and what goals or services should be included for the next IEP year.

Can I request an IEP meeting?

Yes. While IEP meetings typically occur at least once each year, a parent or another IEP team member may request a meeting when there are concerns or when changes may be needed.

How do I get ready?

If you receive a draft IEP, Evaluation Report, progress update, or other documents before the meeting, review them ahead of time. Highlight areas where you have questions or jot down notes about things you want to discuss.

Continued >



Who comes to these meetings?

The IEP team includes your child's parent or guardian, special education teacher, regular education teacher when appropriate, a representative of the local educational agency, someone who can interpret evaluation results, and other individuals with knowledge or expertise about your child. The student may also participate when appropriate, especially as they get older and transition planning becomes part of the IEP.

You may invite someone with knowledge or special expertise about your child, such as an advocate, therapist, or other support person.

If you need an interpreter or another support to understand the meeting, ask the school in advance. The public agency must take steps to ensure parents can understand and participate in the IEP meeting, including arranging an interpreter when appropriate.

Who leads the meeting?

A school or district representative may help facilitate the meeting, but the IEP is developed by the full IEP team. If you are unsure who will lead the meeting or what to expect, ask your school contact before the meeting.

The school team should review the documents with you and explain recommendations clearly. Ask for clarification before signing or agreeing to anything you do not understand.

What will we talk about?

The team will review your child's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, progress toward current IEP goals, related services, and any areas of need. The team will also discuss individualized goals for the new IEP year and the supports, services, accommodations, and plan modifications that may help your child make progress.

These supports may include things like preferential seating, extended time, small group instruction, breaks, assistive technology, or other accommodations based on your child's needs. The team may also discuss accommodations for state or districtwide assessments and whether Extended School Year services should be considered.

Can I ask questions?

Yes! Ask questions whenever something is unclear. You should feel comfortable asking for more explanation, sharing your thoughts, and talking through concerns. The purpose of the meeting is to work together to create a plan that supports your child's needs.



TIP #3 Get the Most Out of the IEP Meeting

An IEP meeting brings together the people who support your child's education. The tips below can help you make the most of the conversation.

Take Notes

You will cover a lot of information during an IEP meeting. Taking notes can help you remember what was discussed, track questions, and follow up after the meeting.

If you would like to record the meeting, ask the school or district about its policy ahead of time. Federal IDEA guidance does not specifically authorize or prohibit recording IEP meetings, and state or local policies may apply.

Ask Questions

Evaluations, assessments, progress reports, goals, and services can sometimes be difficult to understand. Do not be afraid to ask questions. You should understand your child's progress, what the team is recommending, and why those recommendations are being made. Questions you may want to ask include:

- What progress has my child made since the last meeting?
- What strategies are working well?
- What concerns remain?
- How will progress be measured?
- How often will I receive updates?
- What supports are being recommended and why?
- What can we do at home to support these skills?

Ask What Can Be Done at Home

If you are seeing similar needs at home, ask the team whether there are strategies you can use outside of school. For example, if your child is working on writing, organization, coping skills, or communication, the team may be able to share ways to reinforce those skills at home. Your observations matter. Sharing what you see at home can help the team better understand your child's strengths, needs, and progress.



Don't Rush Through the Meeting

Take your time. Your child's progress, goals, services, and supports are important. Slowing down gives you space to process the information, ask questions, and make sure you understand the plan.

Remember the Purpose

The purpose of the IEP meeting is to support your child's success. With preparation, open communication, and collaboration, families can play an active role in helping shape a plan that supports their child's learning and growth.



Contact List

As you move through the IEP process, it can be helpful to know who to contact for questions, updates, and support. Use this page to keep important names, roles, phone numbers, and email addresses in one place.

Name	Role & Organization	Phone Number(s)	Email	Notes



Resources

There are many resources available to help you navigate the IEP process, and your child's educational journey.

Tools

- > **Pennsylvania Family Guide to Special Education for School-Age Children:** This family guide explains how special education needs are determined, how IEPs are developed, what protections families have, and what resources are available in Pennsylvania.
- > **Pennsylvania Individualized Education Program Form:** This PaTTAN resource provides Pennsylvania's IEP form and can help families understand the type of information included in an IEP.
- > **Pennsylvania Annotated IEP:** This annotated IEP form provides additional guidance on the development of an Individualized Education Program in Pennsylvania.
- > **Procedural Safeguards Notice:** The Procedural Safeguards Notice explains the rights available to parents of school-age children with disabilities who have been referred for or are receiving special education services.

Organizations and Supports

- > **Special Education ConsultLine:** ConsultLine helps families and advocates of children with special needs understand the special education system. Families can call, email, or submit an online request for support.
- > **Office for Dispute Resolution:** The Office for Dispute Resolution provides resources for families and schools to help resolve educational disputes involving students with disabilities, students who may have disabilities, and gifted students.
- > **Special Education Dispute Resolution Resources:** Pennsylvania provides information about special education dispute resolution, including ConsultLine, mediation, due process, and state complaints.

**You are an important part
of your child's IEP team.**

**Staying informed, asking questions, and keeping
communication open can help ensure your child's
plan reflects their strengths, needs, and goals.**