

IEP Checklist

Updated June 2003

1. Buy the book *The Complete IEP Guide* by Attorney Lawrence M. Siegel and read it through to the chapters relevant to the upcoming IEP. The book will clearly illustrate your rights, has examples of letters to write and will define what is possible for your child to received.

2. Get used to the idea of writing letters to confirm conversations and expressing concerns.

3. Determine what goals you want for your child ahead of the evaluations. You, the parent knows your child best. Remember you are the CAPTAIN of the IEP team. Make sure your child is adequately represented by you. Aim high on your expectations for your child and those involved with the assessments and placement. But, be fair on the realities of where your child is at the time and where you believe is the truest potential. You may choose to communicate your goals in advance to the school district (i.e. Social interaction, speech improvement, etc.). A good school district will focus on the areas in which are your greatest concern.

4. Understand who from the school district will be conducting the evaluations on your child and what their background is in doing the evaluations (i.e. Education, years with the district, etc.).

5. Copy all paperwork turned in to the school district in advance, most especially the hand written evaluations completed by the parents.

6. If you have a concern on the wording of the evaluations notify the school district in advance of what areas you want to address separately. If the evaluation does not pertain to your child at all or is too ambiguous ask to have that part of the evaluation removed.

7. Get a copy of all evaluations one week prior to the IEP. Request the evaluation copies by a particular date in writing. Once you have the chance to review their evaluation of your child you will be better prepared for rebuttal or agreement at the IEP.

8. Object in writing to anyone scheduled to attend the IEP who has not met you or your child. Insist that any attendee observe your child in advance. If they don't issue a letter of objection to their presence, unless it can be determined their presence is essential to the IEP goals. Don't be bullied or intimidated on this one.

9. Notify the school district in writing at least 24 hours in advance that you will be taperecording the IEP meeting and all meetings.

10. Solicit any experts to back your point of view for what is appropriate for your child. This may include but not be limited to outside evaluations from other professionals.

11. Be aware of the vernacular that is commonly used in IEP meetings. For instance you will not want to use the word "best" for your child, instead use the word "appropriate". The districts are trained to use that against you during the IEP meeting. Being aware of your rights helps in the placement of your child, such as understanding what is considered a Fair and Equal Education in the Least Restrictive Environment.

12. Once you have received the proposal of placement for your child and you have also made clear what you expect in placement for your child, meet with a special education attorney to review the proposal. They may advise you to turn down the proposal or accept it. In either case they will advise you on your next steps.

13. If subsequent IEPs are in order because of lack of agreement then use the time between to solicit outside opinions to back your contention of where your child is best placed. Be prepared to pay upfront for these opinions. Keep track of all charges and notify the school district of your intention to seek outside opinions. You will later solicit the school district for reimbursement of all charges.

14. Stick to what you believe is appropriate for your child and put the program in place, again, keeping track of all charges incurred (ie. Private school, shadow aides, outside evaluations, etc.).

15. If agreement is not doable then consider outside mediator. If the relationship with the school district is especially contentious then consider hiring the attorney to send and receive all communication. The attorney can tell you when it is time to consider a DUE PROCESS hearing.

16. Once Due Process is enacted it becomes a matter a full legal hearing with the individual parties subject to court costs and attorney bills. Keep accurate records and documents. Have the attorney solicit the experts to back your opinion and be ready for the Due Process hearing.

17. Finally, make sure you dress for success at the IEP. Treat it like it is a true "business" meeting. Your appearance gives a final level of credibility to your serious approach of achieving goals for your child.

As a side note, if you have developed a cordial relationship with the school district and find that they are truly helpful, then a thank you note of some sort is in order. You will be surprised how much that can do for them and elevate their opinion of dealing with you. Any time they have achieved something significant for your child, drop them a note to let them know. Like anyone else they appreciate it and work harder to earn your continued appreciation.

Don't consider those who work for the school district and interact with your child to be "your friends". Yes, you can be friendly, gracious and easy to get along with. However, do not share outside opinions, gossip about anyone in the district or in any way lose sight of who is your main concern... **YOUR CHILD.**

If a program or individual is NOT working for your child, notify the school district in writing to make a change. Do not be afraid of personal relationships developed. Focus on what is right for your child.

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Date: June 27, 2003

DISCLAIMER: DO NOT MISCONSTURE THIS AS LEGAL ADVICE! THIS IS A PARENT CREATED CHECK LIST. PLEASE DISCUSS WITH YOUR SPECIAL EDUCATION ATTORNEY BEFORE TAKING ANY ACTION!