



TIP SHEET

IEP Overview for Parents



What is an IEP?

IEP stands for “individualized education program.” An IEP is a written plan for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in an annual meeting. The requirements for the contents of the IEP are outlined in federal law and state regulations (listed at the end of this document).

Who develops the IEP?

The IEP is developed by a collaborative team. This team meets at least once a year (or more often, if necessary) to revise the plan and meet the academic and functional performance needs of the child. Members of the IEP team may include:

- the parents
- general education teacher(s)
- special education teacher (s) or providers
- a school district representative, including nonpublic representative if appropriate
- an individual who can interpret special education evaluation (MDT) implications
- the child with a disability, when appropriate

- a representative of an agency providing transition services
- other persons invited at the discretion of the parents and/or school district

IEP team members work together to develop an educational plan that will address the child’s academic and functional needs and enable the child to participate in general education and school activities. The IEP must ensure the child with the disability is learning alongside his or her nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. This is called the least restrictive environment, or LRE.

When is the IEP developed?

An IEP must be developed within 30 calendar days of an initial evaluation for special education. The IEP must then be developed, reviewed, and revised at least annually, but can be reviewed more frequently if requested by the parent or the school district.

IEP team meetings must be scheduled at a mutually agreed upon time and place. This means that if you receive an IEP meeting notice and the time and location do not work for you, the school must work with the parents to reach an agreement about when the meeting should be scheduled. If a parent is

unable to physically attend the IEP meeting, you may agree to use another means of participation, like video or conference call.

A team member may be excused from an IEP meeting only under specific conditions. These conditions will vary depending on whether or the team member’s area of expertise is going to be discussed or modified in the meeting. The parent *and* the school system must *both* agree in writing that the member’s attendance is not necessary.

What are the required components of an IEP?

When the IEP team meets and considers how your child will be involved and participate in school life, they must be sure that the IEP contains specific information required by law. Here's a brief list of what federal and state law requires:

- a statement of the child's present levels of academic, developmental, and functional achievement, including how your child's disability affects his or her involvement and progress in the general education curriculum
- the development of annual goals, including academic and functional goals
- a description of how your child's progress toward meeting the annual goals will be measured, and when periodic progress reports will be provided
- a statement of special education and related services, and supplementary aids and services
- a statement of accommodations and modifications
- an explanation of the extent, if any, to which your child will not participate with nondisabled children in the regular class and in extracurricular and nonacademic activities (this is called the least restrictive environment, or LRE)
- the projected date for the beginning of services, and the frequency, location, and duration of those services
- beginning no later than your child's 14th birthday, the IEP must also include statements about *transition services*. Transition services are designed to help youth with disabilities prepare for life after high school.

What other special factors must the IEP team consider?

There are several factors that the IEP team must consider to ensure the IEP addresses all of the special education and related service needs of your child. These special factors must also be documented as part of the IEP:

YOUR CHILD'S STRENGTHS

Your child's strengths and interests must be discussed by the IEP team and used as the basis for planning an educational program. Strengths and interests can form the framework on which to build new skills and behaviors (Pacer, 2020).

PARENTAL CONCERNS FOR ENHANCING THE EDUCATION OF THEIR CHILD

The IEP team must discuss your concerns related to your child's education. For example, you might be concerned that your child is being bullied, has few friends, or is failing math. Perhaps you fear your child will become frustrated and drop out of school. The IEP team must address these concerns if they have an impact on education (Pacer, 2020).

RESULTS OF THE MOST RECENT EVALUATION

The IEP team will consider the results of your child's most recent evaluation (initial evaluation or the three-year comprehensive reevaluation) when developing the IEP (Pacer, 2020).

BEHAVIORAL CONCERNS

A student may demonstrate behaviors that interfere with his or her learning, or the learning of others in the classroom. The team may attempt to identify the function of the behavior through a functional behavior assessment (FBA). A behavioral intervention plan (BIP) is written to implement strategies to prevent the behavior from occurring again.

LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

The IEP team must consider the language needs of your child if their primary language is not English. The district must consider services for your child to become proficient in English. They must also provide meaningful access to the content of the general education curriculum.

VISION CONCERNS

If your child is blind or visually impaired, the IEP team shall provide instruction in Braille, unless Braille is not appropriate. An evaluation is completed to determine if Braille instruction is suitable for your child.

COMMUNICATION NEEDS

The IEP team must consider the language and communication needs of your child in order to help them meet their educational goals. This includes opportunities for instruction and direct communications with peers and school staff in your child's language and communication mode.

HEARING CONCERNS

If your child is deaf, hard of hearing, or deaf-blind, the IEP team must consider their language and communication needs, including the opportunities for direct communications with peers and school staff in your child's language and communication mode.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Assistive technology is a tool to help your child benefit from the general educational curriculum, and access extracurricular and nonacademic activities. The IEP team must determine whether your child needs an assistive technology device or service.

PRESENT LEVELS OF ACADEMIC AND FUNCTIONAL PERFORMANCE

Consider how your child is currently doing in school. Where is your child performing academically? How does your child's disability affect his or her involvement and progress in the general education curriculum? Also, consider the functional performance of your child. Functional performance refers to skills or activities that are not considered academic or related to a child's academic achievement.

MEASURABLE ANNUAL GOALS

Once a child's needs are identified, the IEP team works to develop appropriate goals to address those needs. *Annual goals* describe what the child is expected to do or learn within the next 12 months. What baseline data is used to establish the goal? Where is your child heading this year? What will he or she work on, both academically and in terms of functional development?

BENCHMARKS OR SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVES

Benchmarks or short-term objectives are required only for children with disabilities who take alternate assessments aligned to alternate achievement standards. Benchmarks indicate the smaller steps a child will take to reach an annual goal.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND/OR MODIFICATIONS

An accommodation is a change that helps a student overcome or work around the disability. If your child has a writing disability, allowing them to give his or her answers orally is an example of an accommodation. Your child is still expected to know the same material and answer the same questions as fully as the other students, but he or she doesn't have to write answers to show they have learned the content. *A modification means a change in what is being taught to or expected from the student.* Making an assignment easier so the student is not doing the same level of work as other students is an example of a modification.

MEASURING AND REPORTING PROGRESS

Your child's IEP must also contain a description of how progress toward meeting the annual goals will be measured and when it will be reported to parents. Measuring progress gives the IEP team concrete evidence as to whether the individualized program is actually effective or whether adjustments need to be made.

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

Special education is instruction that is specially designed to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. This means creating an individual plan to address your child's specific needs that result from his or her disability. Special education for any student can consist of:

- an individualized curriculum that is **different** from that of same-age, nondisabled peers (for example, teaching a blind student to read and write using Braille);
- the **same** (general) curriculum as that for nondisabled peers, with adaptations or modifications made for the student (for example, teaching 3rd grade math but including the use

of counting tools and assistive technology for the student); and

- a combination of these elements.

It is also important to remember that the education, services, and supports outlined in your child's IEP do not necessarily cover that child's entire education. **The IEP only addresses those educational needs resulting from the child's disability.** If your child needs special education support throughout the school day, for all activities, the IEP will cover all these needs. If your child doesn't need special education support in one or more areas, then the IEP will not include these subjects. Your child will access these areas through the general curriculum, with no special education services.

RELATED SERVICES

To help your child benefit from special education, he or she may also need extra help in other areas. This additional help is called *related services*. Related services can include the following:

- speech-language pathology and audiology services
- interpreting services
- physical and occupational therapy
- counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling
- orientation and mobility services
- school health services and school nurse services
- transportation (see more about transportation below)

Your child may not require all of the related services listed above. Furthermore, the list of related services is not exhaustive. It may include other developmental, corrective, or supportive services if they are required to assist your child with a disability to benefit from special education.

