



CHAPTER FIVE

Developing Quality IEPs



In this chapter you will learn about:

- How to have a great start with IEPs
- Required IEP components
- How to plan for and conduct IEP meetings
- Who should attend and how to involve parents
- Transition planning and how to get students involved in their IEPs
- How to organize and lead an effective IEP meeting

Jamie noticed that four of her students' IEPs needed to be revised within the first month of school. She found an IEP form but had questions about what to put in some sections. She wondered about procedures for scheduling the meeting and who should attend. Although she had written mock IEPs in her preparation program she had never led a meeting. She also had questions about how to balance providing students with access to the general curriculum as well as meet their individual needs. Jamie took a deep breath and hoped that her mentor could walk her through one or two before she had to tackle these on her own.

It isn't surprising that one of the most challenging tasks for new special education teachers is facilitating the development of each student's IEP. The IEP committee must draw on its knowledge about the student's specific needs, research-based practices, and the varied supports and services necessary for the student to achieve important educational outcomes. In addition, specific forms and procedures for IEP development often vary across states and districts, leaving teachers to try to figure out processes in their settings. It also takes knowledge, skill, time, and commitment to work with others to make the IEP development process a meaningful one rather than just a compliance task.

THE IEP DOCUMENT

IEPs are written documents that are legally required for each child identified with a disability. IEPs might be understood as a map that outlines student goals and the necessary services and supports to help each child meet his or her goals:

- ▶ Must be based on meaningful data about student needs.
- ▶ Ensures that the student's education is individualized and standards based.
- ▶ Includes measurable academic goals and necessary supports.
- ▶ Describes the student's level of participation in the general education curriculum.
- ▶ Requires that peer-reviewed research (PRR) is incorporated in the design of special education services for the student. This PRR requirement extends to special education, related services, and supplementary aids and services to the extent practicable. This means that the IEP team should select and use academic and behavioral interventions that are supported by research because they are the most likely to be effective for the child. Other terms such as *evidence-based practices* are also used to describe those teaching practices supported by research.
- ▶ Provides a description of the student's participation in extracurricular activities and nonacademic activities, including lunch, clubs, and after-school programs.
- ▶ Ensures continuity of services as the child moves to another school.

The language in the IEP should be clear enough that a teacher in a different school or district will be able to understand and implement it. At the end of this chapter we list websites that include numerous examples of completed IEP documents for students with varied needs in elementary, middle, and high school.

THE IEP PROCESS

The IEP is developed through a process designed to encourage parents and school personnel to plan and communicate together to cultivate a program specific to the child's needs. The IEP meeting accomplishes the following:

- ▶ Helps the IEP team be thoughtful and proactive about supporting the student's needs
- ▶ Provides an opportunity for the IEP team to understand how the child currently performs in academic and nonacademic areas
- ▶ Allows the IEP team to collaboratively develop annual goals and determine needed services, accommodations, and supports
- ▶ Encourages the team to identify strengths and needs, problem-solve, and discuss concerns

TIPS FOR A GREAT START WITH IEPs

You will no doubt have questions about the IEP procedures in your district. It is important to ask for help and remember that writing IEPs becomes easier with experience. IEP forms and processes may also differ from those you used in college courses. It is important to note that some states have additional requirements for IEP documents beyond those included in federal law. This means that you need to take

time to learn about IEP forms and expectations that are specific to your district. Here are some suggestions to help you tackle IEPs:

- ▶ Attend orientations and other special meetings about the IEPs in your district.
- ▶ Review district websites and manuals that explain district IEP procedures and forms.
- ▶ Observe your mentor or another special education teacher lead an IEP meeting.
- ▶ Ask your mentor to give you feedback when you participate in or lead your first meetings.
- ▶ Jot down IEP questions that you can ask your mentor during scheduled meetings.
- ▶ Ask your mentor for examples of model IEPs.

TIPS FOR DEVELOPING IEP COMPONENTS

Today the vast majority of students with disabilities are expected to learn the academic standards required of all students. Therefore, committees need to make sure that IEPs are aligned with the general education curriculum and also address individual needs. In this section, components of the IEP are described with examples of each. It is essential that IEP components be carefully linked to each other. For example, present levels of performance are used to determine annual goals, and special education services are designed and informed by PRR to maximize opportunities for student learning. Once the IEP is written, the IEP team monitors the student to assess his or her progress toward IEP goals and adjusts services as necessary. Figure 5.1 shows the relationships among key components of the IEP.

