

Parents' Role in the IEP Process

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) process can seem overwhelming and if you are new to the process, you may wonder what your role is and what you can offer. Remember, you may not be a special education expert, but **you are the expert on your child.**

Developing your child's IEP involves two main things:

- ARD meeting(s), where you, your child (when appropriate), and school staff members together decide on an educational program for your child; and
- The IEP document, which puts the decisions from that meeting in writing.

It can be intimidating and difficult to communicate your child's needs with the rest of the ARD committee. You will become more comfortable as you learn more about your rights and the special education services available to your child. You can't learn everything in a day; it will take time. Asking questions and learning as much as you can will help you become the best advocate for your child.

Parents are essential and equal members of their child's ARD committee

A parent's right to participate in their child's ARD meeting is protected by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the federal law governing special education. In listing the required members of the ARD committee, IDEA lists parents first.

Your thoughts and opinions on the eligibility, evaluation, services, goals, and placement of your child are important. There is no one as motivated to see your child succeed as you, and this alone places you in a crucial role as an active participant on the ARD committee.

IDEA requires that parents be informed and provided an opportunity to disagree before the school makes any changes to their child's placement. Parents can voice their disagreement through the dispute resolution process, during which your child has the right to remain in their current placement.

Your ongoing participation is important

Parents are the only adults on the ARD committee that stay constant throughout



Resources for Families

Need more information on IDEA, IEPs, or special education? Scan the QR code to access our online resources.



Partners Resource Network



Offices in Lubbock, Houston, Austin, El Paso, and Dallas/Fort Worth



1.800.866.4726



info@prntexas.org



prntexas.org



a child's school career. While parents may not be educators, they are experts on their child and know them better than anyone else. Parents have a deeper understanding of the ways their child's physical, social, developmental, and family history impact their learning.

- **Help the ARD committee get to know your child.** Your child's IEP will be developed based on their present level of academic achievement and functional performance (known as PLAAFP). To write the most effective IEP, the school needs to first know your child's current performance. While your child's teachers provide valuable information on your child's performance at school, your input about how your child functions at home provides additional information and context which may help the ARD committee properly identify your child's weaknesses, strengths and level of academic skills.
- **Write realistic and ambitious goals.** You and the rest of the ARD committee are required to write measurable annual goals for your child. Your input helps ensure goals are realistic and ambitious. Goals provide your child and their teachers something to work towards and help hold the school accountable for your child's academic progress.
- **Track your child's services and supports.** Your child should receive specific supports and services based on their unique needs. As the parent, you can make sure your child's IEP is written specifically to suit their needs rather than according to generic supports and services given to any students with a certain disability. Pay attention to whether your child is actually receiving the services and supports specified in their IEP. If you are concerned they are not receiving these services follow up with someone on the ARD committee such as their teachers, principal, or diagnostician. It may be most helpful to first approach the school in a collaborative spirit; however, there may be circumstances in which you will need to take a more formal action such as writing a letter of complaint.

Parents help your child learn to be their own advocate

As your child gets older, they should serve as an active member of their ARD committee. They will provide input on goals, needed services, and will participate in developing their transition plan. Your job will be to support your child as they become their own primary advocate.

- The first step in helping your child develop self-advocacy skills is learning to identify their thoughts and feelings. Being able to identify their feelings will open the door to being able to express what they need.
- Practice problem solving with your child at home. Encourage your child to solve the problem with as little intervention by you as possible. Allowing your child to work through their own problems in the safety of home helps prepare them for solving them out in the world. An issue your child would like addressed in their IEP provides a great opportunity to practice self-advocacy by role-playing how they can bring it up in their ARD meeting.
- Encourage your child to speak up. Your child should be able to say what they need without you asking. Give meaningful rewards and praise to your child when they bring an issue to you. When your child is rewarded for speaking up at home, they are more likely to speak up in other environments.



The contents of this publication were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, #H328M200041, #H328M200042, #H328M200043, #H328M200044. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.