

Parent's Guide to IEP Meeting Participation

Preparing for, Participating in, and Following Up on Your Child's IEP Meeting

Research on family engagement consistently shows that when parents come to IEP meetings prepared and are treated as equal team members, students have stronger outcomes. This guide walks you through the meeting process from both a rights and a practical-preparation perspective.

1. Before the Meeting

- Confirm the date, time, and location work for your schedule — you can ask to reschedule if it doesn't.
- Request a copy of any new evaluation reports or draft goals in advance so you have time to review them.
- Write down your top 3 priorities for your child this year (academic, social, behavioral, or independence-related).
- Jot down specific questions — e.g., "How will progress toward this goal be measured?" or "What happens if my child isn't making progress by winter?"
- Decide whether you want to invite anyone else with knowledge of your child (family member, therapist, advocate).

2. During the Meeting

- You do not have to agree to anything in the meeting itself — you can ask for time to review and respond later.
- Ask the team to explain any acronym or jargon you don't recognize (PLAAFP, LRE, FAPE, etc.).
- Ask how each goal will be measured and how often you'll get progress updates.
- If you disagree with something, say so and ask for it to be noted — you can also request Prior Written Notice explaining the district's reasoning.
- You can request a break at any point, or to reconvene the meeting another day.

3. Quick-Reference: What Should Be in the IEP

Section	What to Look For
Present Levels	Specific data on current skills — not just a diagnosis
Annual Goals	Specific, measurable targets tied to your child's needs
Services	Type, frequency, duration, and start date of each service
Placement/LRE	Where services happen and how much time is in general education
Accommodations	Supports for both classroom work and testing
Transition Plan (age 16+ or per state)	Postsecondary goals and the steps/services to reach them

4. After the Meeting

- Review the written IEP carefully once you receive it — it should match what was discussed and agreed to.
- Keep a folder (paper or digital) of all IEPs, evaluations, report cards, and written communications with the school.
- Track progress reports against the stated goals — ask questions early if progress seems to be stalling, don't wait for the annual review.

5. If You Disagree

- You do not have to sign the IEP to indicate agreement with every part of it — check your state's specific consent procedures.
- You can request another IEP meeting at any time, not just at the annual review, if concerns come up.
- Mediation and IEP facilitation are free, informal options for resolving disagreements before considering a formal complaint or due process.

Evidence Base & Sources

- 34 CFR §300.321–300.322 (IEP Team composition and parent participation).
- Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR) — IEP meeting preparation resources.
- Harvard Family Research Project / National Center for Families Learning — research on family engagement and student outcomes in special education.
- PACER Center — parent-facing IEP meeting checklists and self-advocacy materials.

This resource synthesizes federal statute, regulation, and peer-reviewed / technical-assistance-center guidance current as of publication. It is an instructional tool, not legal advice; consult your district's legal counsel and current state regulations for compliance decisions.