



ENHANCED

Learning

INDIVIDUAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

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Questions Answered

- What is an Individual Educational Program?
- How are test results translated into a plan?
- How is a student determined to qualify for school services?
- What are the components of an IEP?
- How can you evaluate the appropriateness of an IEP?
- What web sites or organizations can be helpful for researching educational plans?



If you are familiar with teaching to either Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder or Learning Disabilities, you understand that the first part of the process is to assess a student and determine their educational needs. Once the student has been assessed, the recommendations may come to you to help implement an educational plan. If you are in a private school you may not use the “Individual Educational Program” term that the public schools would use. To make accommodations for a student, you might use the terms “Educational Plan for Success,” “Accommodation Plan” or “Educational Plan.”

This article will walk you through the steps of translating an educational assessment into some type of accommodation or educational plan.

HOW TEST RESULTS ARE TRANSLATED INTO A PLAN

Determining Eligibility for Public School Services

The following discussion may apply if the family is using local school district resources to evaluate a student. If the family uses an independent evaluator, this detailed process may not apply. Only when state or federal funds are being used to provide special services must this focus-of-concern, or child-find, process be followed. However, even for private school students, most of the sequence of translating test results into program recommendations is going to be applicable. I am describing the public school process, because parents may use this resource, rather than incur the expense of a private evaluation.

Once the testing is completed, the psychologist and/or the child study team at the school the child would attend if he were going to public school will evaluate the results. Within the public school process, an eligibility committee must meet and review the evaluation. It's important to note the terminology used in the laws. The public school is required to provide special services only after the child is deemed "handicapped and in need of special-education and/or related services." You may not like the heavy sound of the word handicapped, but the legislation that mandates and provides funds for the child to receive extra help utilizes such terms. Therefore, the terms and their definitions must be used in this process.

To qualify a student for help within the learning-disabled category, the eligibility committee must see evidence from the evaluation that there is a severe discrepancy between the student's intellectual ability and academic achievement in one or more of the categories we've seen previously. Similar, but different, categories for learning disabilities

may be specified in your state regulations. Other eligibility criteria exist for each of the special-needs categories.

Parents and private school teachers may not automatically be a part of the eligibility committee meeting. After the evaluation process has been completed, parents have a right to review the information, obtain copies of the evaluation, and request that the evaluation be explained to them. Parents may also request that they be allowed to attend the eligibility committee meeting. All of this occurs before the IEP meeting.

This is important because the eligibility committee may determine the student does not meet the criteria for a particular learning problem, and therefore is not eligible for special services. The results of the evaluation may say, for example, that the child's scores on any of the achievement categories are not low enough to meet the criteria. The student may have problems in, say, written expression; but he or she is only one and a half grade levels behind, not two. Two levels below expectations may be the cutoff score so the child isn't eligible for services.

That's the kind of deliberation the eligibility committee must complete. They have to follow fairly rigid criteria established by your state office of public instruction. If the child is found not to be eligible for services, the IEP meeting will not be held. That's why parents may want to ask to attend the eligibility committee meeting. This is a crucial decision point in the total process, and the parents may need to be a strong advocate for their child's best interests. Here is where parents may disagree with the findings, and ask for another evaluation, if they believe the results aren't an accurate reflection of their child's abilities and needs.

I must emphasize that these procedures are necessary for special education services



within the public schools, or if the evaluation was completed by public school personnel. If a private clinician does the assessment, the implementation activities will take place within your school and/or other community resources. It's also important to remember that, even when the student has been identified by the public school process as having significant learning deficiencies, they may still not be able to obtain public school services. This is because a private school student can be assessed, but there is no guarantee that the required services will be paid for by public school funds.

Preparation of an Individualized Education Program (IEP)

It's now time to formulate a plan of action. What will help the student in terms of intervention, accommodation, and remediation? According to federal law, a meeting is to be held within 30 days of the time the student has been found to qualify for special education and related services. The purpose of this meeting is to formulate and review the individualized education program (IEP) appropriate to the child's needs. This timeline would be true whether the local school district did the evaluation or an independent evaluator was used. The clock would start ticking once the district had received the test results and the eligibility committee confirmed the child did have a learning disability or other health impairment, such as ADHD, as defined by your state guidelines.

If the family used an independent evaluator outside of the public school process, a summary session would ordinarily be held with that person shortly after the testing was completed. This session should be a time to explain the entire testing process, describe specific test results, and give a summary of the implications for that child. As the child's teacher or administrator, you want to know the student's strengths and weaknesses, areas of learning disability, and the methods of

instruction that are likely to be of most value. This content would be similar to what the local school district meeting would provide. If the family expects to utilize the services of the public school, the results of the evaluation must be forwarded to the district, and the eligibility process would still have to be completed. If all services are going to be provided by your school, the public school probably won't be involved in any of the educational deliberation and implementation.