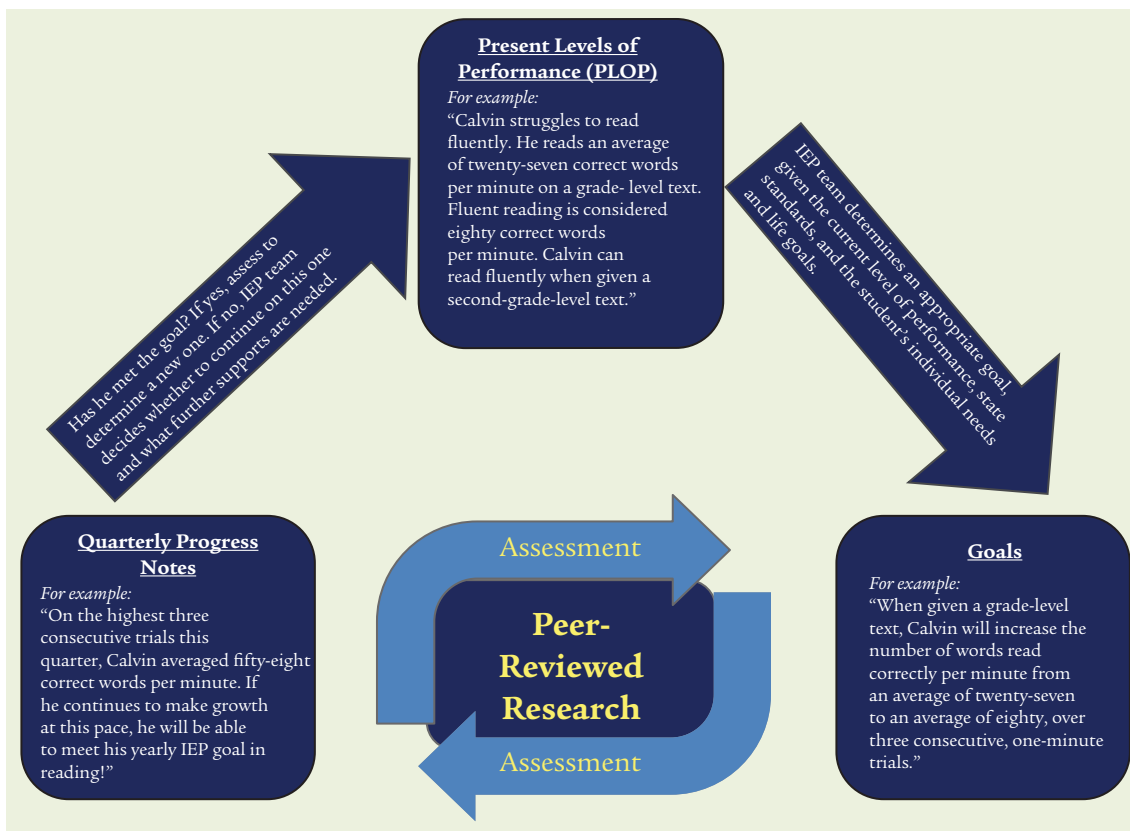


Figure 5.1 Interrelationships of IEP Components
 Source: Elizabeth Bettini, University of Florida

Now that you have the big picture of how key components are related, we describe specific IEP components and provide tips and examples for writing each component.

Present Levels of Performance (PLOP)

The child's present levels of performance (PLOP) include information about academic achievement and functional performance, including how the child's disability affects his or her involvement and progress in the general curriculum.

- ▶ When writing PLOPs, focus on the child's strengths (i.e., what the child can do) and what is needed to help him or her achieve goals rather than using deficit language. For example, instead of writing that the student cannot read, describe developing reading behaviors (e.g., phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, listening comprehension).

TYPICAL SOURCES OF DATA FOR PLOP

- ▶ Data from mandated tests
- ▶ RTI or progress-monitoring data
- ▶ Psychological and academic tests
- ▶ Parent and staff observations
- ▶ Standardized achievement tests
- ▶ Curriculum-based measures
- ▶ Academic work samples
- ▶ Data gathered from related services personnel
- ▶ Data on student behavior

TIPS FOR WRITING PLOP

- ▶ Create a data folder for each student: include assessments, work samples, and other materials for showing the child's present level of performance.
- ▶ Solicit input from parents and service providers about PLOP prior to the meeting.
- ▶ Note areas in which additional data are needed.
- ▶ Make notes about strengths and needs in key areas (e.g., reading, behavior).
- ▶ Summarize a draft of the PLOP data prior to the meeting.
- ▶ Revise the PLOP data based on feedback from others during the meeting.

Examples of PLOP Statements

ACADEMIC PLOP

Results of the Woodcock-Johnson Revised indicate that Jamal's basic reading level is at a beginning second-grade level. He was able to decode all of the first-grade sight words on the district's reading placement test and 25 percent of the second-grade list. He can consistently decode short vowel words (with some difficulty with the short *u*) but is inconsistent when decoding long vowel words. Jamal relies heavily on context clues in reading and scored at the fourth-grade level on the QRI, a measure of listening comprehension. Jamal loves to read and visit the library. He often chooses to reread books multiple times.

NONACADEMIC PLOP

Elise is “non-verbal and uses many communication methods, including gestures, facial expression, eye gaze, vocalizations, word approximations, head nods for yes, head shakes for no, and use of a Dynavox 3100 augmentative communication device that she accesses with a head switch.”¹

Maya is on task for an average of 85 percent of the time when she works in a small-group setting and completes 80 percent of work when she is in a small-group setting, whereas, during whole-class instruction, Maya is on task for an average of 50 percent of class time and completes 60 percent of the assignments.

Annual Goals

It is easy to make similar goals and objectives and provide a “lunch menu” of accommodations, modifications, and adaptations, but it should be individualized!