SUPPLEMENTARY AIDS AND SERVICES

Supplementary aids and services are intended to improve your child's access to learning and participation across the spectrum of academic, extracurricular, and nonacademic activities and settings. They can change how that content is

presented or the way your child's progress is measured. Supplementary aids and services can also include direct services and support given to your child, and support and training for staff who work with your child. The IEP team must determine what supplementary aids and services your child will need and specify them in the IEP.

PROGRAM MODIFICATIONS FOR SCHOOL PERSONNEL

Also, part of the IEP is identifying the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided. This includes supports for those who work with your child to help them be successful in school. Some of these supports might include:

- attending a conference or training related to your child's needs,
- having an aide in the classroom, or
- getting special equipment or teaching materials.

EXTENT OF NONPARTICIPATION

The IEP must also include an explanation of the extent, if any, to which your child will not participate with nondisabled children in the regular class and in other school settings and activities. Federal law has a **strong preference for children with disabilities to be educated alongside their peers without disabilities**, to the maximum extent appropriate. This is referred to as the least restrictive environment (LRE). The removal of your child from the regular education class may occur *only if* your child cannot be satisfactorily educated in the regular educational environment *with* the use of supplementary aids and services.

PARTICIPATION IN STATE AND DISTRICT-WIDE ASSESSMENTS

Law requires that students with disabilities take part in *state or district-wide assessments*. The IEP team must decide if the student needs accommodations in testing or another type of assessment entirely. In this component of the IEP, the team documents how the student will participate in assessments.

SERVICE DELIVERY

This describes the services your child will receive—the when, where, how often, how long of service

delivery. The service delivery statement in the IEP should include:

- **how often** your child will receive service(s) (number of times per day or week)
- **how long** each “session” will last (number of minutes)
- **where** services will be provided (in the general education classroom or another setting such as a special education resource room)
- **when** services begin and end (starting and ending dates)

EXTENDED SCHOOL YEAR

The IEP team must also consider whether or not your child needs to receive services beyond the typical school year. This is called Extended School Year (ESY) services. Whether or not your child needs ESY

In summary, collaboration among IEP team members is essential to ensure that your child’s educational experience is a success. All members of the IEP team are equal partners. The opinions of all team members are valued and encouraged. You, as the parent, bring a valuable understanding of your child to the table. Your child also knows their strengths, preferences, interests, and needs, and often can express this better than anyone else. With this in mind, all members of the IEP team must recognize their responsibility to maintain and enhance partnerships, creating a collaborative and supportive environment at every IEP.

For more information about IEPs, contact your child’s special education teacher, a PTI Nebraska parent/professional at (800) 284-8520 and pti-nebraska.org, or the Nebraska Department of Education at (402) 471-2471 and education.ne.gov/sped/.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children. See <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/> for more information on IDEA.

Rule 51 is the document that outlines regulations and standards for special education programs in Nebraska. Rule 51 can be found on the Nebraska Department of Education’s website: https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Rule51_2017.pdf.

Rule 55 is the document that outlines rules of practice and procedure for due process hearing in special education contest cases. Rule 55 can be found on the Nebraska Department of Education’s website: https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Rule55_2012.pdf

SOURCES

Nebraska Department of Education IEP Technical Assistance Guide

<https://www.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Setting-Goals-Achieving-Results-3-11-14.pdf>

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Parent Center Hub

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/accommodations/>

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/iepcontents/>

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/iep-team/>

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/present-levels/>

is a decision that is made by the IEP team. For more information on ESY, see the ESY tip sheet at <https://www.education.ne.gov/sped/parent-information/>.

TRANSITION PLANNING

Beginning no later than a student’s 14th birthday (and younger, if appropriate), the IEP must contain transition-related plans designed to help the student prepare for life after high school. For more information on transition planning, see the transition tip sheet and checklist

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation as a related service may be included in an IEP. If the IEP team determines that such a service is needed for your child to benefit from his or her special education, then transportation services are included in your child’s IEP.