

What's an IEP and Why Do I Need to Know?

IEP is just a shorter way of saying "Individualized Education Program". Some people think IEP stands for Individualized Education *Plan*, but no – the "P" stands for Program. Nonetheless, an IEP is a *plan*. So think of it this way: the "P" in "IEP" stands for "Program" but it's really both a program and a plan. The Plan creates the Program. The good news is that you get to play a big part in creating that plan, the *Individualized Education Program* for your child.

An IEP is a written plan, designed specifically for your child. Think of it as a contract, because it's as important as one. The IEP is the written agreement, between you and the school, about how your child will be educated. The IEP is a set of **VIP – Very Important Papers** - so it's to your (and your child's) advantage to know all you can about what makes a good IEP.

Background

When you understand where the IEP originates, you are better prepared to participate in creating a meaningful IEP. The IEP is the centerpiece of the federal legislation we call [IDEA](#). The purpose of IDEA (§ 300.1) is to:

Ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their UNIQUE NEEDS and prepare them for:

- ***Further education,***
- ***Employment, and***
- ***Independent Living***

Why do you need to know this? The intent of IDEA, and thereby your child's IEP, is to prepare your child for [life beyond school](#). Every step you take and every IEP you sign should have your child's adult life in mind.

Let's look specifically at what IDEA says about how your child should be educated:

**"To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities...
are educated with children who are not disabled..."**

"Special classes, separate schooling or other removal...from the regular educational environment occurs ONLY when the nature or severity of the disability...is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved..."

IDEA has always advocated for kids with disabilities to be educated, to the greatest extent possible, with their non-disabled peers. At first glance, many children may appear "too disabled" to fit into the general education classroom setting. That's where the IEP comes in. The IEP addresses issues such as:

- What can your child do right now ([present levels](#))
- What [goals](#) will your child work on this year?
- What services will your child receive to assist in meeting those goals? Services can include [special education services](#), as well as [related services](#). These services might include certain types of therapies, counseling, special transportation, interpreter services, or other types of special education support.
- What [supplemental aids and services](#) will the school provide your child? Supplementary aids and services might include things like augmentative communication, or assistive technology.

- Where and when will these services be provided?
- And much, much more...

With a great IEP - the right goals, services and supports – we find that those same children who appeared “too disabled” to be educated in the general education classroom CAN be educated in those settings after all – which has been the intent of IDEA all along. ["Inclusion Begins in Kindergarten"](#) explains more about inclusive education settings – why you should consider them for your child and what you can do to make them happen.

An IEP is required before your child can receive any special education and/or related services. Sometimes it isn't possible to have an IEP in place before the student must begin school, such as when testing is in progress, the student is transitioning from an ECI program, or when a student moves into a district from another district. Please see Temporary/Transition IEPs for more information on IEP development in those specific situations

What Parents Need to Know

The IEP is the blueprint for your child's education. Would you allow an architect to design your new home without your input? You'd want to have a say in where the kitchen, the bedrooms, and the bathrooms go, right? Whether it's a one-story or two-story house? Brick or wood? It's no different here, just a different kind of blueprint. As the Parent, your voice is critical in the development of your child's Educational Blueprint, the IEP. You are helping to build your child's future!

Where to start? Go to:

- [Developing an IEP: The Five "W's":](#)
- [Present Levels of Academic and Functional Performance](#)
- [Writing Goals and Objectives](#)
- [Placement Decisions](#)

Additional Resources:

Note: There is a wealth of valuable information about IEPs on the web. Be sure you are looking at current information that reflects the changes made in the last update (2004) of IDEA. Here are just a few sites we use...

[TEA's Guide to the ARD process](#)

[The Legal Framework for the Child-Centered Special Education Process](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Education's Guide to the IEP](#)

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) – [All About the IEP](#)

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) – [Building the Legacy: A Training curriculum on IDEA 2004 – Theme D: Modules 5-8](#)

WrightsLaw: [IEP information](#)

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Texas Project FIRST is an activity of the Texas Continuing Improvement Process (TCIP) under the auspices of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and Region 9 Education Service Center, and is focused on helping to fulfill the goals of TEA and the Parent Training Committee

Special Education Information Center: 1-855-SPEDTEX (1-855-773-3839)