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PLOPs should be directly related to annual goals: the IEP team uses present levels of performance data to determine the child’s annual goals. These include measurable academic and functional goals designed to do the following:

- ▶ Meet the child’s needs that result from his or her disability
- ▶ Allow the student to make progress in the general education curriculum

TIPS FOR WRITING ANNUAL GOALS

- ▶ Consider a range of student needs. Goals need to be aligned with the general education standards and also address individualized areas of need such as behavior, self-advocacy, social skills, and personal needs.
- ▶ Select goals that are most important and will make the biggest difference for the student. For example, if a student has significant behavioral needs that prevent her from making progress in the curriculum, it is essential that behavioral goals are included in the IEP.
- ▶ Focus goals on what the child will learn, not on activities or services. Whenever possible, write the goals in positive terms, indicating the desired behaviors (e.g., increase on-task behavior) instead of undesirable ones (e.g., decrease off-task behavior).
- ▶ Write measurable goals that include three components:
 - The goal
 - The conditions under which the goal will be met
 - The criteria for meeting the goal

Example of Annual Goals and Objectives in Academic and Nonacademic Areas

- ▶ Lilly will type an average of forty-five words per minute (goal) given an assigned passage on a fifteen-minute test (condition) with 98 percent accuracy (criterion).
- ▶ Jamal will read second-grade material (goal) aloud for five minutes at 115 to 130 words per minute (condition) with 98 percent accuracy (criterion).
- ▶ Dima will demonstrate mastery of the algebra 1 curriculum (goal) by completing the district algebra exam (condition) with 80 percent accuracy (criterion).
- ▶ Meg will demonstrate on-task behavior during thirty minutes of seatwork (goal) in math class (condition) for 90 percent of the time in three time-sampling observations (criterion).
- ▶ Juan will write a one-page essay in American history (goal) on an assigned topic in thirty minutes (conditions) that includes an introduction, relevant and factual details from the taught unit, and a conclusion and that includes no more than five mechanical errors (criterion).

Some goals indicate where the student is currently functioning as well as the annual goal. For example, "When given a prompt and three minutes to write, Kevin will increase the number of correct word sequences (sets of two sequential words or grammatical elements that are mechanically correct) from thirteen (present level) to thirty (annual goal)."

Short-Term or Benchmark Objectives

Short-term or benchmark objectives are the logical steps a child will take to reach a specific annual goal. IDEA 2004 only requires short-term objectives for students who take alternate assessments that are aligned to alternate achievement standards.² However, it is important to know that some states mandate short-term objectives for all students with disabilities. Be sure to know the requirements of your local school district. The following is an example of one student's annual goal and corresponding short-term objectives.

IEP Example

"The IEP team developed David's reading goal and objectives by examining the information in his PLOP. Then, they determined the skills that David needs to learn in order for him to be able to read at a fifth-grade level.

Annual goal: David will achieve a reading score at the fifth-grade level or above, as measured by the qualitative reading inventory.

Examples: Short-Term Objectives

- ▶ By October, when given a list of twenty unfamiliar words that contain short-vowel sounds, David will decode them with 90 percent accuracy on each of five trials.
- ▶ By November, when given twenty unfamiliar words that contain long-vowel sounds, David will decode them with 90 percent accuracy on each of five trials.
- ▶ By December, David will correctly pronounce twenty words with 90 percent accuracy on each of five trials to demonstrate understanding of the rule that when one vowel follows another, the first vowel is pronounced with a long sound and the second vowel is silent (e.g., ordeal, coast).
- ▶ By December, David will correctly separate twenty words by syllables with 90 percent accuracy on each of five trials to demonstrate understanding of the rule that each syllable in a word must contain a vowel (e.g., lesson)."³

Special Education Services

IEP team members must outline the special education services to be provided to the child. The definition of special education services is complex. Fortunately, “the twenty opening words of special education’s definition—specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability—contain the core of the term’s meaning.”⁴ The IEP committee team must use their knowledge of PRR to determine what special education services will best help the student meet his or her annual goals. In the following more information is provided about determining if special education is needed and what constitutes the IEP.

The IEP must determine what specially designed instruction is necessary to meet the needs of the child. Special education services may look very different for students given that the IEP must be individualized for each child. For example, special education for any student can consist of the following:

- ▶ An individualized curriculum that is different from that of same-age, nondisabled peers (e.g., 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 (e.g., teaching third-grade math but including the use of counting tools and assistive technology for the student)
- ▶ A combination of these elements

The education, services, and supports outlined in a child’s IEP do not necessarily cover a child’s entire education but rather those educational needs resulting from the child’s disability. If the services and supports are needed for all activities throughout the school day, the IEP will cover all of these needs.

ADAPTATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS

The IEP will also include modifications and adaptations. A *modification* means a change in the level of what is being taught to or expected from the student.

- ▶ *Example:* Making an assignment easier so the student is not doing the same level of work as other students

An *accommodation* helps a student overcome or work around the disability without modifying expectations and standards.

- ▶ *Example:* Allowing a student who has trouble writing to provide answers orally. This student is still expected to know the same material and answer the same questions as fully as the other students but he doesn’t have to write his answers to demonstrate content knowledge.

The following are examples of common modifications or accommodations:

- ▶ *Scheduling:* Giving the student extra time to complete assignments or allowing several days for testing
- ▶ *Setting:* Working in a small group or working one-on-one with the teacher

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- ▶ *Materials:* Providing audiotaped lectures or books giving copies of teacher's lecture notes using large print books, Braille, or books on CD (digital text)
- ▶ *Instruction:* Reducing the difficulty of assignments, adjusting the reading level, or using a student or peer tutor
- ▶ *Student response:* Allowing answers to be given orally or dictated using a word processor for written work or using sign language, a communication device, Braille, or native language for a student whose native language is not English

Modifications and accommodations are meant to help a child to learn. For example, Jack is an eighth-grade student who has specific learning disabilities in reading and writing. He is in a regular eighth-grade class that is co-taught by a general education teacher and a special education teacher. Modifications and accommodations provided for Jack's daily school routine (and when he takes state or districtwide tests) include the following:

- ▶ Shorter reading and writing assignments
- ▶ Textbooks based on the eighth-grade curriculum but at Jack's independent (fourth-grade) reading level
- ▶ Test questions read and explained when he asks⁵

Adapted from NCHCY

Participation in General and Special Education

Students with disabilities should be placed in the least restrictive environment, participating in general education settings for academic and nonacademic activities to the greatest extent possible (see chapter 4). IEP teams make this decision by determining how much of the school day the child will be educated separately from nondisabled children or will not participate in extracurricular or other nonacademic activities. The amount or percentage of time that the student spends in general and special education is recorded in the IEP. If the student is to be placed outside of the general education classroom, an explanation must be provided in the IEP.

