



Individualized Education Programs: A Brief Overview

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, every student who receives special education services in schools is entitled to an Individualized Education Program, or IEP. An IEP is a document that describes the programs, services, and goals that are tailored to the unique needs of each student in special education. All educators must adhere to the education program set forth by the IEP.

MEMBERS OF AN IEP TEAM

The IEP team is composed of several members:

- The parent(s) or legal guardian(s) of the student
- At least one general education teacher of the student
- At least one special education teacher of the student
- A representative of the school district who is qualified to provide or supervise special education services and who is knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the school district (known as the local education agency representative)
- An individual, such as a school psychologist, who can interpret evaluation results
- Others who have knowledge about the student, at the discretion of the family or the school district
- The student, when appropriate

COMPONENTS OF AN IEP

The IEP is developed collaboratively by the IEP team. It contains:

- A statement of the child's present levels of academic and functional performance
- Measurable annual educational goals and objectives for the child related to the area(s) of disability
- Description of special education services needed to meet goals, including specially designed instruction, related services, and supplementary aids and services
- Necessary accommodations and modifications
- IEP team members responsible for implementation of the IEP
- The process for monitoring progress toward the annual goals
- An explanation of the extent, if any, to which the student will not participate with children without disabilities and general education and nonacademic activities
- For transition-age students (usually 16 and older), measurable postsecondary goals based on transition assessment

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS REGARDING IEPs

The IEP has many requirements regarding its development and dissemination. First and foremost, schools must ensure that families understand and are able to participate in any discussions related to the development of the IEP and any changes made to it. To that end, the school must provide adequate prior notice of team meetings, which must be scheduled at a mutually agreeable time and location. If a caregiver cannot attend, the school must make attempts to include families by other means, such as phone calls or videoconferencing. Other important legal requirements include:

- The IEP must be accessible to all of the child’s teachers and service providers.
- The school is accountable for providing the instruction and services outlined in the IEP.
- Special education and related services must be made available as soon as possible following the development of the IEP.
- The IEP must be reviewed at least annually, and the child must be reevaluated at least once every 3 years (or more if warranted; the team determines if new assessment data are needed for a reevaluation).
- Caregivers must be given reports on progress toward IEP goals at least as often as general education students receive progress reports.

CAREGIVERS’ ROLES IN IEPs

As noted above, families are important members of the IEP team. They are invited to give their input into the development of the IEP and future revisions as needed. During IEP meetings, caregivers are asked to talk about their child, future goals, strengths, concerns, and needs. If families do not agree with the contents of the IEP, they may request a mediation (a meeting with an objective third party to help address differences) or a due process hearing (a legal proceeding with a hearing officer).

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS’ ROLES IN IEPs

School psychologists are often part of teams that develop initial IEPs because of their role in interpreting evaluation results. School psychologists, however, can also be valued regular members of IEP teams due to their knowledge of instructional and progress monitoring strategies; data collection; academic, behavioral, and mental health interventions; and goal-setting strategies. The contribution of school psychologists during IEP annual reviews and reevaluations varies by state and school district.

TEACHERS’ AND ADMINISTRATORS’ ROLES IN IEPs

As noted above, at least one general education teacher and one special education teacher knowledgeable about the student are required members of IEP teams. Additionally, a school administrator most often serves as the local education agency representative on the IEP team. Beyond team membership, teachers are responsible for carrying out the provisions of the IEP, including the specially designed instruction and any accommodations and modifications outlined on the IEP that are needed for the child. Administrators are responsible for overseeing the provision of special education services and ensuring services are provided in accordance with the IEP.

RELATED RESOURCES

Jacob, S., Decker, D. M., & Lugg, E. (2016). *Ethics and law for school psychologists* (7th ed.). Wiley.

[Disability and Special Education Acronyms](#): This website from the Center for Parent Information and Resources lists common special education acronyms to help parents and educators navigate terminology.

[Parent FAQ](#)

[RoadMap to IEP](#): This provides a roadmap that helps parents know what to expect in meetings, the contents of an IEP.

[U.S. Department of Education’s website for IDEA](#)

This document is designed to summarize guidance based on federal legislation. State and territorial laws and regulations and local education agency policies may be more restrictive than federal guidance. Readers are encouraged to also access their state or territorial department of education and school district websites for this state and local guidance. Please also note that the function of this document is informational and is not intended to provide official legal advice.

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