Federal guidelines require the local school district to use a multi-disciplinary team to interpret the evaluation data and contribute to placement and instructional recommendations. This team will include the child's classroom teacher and at least one person qualified to conduct individual diagnostic examinations of children, such as a school psychologist. Often other people, such as a nurse, speech and language specialist, learning disorder specialist, or an administrator, will be involved. This team is supposed to draw on information from a variety of sources to make its recommendations. This data can include aptitude and achievement tests, teacher recommendations, physical or medical conditions, social or cultural background, and adaptive behavior.

The information obtained from all these sources is to be documented and carefully considered. The eventual placement decision is to be made by a group of persons, including those who are knowledgeable about the student. In making that decision, the group should consider all placement options, and make use of the least restrictive environment. All this culminates in an individual educational plan (IEP) for the child.

Private School Planning

Now, what happens if there is no involvement with the public school? The expectation is that everything will be done within your school or with private resources. Your school will have its own process for determining eligibility into any special program. However, there still needs to be some type of process that takes the

assessment information and translates the recommendations into an educational plan for your student. Your school may have another name for the planning process, but the goal is still to arrive at specific ways to help the student.

Components of an Individual Educational Plan (IEP)

IEP Components

- ✓ A statement of the child's present levels of educational performance
- ✓ A statement of annual goals, including short-term instructional objectives
- ✓ A statement of specific educational services to be provided
- ✓ A statement of the extent to which the child will be able to participate in regular educational programs
- ✓ A statement of whether modifications in the administration of standardized school-wide tests should be made for the child.
- ✓ The projected dates for initiating services, and the anticipated duration of those services
- ✓ A statement of whether any transition or pre-vocational skills and services are needed after the child turns 18
- ✓ Appropriate criteria and evaluation procedures for determining, at least annually, whether the instructional objectives are being achieved

Now let's look at these components in more detail.

- ✓ An IEP should present up-to-date information on test results in basic academic, vocational, and/or social skills. Names of the tests, dates administered, and results are to be described. Most important is the data that identifies the weakness or special needs of the student. This is basic information that drives the entire process. Based

on this description of deficits, the programming can be developed.

- ✓ Annual goals and short-term instructional objectives will specify the general intent and direction of the services provided from year-to-year. Goals statements should be included for every area of need, as documented under the present levels of educational performance (item 1). Short-term instructional objectives should be included for each goal and should map out a systematic sequence of skills needed to achieve the goal.
- ✓ The next component of an IEP is a presentation of the services the student is to receive. This will outline the type of special program, such as a remedial program for reading comprehension, and the particular model of service delivery. Also identified is the number of hours per day the student will participate in special classes. Types of accommodations that are to be made in the classroom are also identified, such as oral testing, computer access, or taped books. Finally, any related services, such as counseling, physical therapy, or tutoring, are to be described.
- ✓ The IEP will describe the amount of time the student will participate in regular educational programs. This can include the extent to which the student will participate in activities like physical education. If the student is unable to participate in the regular physical-education program, for example, a description of the specially designed alternate program shall be included.
- ✓ Most public and private schools give some type of district or school-wide standardized achievement tests. The IEP can state what modifications are required in the giving of these tests. They can include extended time or a distraction free room for testing.
- ✓ Dates are to be given for when the services are to begin, as well as the anticipated duration of those services.

✓ Transition service needs is an element of the IEP that addresses the post high school goals of the student. These are a coordinated set of activities that promote movement from school to post-school adult living activities. An example would be pre-vocational classes in high school that would prepare the student to enter a full-time vocational-technical training program. The plan would include a list of any agencies, in addition to the school, responsible for services.

✓ The final component is the description of objective criteria and evaluation procedures for determining progress toward the goals. A statement is to be made for each goal and objective that identifies the level of mastery required, and how it will be tested. The interest here is in monitoring the student's growth and evaluating the effectiveness of the IEP. A date and method of annual review is also to be specified. The IEP committee should meet at least once each school year to evaluate the IEP, the student's progress, and whether the instructional objectives are being met.

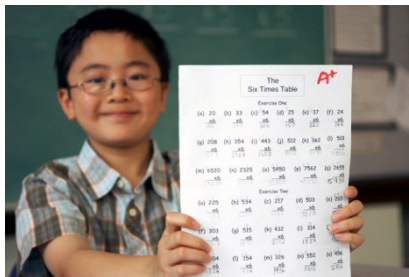
✓ Statements can also be made in the IEP of secondary students about whether the student is working toward graduation with a diploma and what accommodations, if any, are needed. Some school systems award handicapped students a certificate of attendance, which signifies completion of four years' attendance, rather than graduation from high school. Therefore, the IEP should

state the type of certificate or diploma the student is working to achieve.