Example: Participation in General and Special Education

"Does this student attend the school he or she would attend if nondisabled?"

Yes No

If no, justify: *N/A*

Does this student receive all special education services with nondisabled peers?

Yes No

If no, justify (justification may not be solely because of needed modifications in the general curriculum): *Kimi requires instruction in cognitive strategies that enable her to better retain auditory material. She works with the speech-language pathologist to learn new strategies required to complete academic assignments. Special education and general education teachers collaborate to monitor progress.*

Ninety-nine percent to 80 percent of day inside the gen ed environment"⁶

Related Services

For some children with disabilities, related services are necessary to benefit from special education. For example, Alicia requires occupational therapy to improve her fine motor coordination, which is necessary for numerous school activities (e.g., writing, putting together puzzles). Philip requires counseling to learn anger management because his frequent outbursts interfere with his learning in the classroom. These related services are part of a free, appropriate public education and are provided at no cost to the parent.

IDEA requires a comprehensive evaluation to identify all special education and related services a child needs. Evaluations from therapists and counselors are often part of the present level of performance data. These evaluations may suggest the need for related services, such as the following:

- ▶ Occupational, music, and physical therapy
- ▶ Speech-language services
- ▶ Assistive technology
- ▶ Counseling or psychological services
- ▶ School nurse services
- ▶ Interpreting, orientation, and mobility services
- ▶ Parent counseling and education
- ▶ Transportation
- ▶ Medical services, if for diagnostic purposes or evaluation

Related services personnel should attend the IEP meeting when they have evaluated the child. The IEP team determines when related services will begin, how often they will be provided, for how long, and where they will be provided on the IEP.

Example: Schedule of Related Services

- ▶ Faisal will receive speech language therapy for two thirty-minute sessions weekly provided by the speech-language pathologist (related to annual goal four).
- ▶ Maddy will receive thirty minutes of occupational therapy each week by a licensed occupational therapist in her second-grade classroom (related to annual goal one), from the week of October 15 through the week of June 1.
- ▶ Evan will receive counseling twice monthly by a licensed psychologist in the library study room (related to annual goal two). Services will begin in October and the committee will reconvene in January to assess progress and determine whether continued services are needed.

Supplementary Aids and Services

The IEP team must consider supplementary aids and services to help students meet their goals. For instance, if Mary exhibits behavioral challenges that interfere with her ability to make progress on her academic goals, the IEP team creates a plan to address Mary's behavior. The following form is often included with the IEP to document that the committee considered needed supports.

Address All Areas Marked "Yes" in the IEP	Yes	No
Does the student's behavior impede his or her learning or that of others?		
Is the student an English language learner (ELL)?		
Does the student have special communication needs?		
If visually impaired, does the student need instruction in Braille or the use of Braille?		
Does the student need assistive technology devices and services?		
Is the student working toward alternate achievement standards, requiring alternate assessments?		
Does the student require specially designed physical education?		
Does the student require extended year services (i.e., service beyond the academic year)?		
Does the student require transition services according to state requirements or will he or she be sixteen or older during the implementation of the IEP?		

Accommodations in Assessment

IDEA also requires that students with disabilities take part in state and districtwide assessments, with test accommodation and modifications as needed. It is the responsibility of the team to determine needed accommodations in these assessments or determine if another type of assessment is needed (see chapter 10).

THE IEP MEETING

The IEP is your student's lifeline to success. It is imperative that you do your best in the development of this very important document!

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Required IEP Participants

A team of individuals, including school personnel and parents, are responsible for developing the IEP. The following individuals are required participants on the IEP team:

- ▶ The child's parents or legal guardian (if parents do not attend, attempts to involve them must be documented).
- ▶ The general education teachers and preferably all but at least one of the child's special education teachers or special education providers.

IEPs and Assistive Technology

Under IDEA 2004, IEP teams must consider whether assistive technology (AT) devices and services are needed to help students with disabilities meet their goals. Although the law requires that team members consider AT, specific guidance is not provided. However, states and districts may provide guidance. A popular guide is the *Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative (WATI) Assistive Technology Consideration Guide*, an excellent resource available for download at no cost.⁷

The following are examples of problems that would suggest a need to consider AT:

- ▶ Print size is too small.
- ▶ A student is unable to hear all that is being said.
- ▶ [The student has] difficulty aligning math equations.
- ▶ The student often needs text read to him in order to complete an assignment.
- ▶ Handwriting is so illegible that the meaning is impossible to decipher.
- ▶ The effort of writing is so slow or so exhausting that it is counterproductive.
- ▶ The student has difficulty finding key points on web pages.
- ▶ Current modifications are not working.
- ▶ The effort required to decode reading assignments is so difficult that the student loses track of the meaning.
- ▶ Student cannot organize assignments in a way that brings them to completion.⁸

