

## Strategies to Obtain Special Education Services

*Planning and preparation* are on-going activities that contribute significantly to success in the ARD process. You cannot control what others do, but you can control what you do. Being prepared for problem-solving in the ARD meeting will help you to become a full-meaningful participant in the meeting, as well as to be respected by the other ARD team members.

### EVALUATIONS

Early in the ARD meeting, there should be a discussion about evaluations of the child. School personnel will discuss the most current evaluation reports for the student, as well as what other evaluations they believe may be needed. Parents can interject discussion about private evaluation reports and other evaluations they believe are necessary. According to special education law, the school must evaluate a student concerning all areas of suspected disability and comprehensive enough to identify all of the child's special education and related services needs. If the school refuses to do so, it must provide the parent with Prior Written Notice per the requirements of the law (see *Notice of Procedural Safeguards - NOPS*). If parents feel strongly that evaluations are required but the district refuses to perform them, parents may pursue one of the complaint process options outlined in the NOPS and may obtain their own private evaluations of the student. Data Gathering provides information to help drive decision-making for an educational plan; the PLAAFP must be based upon data from several relevant measures/tools and sources including the parents.

### PLAAFP

The ARD team will discuss and determine what the student's present levels of *academic achievement and functional performance* ("PLAAFP") are. In order to determine PLAAFP, the committee must consider several items, and the PLAAFP will be based upon results obtained from *data gathering* activities. According to special education law, it is not sufficient to determine PLAAFP solely based upon one tool or measure. Some tools useful in determining PLAAFP include:

- Classroom tests/benchmarks
- Probes/screening assessments
- Standardized tests
- Work Samples
- Parent observations/interview
- Teacher and other school personnel observations/interview
- Therapy provider input (evaluations, interviews...)
- Anecdotes from third-party observations (eg, Boy Scouts, etc)

School personnel will bring their own ideas to the table about the child's PLAAFP, including a statement about the student's strengths and areas of concern. It can be helpful for parents to compose their own PLAAFP for their child and bring it to the table for discussion at the ARD. While the school's PLAAFP will likely focus highly on grades and test scores, it is important to balance that perspective with work samples, parent and teacher observations, and other relevant data.

### ADDITIONAL WAYS TO "MAKE YOUR CASE"

- Make a list of the services, supports, accommodations, etc, you believe your child needs and why. Review this list and try to identify *positions v. interests*. When discussing your concerns with the ARD team, focus on the *interests* and be open-minded about how to serve them. Be sure to interject how these issues affect (or potentially can affect) the student in the school environment and his/her educational (both academic and functional) performance. Including behavior and social skills.

- Try to anticipate the school district’s interests and positions, and prepare a possible response. Try to have some alternatives for solving some of the issues that may arise concerning the district’s perspective.
- Bring research materials to the ARD about the diagnoses and best-practices for serving the needs of the student. Make copies of particularly useful articles, excerpts from practice manuals, etc., and give to each ARD team member. Highlight important points on these materials, and bring the highlighted items up in the discussion where appropriate.
- Bring an audio/visual example showing the student’s real-time behaviors, skills, etc, which exhibit the concerns you have about the student. Such things as an audio recording of the child talking about his/her struggles during the school day, a video of the difficulties of doing homework, etc, can help to demonstrate needs more clearly.
- Use other visual aids as appropriate – eg, plot the student’s standardized test scores (standard scores and percentiles) on a bell curve diagram or in a Powerpoint chart to show visually the weaknesses and strengths. And progress or lack of over several years.
- Have the student create his/her own presentation (Powerpoint, poster, or other means) answering such basic questions as “What do I want to do when I graduate from school?” “What are my struggles in school now?” “What do I enjoy at school?”...etc. The student should participate in the ARD when appropriate and show the presentation in order to help the committee understand his/her perspective.
- Bring in outside “experts” who have worked with your child – private therapists, doctors, agency personnel, etc, may have helpful information to share and can corroborate parent examples of problems that are exhibited by the student.
- Bring excerpts from relevant special education laws for topics that you anticipate problems with. Bring these up in the meeting if there appears to be a misunderstanding about what is required to be done. It can’t hurt to carry a copy of *From Emotions to Advocacy* or the *Wrightslaw Special Education Law* books to refer to in the meeting if necessary.

Remember that the parent will often need to take the role of ‘educator’ to the ARD team members in terms of the student’s disability diagnosis, best-practices for instruction, and about the student’s personality, strengths and weaknesses from the parent perspective. It is important that the parent be respectfully assertive in providing information and in participating in the ARD discussion in order to ensure that important information is heard and considered in creating the IEP.



The contents of this publication were developed under a grant from the US Department of Education, H328M150022 (PATH), H328M150023 (PEN), & H328M150024 (TEAM). However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.



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