Once the IEP is signed, the parent has given permission for their child to receive the services outlined in that document. Only those services outlined on the IEP are required (in addition to the basic regular educational services). This is more of a legal concern for special education services provided by a local school district. In that case, the parents need to make sure everything discussed is actually

included in the final form of the IEP. In the private school situation, there is not a legal mandate for an IEP. Although, if a family is spending several thousands of dollars to have their child participate in a special program, I would think

a formal IEP or contract would be very advisable. (Martin, 2004)



Questions to Ask About a Student's IEP

Since the IEP document is so crucial in identifying all the services that are going to be provided for the student, teachers and parents want to make sure the IEP is as comprehensive and accurate as possible. The following questions can help the parents and teacher evaluate the IEP. You can check off the boxes for "yes" if the question can be answered in the positive. Use the "no" when you believe the IEP does not fulfill the elements of a question. The "?" box can be used when you're uncertain and need to obtain more information. (Martin, 2004)

Questions to Help Evaluate a Student's IEP

- | YES | NO | ? | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Was the evaluation comprehensive, non-discriminatory, and multi-disciplinary? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the evaluation describe a full range of the child's strengths and weaknesses, including learning styles and possible disabilities? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the IEP accurately and fully describe the child's present level of educational performance in all relevant developmental areas? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do you agree with the assessment results? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is more information needed to present a fair and accurate picture of the child's learning status? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do the goals included in the IEP accurately and adequately describe the skills, behavior, and understanding you wish the student to acquire in the next year? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do the goals represent all aspects of the educational experience and draw from the intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual domains that you believe are crucial for the child? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are the goals listed in order of priority from most to least important? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are the goals written so as to build on the child's strengths and present level of performance? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do the goals specify what service is to be provided, who will provide the service, how and where the service will be delivered, how often and how much service will be provided, and when the service will start? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do all the professionals, who know and will work with the student, agree with the components of the IEP? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the IEP clearly outline the balance of time the child will spend in regular- and special education programs? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is there at least one annual goal and short-term objective for each type of service the child will receive? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are all goals and objectives written in understandable, positive, and measurable terms? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the IEP include clearly defined methods for systematically (at least annually, if not more often) evaluating the child's progress toward each of the goals and objectives? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Given everything that's included in the IEP, do you agree? |

The reason for these questions is to make sure a comprehensive evaluation was completed, that accurately reflects the child's needs, and that the program is designed to do everything possible to help the student achieve more success in school.

Depending on the student's diagnosis and recommendations of the psychologist, teachers who know the child, and others on the child-

find team, a whole host of educational plans can be implemented. This article can't spell out all of the possibilities. There are many resources than can be used.

A book published by Purposeful Design entitled *Help! For Teachers. Strategies for Reaching All Students* covers many possibilities for special needs students who attend private schools. (Martin, 2004). ■

References

Many educational resources can be found at web sites such as:

www.ldonline.com

www.php.com

www.greatschools.org

www.smartkidswithld.org/guide-to-action/educational-planning

www.help4adhd.org/en/education/teachers

www.cec.sped.org/Content/NavigationMenu/NewsIssues/TeachingLearningCenter/default.htm

www.familyeducation.com

www.ldresources.com

www.eric.ed.gov

Organizations

The Council for American Private Education (CAPE) is a coalition of national organizations and state affiliates serving private elementary and secondary schools. CAPE member organizations represent about 80 percent of private school enrollment nationwide. CAPE's mission is to preserve and promote educational pluralism so that parents have a choice in the schooling of their children. www.capenet.org

National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA). Rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the NCEA is a professional membership organization that provides leadership, direction, and service to fulfill the evangelizing, catechizing, and teaching mission of the Church. NCEA is the largest private professional education organization in the world, representing 200,000 Catholic educators serving 7.6 million students in Catholic elementary and secondary schools, in religious education programs, in seminaries, and in colleges and universities. www.ncea.org/public/ideaspecialeducation.asp

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) offers a wealth of information on disabilities. They serve the nation as a central source of information on disabilities in infants, toddlers, children, and youth. You'll also find easy-to-read information on IDEA, the law authorizing early intervention services and special education. Their State Resource Sheets will help you connect with the disability agencies and organizations in your state. www.nichcy.org

Children with Disabilities Placed by Their Parents in Private Schools: An IDEA Practices Toolkit. The toolkit was developed to help parents, private school officials, and public school officials understand the provisions of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that relate to children with disabilities who have been placed by their parents in private schools. www.capenet.org/pubs2.html

Resources

Martin, G.L. (2004). *Help! for Teachers. Strategies for Reaching All Students*. Colorado Springs, CO: Purposeful Design.