Perspective on IEPs and Assistive Technology⁹

Penny Reed, Assistive Technology Specialist

I think that a good IEP team meeting is one in which all the members of the team, including the parents and the student, when the student is able to participate, have a voice in making decisions about all aspects of that student's IEP. First, they look at the present level of educational achievement and functional performance, and that level is well written so that you know exactly what the child is able to do or not do and where the challenges are. The IEP team then determines the goals for the coming year, talks them through, and all are in agreement about those, and then asks, "Okay, what do we need to provide so that this student can meet those goals? Where are the challenges? What things are we most concerned about?" And for those tasks and activities they look at assistive technology as well as other strategies that might help them. You've got to stop and think about the student and exactly what he's able to do and not able to do. And in the environment, what's there for him to use and what isn't? How much support does he have and how noisy is it, and things like that. What are the specific tasks, because you can't make an AT decision without knowing what the task is.

AT is not available for a specific disability. It's available to address specific tasks. One child with cerebral palsy will need a completely different set of assistive technology tools than another child with cerebral palsy. And one child with autism will require a completely different set of resources than another child with autism. We can't prescribe AT based on disability identification.

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We have to look at the task that the student is struggling with. So that they're very task focused, they know exactly what the student can do and not do, now that it's based on what the task the student needs to do and where we're concerned about barriers that he's going to not be able to overcome without the assistive technology. You can't really do a good job of considering the need for assistive technology unless you're task focused, and you can't be task focused until you know what the goals are. For me, that's always been a significant piece. Many IEP forms ask you somewhere else in the IEP about AT as if it's a completely separate thing. So in some states it might come on the second or third page, and you haven't even developed the goals until two pages later. That's a problem for a lot of IEP teams because they're trying to think about it in isolation and, of course, then they don't have an answer. We're all driven by the order of the IEP that was developed by somebody who just thought it fit there nicely. And I used to put a sticky note on that page and come back to it because whether it's an electronic sticky note or it's a paper one, whatever form you're working in, you can't be driven by that. You've got to follow a thought process that makes sense for the participants.

- ▶ A representative of the school system, such as an administrator or special education teacher, who can fulfill the following:
 - Is qualified to provide or supervise special education services
 - Knows about the general curriculum
 - Knows about the resources the school system has available
- ▶ An individual who can interpret the evaluation. Depending on the type of evaluation data (e.g., psychological testing or classroom-based evaluation data), this may be a school psychologist or a special educator.
- ▶ The student, when appropriate (see the section on transition plans on involving the student in the IEP meeting).
- ▶ Representatives from any other agencies that may be responsible for paying for or providing transition services (if the child is sixteen years or, if appropriate, younger).
- ▶ Other individuals invited by the parent or the school who have knowledge or special expertise about the child. This might include a relative, child-care provider, paraeducator, or a professional who provides related services.

IEP Notification

IDEA requires that parents receive notification early enough so that one or both have an opportunity to attend the meeting. It is important that the meeting is scheduled at a mutually agreed-on time and place. Most districts have form letters that are used to notify the parent about the meeting. This letter should include the purpose of the meeting, time, location, and who will be present. Some districts provide parents with a list of questions ahead of time that they might think about prior to the IEP meeting. These questions may include the following:

- ▶ How do you see your child's strengths and needs?
- ▶ Is there anything that you hope your child learns this year?
- ▶ What would you like for us to consider as we plan your child's program for this year?

Parent Participation

“Parents feel empowered because they believe their voices are heard and their values are reflected in the IEP.”¹⁰

Teachers are very busy people and it is easy to focus on getting the IEP completed and signed instead of thinking about what parents and others have to contribute. This quote emphasizes the importance of making sure that the IEP team takes time to give parents a voice in the process and to work toward meaningful versus perfunctory participation (see chapter 3).

Parents can make important contributions to the meetings because they know their child well. For example, they may do the following:

- ▶ Provide information about their child’s strengths, needs, and interests
- ▶ Identify what they would like for their child to learn
- ▶ Share concerns and suggestions based on their knowledge of their child over time
- ▶ Help establish long-term goals based on their vision for their child’s future

To ensure meaningful participation, it is important to schedule interpreters for parents who are deaf or hard of hearing and for those who speak a language different from others at the meeting. Parents also have the option of participating in IEPs through conference calls or Skype.

It is important to exercise caution when bringing a written IEP to the meeting. When parents are asked to sign an IEP that was written before the meeting, they may view the process and their involvement as less important or pro forma. If you choose to bring a written IEP, clearly write the word *draft* on the IEP and explain to parents that you have recorded some ideas and your own thinking, and that it is not complete. During the meeting, record the input of others as decisions are finalized.

Teachers, principals, and district personnel may be responsible for facilitating IEP meetings. As you begin in the school, be sure to find out if you will have this responsibility. The guidelines in exhibit 5.1 should help you facilitate IEPs or be a more effective team member.

Exhibit 5.1 Facilitating an Effective IEP Meeting¹¹

Preplanning for an IEP Meeting

Prior to holding an IEP meeting, several tasks need to be completed to ensure that the required team members are in attendance and that the information presented is organized. Begin planning for IEP meetings three to four weeks prior to the anticipated meeting time. This will give all team members ample time to prepare and ensure availability for them to attend the meeting.

- ▶ Plan the date and location of the meeting.
- ▶ Verify the time and date with parents or guardians first. Inform parents of who will be attending the meeting as well as the purpose of the meeting. You may also want to provide parents with information about how they can contribute to the meeting.
- ▶ Once the date has been verified with the parent or guardian, coordinate the time and location with the required team members. Federal law requires the following team members to be present at all meetings: parent or guardian, school district representative, special education teacher, and general education teacher representative. Do not invite too many persons whose participation may not be needed. Large numbers at IEP meetings guarantee a long meeting and can lead to parents feeling overwhelmed.
- ▶ All students should be encouraged to attend their IEP meeting. Students in ninth grade or age fourteen or older should be invited to the meeting. If the student does not attend, he or she should be consulted about interests and preferences regarding his or her educational program.
- ▶ Send a notice of the meeting to parents and enclose the parents' rights with the meeting notice. Be sure to keep records of all attempts to contact parents, parents' responses, and any other communication between the parents and the school.
- ▶ Begin to compile data for developing the present level of performance.
- ▶ Prepare statements on the strengths of the student as well as concerns that need to be addressed.

BEFORE THE IEP MEETING

The physical set-up of the room can contribute to a positive and effective IEP meeting. Note the following:

- ▶ Choose a room free from outside distractions with ample room for all team members to sit and have space to take notes.
- ▶ Consider providing water or beverages if the meeting will be longer than one hour.
- ▶ Alert office personnel to expect parents and make them feel welcome or have a team member meet the parents in the office and escort them to the meeting room.
- ▶ Consider waiting until the parent arrives before all team members enter the meeting room. It can be very intimidating to enter a meeting when all others have arrived and are already seated.
- ▶ Hold phone calls.
- ▶ Have pencils, paper, and copies of reports available for team members.
- ▶ Provide name tags with each participant's name and title.

BEGINNING THE IEP MEETING

When conducting an IEP meeting, it's important to set the tone and purpose of the meeting. With that in mind, the facilitator should consider the following:

- ▶ Welcome
- ▶ Introductions
- ▶ Explanation of the meeting's purpose and the expected outcome(s)
- ▶ The time parameters set aside for the meeting (include the time frame on the meeting invitation, for example, 2:00 to 3:00 PM)
- ▶ A reminder that if all agenda items are not addressed, another meeting will be held. This helps members to stay focused and to allow members to return to their schedules as planned.
- ▶ Explanation of the ground rules for the meeting (see following).
- ▶ Explanation of the standard for decision making and reaching consensus. This does not mean voting. Consensus means that the IEP team works together to develop an IEP that all can agree on or at least live with.
- ▶ Explanation of the procedural safeguards (see chapter 4). Be sure to also provide parents with a copy of this document.

CONDUCTING THE MEETING: GROUND RULES

When conducting the meeting, note the following ground rules:

- ▶ Remain child focused and child centered.
- ▶ Remain in the moment: turn off or mute all devices.
- ▶ Be an active listener and participant.
- ▶ Follow the agenda; however, record any non-IEP concerns as they come up and return to the agenda. Determine at the end of the meeting to whom the concerns need to be directed.
- ▶ Acknowledge all team members as valuable participants.
- ▶ Demonstrate mutual respect toward team members and their views.

MEETING ETIQUETTE FOR ALL MEMBERS

The following are suggestions for meeting facilitators and participants.

MEETING FACILITATOR

- ▶ Be open and encouraging.
- ▶ Serve as a catalyst by posing questions.
- ▶ Maintain harmony; remind participants of shared goals and appropriate meeting behaviors.
- ▶ Don't ramble.
- ▶ Don't control or dominate the discussion.
- ▶ Ask follow-up questions.
- ▶ If consensus can't be reached on an issue, discuss follow-up options.

MEETING PARTICIPANT

- ▶ Decide to make the meeting worthwhile.
- ▶ Exercise appropriate meeting behavior.

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- ▶ Stay on topic; don't ramble.
- ▶ Study the agenda and assemble your information to share. Don't wing it.
- ▶ Practice listening skills; avoid engaging in sidebar discussions.
- ▶ Suggest closure for items that aren't resolved within allotted time.

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

If a meeting becomes difficult, facilitators should use the following tips to maintain a productive meeting:

- ▶ Remember: everyone wants to be heard.
- ▶ Stay calm. Don't be defensive.
- ▶ Be aware of body language and tone of voice. Sandwich problematic issues with positive statements. Remember that disgruntled parents walk away upset because of poor communication.
- ▶ Do not take complaints personally.
- ▶ Stay focused.
- ▶ Adjourn the meeting if it becomes nonproductive, discuss issues with your administrator, and reconvene at a later date.
- ▶ Maintain and bring clear, relevant data to any meetings; this will assist you in meeting due process timelines and monitoring progress on goals and objectives. It's easier to defend the student's program when there is data to support the school district's position.

FACTORS THAT CAN SLOW DOWN A MEETING

During a meeting, avoiding problems can lead to a more productive and shorter meeting. Whether you're a facilitator or participant, avoid the following:

- ▶ Arriving and starting the meeting late.
- ▶ Interrupting other participants.
- ▶ Having sidebar conversations.
- ▶ Making sarcastic comments.
- ▶ Letting unanticipated issues distract you from the agenda. If this occurs, record these as issues to resolve later and return to the agenda.
- ▶ Dominating the conversation.

ENDING THE MEETING

When ending the meeting, bring proper closure to the decisions made so that every team member understands personal responsibilities regarding the student's educational program.

- ▶ Consider all the parent requests; however, make recommendations based on data and professional expertise.
- ▶ Summarize the services being offered and any changes that are being recommended.
- ▶ Encourage the parent to review the IEP on receiving it and call with any questions.
- ▶ Complete, explain, and provide the prior written notice to parents.
- ▶ Thank the parents and team members for coming in and taking the time to meet.

With minor adaptations, from Henrico County Public Schools, Exceptional Education and Support Services.
Facilitating an effective IEP meeting. Reprinted with permission.

TRANSITION PLANNING

Providing effective transition services is critical to helping students with disabilities prepare for adulthood and to help them gain the necessary education to pursue their postsecondary goals. Unfortunately, many students with disabilities drop out of high school; consequently, many are underemployed or unemployed and continue to live with their parents after high school. Students with disabilities also attend college at far lower rates than their nondisabled peers. To improve the opportunities that students with disabilities have to achieve success in adult life, transition services are designed to provide a coordinated set of activities based on the student's assessed needs, interests, aptitudes, and their postsecondary goals.

When Transition Plans Must Be Included

A transition plan is required to be in effect as part of the IEP when the student reaches sixteen years of age. This means that the IEP team should develop the transition plan while the student is age fifteen so it is in effect when the student turns sixteen. It is important to note that many students will benefit from even earlier transition planning, allowing more time for students to prepare for adulthood. Some states require that transition planning begin at age fourteen.

Requirements for Transition Plans

Transition plans address the following elements:

- ▶ The needs of the student, including strengths, skills, and interests, are used to make informed decisions about transition goals and activities.
 - Needs may be based on formal and informal assessments, interviews, and observations.
- ▶ Measurable postsecondary education goals in education, training and employment and independent living skills, if needed. For example:
 - After high school, Darla will enroll full-time in the hotel and restaurant program at Williard College.
 - After graduating from Williard College, Darla will work full-time managing a restaurant.
 - After high school, Raman will live in a group home and learn meal preparation, dressing, and personal care skills.
- ▶ A plan necessary to help students prepare to achieve postsecondary goals.
 - Academic preparation and training (e.g., specific courses or a course of study providing preparation in academics, career and technical education, vocational training, community college courses)
 - Employment (e.g., learning specific skills in employment settings such as part-time employment, supported job placement, internships, and shadowing to develop specific knowledge and skill such as résumé writing, interviewing, customer service, child care, technology)
 - Independent living (e.g., developing skills in using transportation, managing time and money, personal care skills)
 - Functional performance (e.g., self-advocacy, self-determination, goal setting, problem solving, social and interpersonal skills)

Some states include a specific transition planning form in the IEP. Forms include a place to identify a postsecondary vision and goals, disability-related needs, and an action plan needed to achieve the postsecondary goals (see the resources at the end of this chapter for examples).

Participants in Transition Planning

There are several important things to know about who needs to be invited to the IEP meeting if transition planning is part of the IEP.

► Student participation

In addition to the typical IEP committee, students of age must be invited to participate in their IEPs if it includes a transition plan. It is critical that students practice self-advocacy skills. Students need to know why they need it, what they need, and learn to ask for it as adults. If the student is unable or unwilling to attend, school personnel must take steps to ensure that the student's preferences and interests are considered (e.g., ask students about their preferences prior to the meeting).

► Representatives from participating agencies

Others who are responsible for providing (or paying) for transition services also must be invited to attend the IEP meeting. For example, the following individuals may be involved in transition services for certain students:

- Vocational rehabilitation counselor (required if paying for adult services)
- Assistive technology specialist
- Representative from the community if it relates to the plan
- Guidance counselor
- School nurse
- Social service agencies
- Juvenile officer
- Disability support services personnel from colleges or universities
- Advocates

Tips for Involving Students in Transition Planning

The transition planning process will be more meaningful if students and families receive guidance about transition planning prior to the meeting. Students and families need information about (1) the purposes of the transition meeting and (2) specific suggestions for preparing for the meeting.

Student-led IEP and transition meetings can help students meet critical self-determination goals, such as developing self-awareness, making decisions, setting goals, solving problems, and learning to self-advocate (see chapter 17 for a discussion of person-centered planning). Teachers can help prepare and coach students to eventually lead their own meetings. For example, students may become familiar with IEP forms and discuss their IEP individually with their teacher. As students become ready to lead, they may work with their teachers to prepare a PowerPoint presentation that includes material such as

Table 5.1 Interview Questions for Parents and Students¹²

Questions for Parents	Questions for Student
What are your hopes and dreams for your child?	What do you want to do when you become an adult?
In the next few years, what do you envision for your child in the domains of academics, social, independent living, vocational, community, and leisure?	In the next few years, what kinds of things do you want to learn and do? In school? At home? In the community?
What are your child's interests? What does he or she dislike?	What activities do you like to do? What activities do you not like to do?
What are some of your child's strengths? What are some of his or her weaknesses?	What are you really good at? What do you want to be good at?
What are your concerns for your child in the future?	Is there anything you are scared about in the future?

Adapted from Meaden, Sheldon, Appel, & DeGrazia (2010).

(1) how to open a meeting (e.g., welcome, introductions, purposes of meeting); (2) their strengths and needs overall and by course; (3) their interests and goals; (4) needed supports; and (5) questions that invite participation from others. Numerous resources about preparing students for leading their own meetings are provided at the end of the chapter.

Table 5.1 provides examples of the kinds of questions that families and students may wish to consider before the transition meeting so they are well prepared for what will be discussed.

IEP SUMMARY FORMS

IEPs are often long documents, sometimes ten pages or more. Exhibit 5.2 provides a summary form that teachers may use to keep key IEP information readily available. For example, summary documents can be used to share essential IEP information with general education teachers or paraprofessionals and as a reference for your own daily instructional planning. Be sure to check to see if the use of this form is consistent with your school guidelines for confidentiality.

TIPS FOR ORGANIZING THE IEP PROCESS

Set up an IEP file drawer or box with the following folders:

- ▶ Copies of blank letter forms inviting parents to the IEP meeting (most districts provide these) in multiple languages if needed
- ▶ Envelopes for letter to parents
- ▶ Blank IEP forms in multiple languages if needed
- ▶ Parent documentation sheet
- ▶ Copies of IEP meeting agenda
- ▶ An IEP folder for each student

Exhibit 5.2 IEP at a Glance (Elementary Level)

Name: _____ Grade and teacher(s): _____

Strengths: _____ Schedule: _____

Medical or health information: _____

Communication needs: _____

Crisis plan Yes No (If yes, attach)

IEP goals	Modifications or adaptations
Academic:	
Nonacademic:	
Behavioral, social, and personal:	
Other:	

Add names of all students to the calendar:

- ▶ Add the name of each student's IEP due date (e.g., Torrey Rex—IEP due).
- ▶ Three weeks before the IEP is due, record the date to begin (e.g., Torrey Rex—begin IEP planning).
- ▶ When new students are added, be sure to add their due dates as well.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FROM SPECIAL EDUCATORS

WHAT RESOURCES HAVE YOU FOUND TO BE BENEFICIAL WHEN DEVELOPING IEPs?

- ▶ District policies and procedures for writing IEPs
- ▶ District or state forms and examples of completed IEPs
- ▶ Forms available in Spanish and English (or other languages)
- ▶ Comprehensive student assessment data, including strengths and needs
- ▶ Skill hierarchies (commercial or teacher devised) for writing benchmark objectives
- ▶ Other teachers and mentors who have experience with the IEP process

WHAT APPROACH WOULD YOU SUGGEST FOR DEVELOPING IEPs?

- ▶ Actively involve the team to make it a meaningful document.
- ▶ Focus on collaborative IEP development rather than just going through the document.
- ▶ Emphasize individualization, noting student strengths and needs as well as skill levels.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR NEW TEACHERS?

- ▶ Realize that others may not know the rights of the students and parents or procedures governing IEPs for students with disabilities. It's your job to help educate others.
- ▶ Do not be afraid to advocate for students.
- ▶ Try to make the IEP something general education teachers, parents, and the student can understand clearly.

TO SUM UP

- ▶ IEPs are legal documents required for all students; teachers need to understand what goes in each component.
- ▶ The IEP team determines appropriate measurable goals based on the present levels of performance, state standards, and the student's interests, needs, and life goals.
- ▶ The IEP team must consider PRR in the design of special education services for students to help them increase their opportunities to meet their goals.
- ▶ The IEP meeting is important and all team members, including parents, need to be encouraged to have meaningful input into the planning for their child.
- ▶ Assistive technology is a required consideration in IEP planning; understanding how assistive technology can help is critical to decision making.
- ▶ Students can be active participants in the IEP meeting, and this is especially important for transition planning.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Now that you have the big picture and the details of writing IEPs, we will move on to ways to organize and manage your many responsibilities.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

IEP RESOURCES

- ▶ Examples of IEPs and transition plans: www.sagepub.com/gargiulo3estudy/pdf/Gargiulo_IEP.pdf and <http://sped.sbcs.k12.in.us/iStart%207/samples.html>
- ▶ *A student's guide to the IEP*: <http://nichcy.org/publications#lets>
- ▶ IRIS Center. *Star legacy module: Assistive technology: An overview*, <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/at/chalcycle.htm>
- ▶ Hammer, M. R. (2004). Using the self-advocacy strategy to increase student participation in IEP conferences. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 39, 295–300.
- ▶ Konrad, M., & Test, D. W. (2004). Teaching middle-school students with disabilities to use an IEP template. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 27, 101–124.
- ▶ North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Actual forms, in English and Spanish, including invitation letters, IEP forms, and examples and descriptions of how to write these forms: <http://ec.ncpublicschools.gov/policies/forms/statewide-forms>
- ▶ Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction: *A guide for writing IEPs*, <http://dpi.wi.gov/sped/pdf/iepguide.pdf>

TRANSITION SERVICES WEBSITES AND RESOURCES

- ▶ National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center: www.nsttac.org/content/about-nsttac
 - See the *Team Planning Tool for Improving Transition Education and Services*. www.nsttac.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdf/pdf/complete_taxonomy_planning_tool.pdf
- ▶ NICHCY. (2009, September). *Transition "starters" for everyone*. Retrieved from <http://nichcy.org/schoolage/transitionadult/starters>
- ▶ PACER Center. *Transition planning and employment*: www.pacer.org/tatra/resources/transitionemp.asp
- ▶ Beach Center on Disability: www.beachcenter.org
- ▶ NICHCY. (2009, November). *Students get involved*. Retrieved from <http://nichcy.org/schoolage/transitionadult/students>