



Tips for Involved Parents from Gwinnett County Public Schools

Tips for a productive IEP meeting with your child's special education team

Be There is a national movement that inspires parents to become more involved in their children's education. Teachable moments are everywhere. Be your child's favorite teacher. Connect in meaningful ways and your simple actions will reap immense rewards at home, play, and school!

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), public schoolchildren who receive special education and related services must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). An IEP is designed based on each individual child's needs, strengths, preferences, and interests. Along with teachers, administrators, support staff, and your student, you are an important member of the IEP development team. Following are some tips to ensure that your IEP meetings are productive and your work together as a team supports your students with special needs.

BEFORE THE IEP MEETING

- **Know your child** and his or her strengths, weaknesses, and needs. Ask teachers to help you understand how your child performs at school. Learn all you can about your child's disability and how it may affect your child in school.
- **Know your educational rights** and legal procedures to ensure those rights.
- **Be familiar with your child's school.** Get to know teachers, therapists, support staff, and other personnel. Build positive relationships and volunteer at school. This allows you to understand the school culture and get information first-hand.
- **Gather materials that may be helpful** for a productive meeting, including evaluations, report cards, etc.



- **Know the purpose and requirements of the meeting.** An IEP meeting is designed to give you timely notification of your child and his or her progress and any concerns in the classroom. Know which school personnel are required to attend.
- **Review your child's current IEP** or a draft copy if this is your first IEP meeting. Make notes of questions and points you want to make.
- **Don't wait for a formal IEP meeting** to express concerns and share ideas with your child's teacher and therapists. It's important to maintain the home-school connection and work in partnership with the school to support your child.
- **If you need an interpreter, inform the school** as soon as possible.
- **If you plan to record the meeting, inform the school** in advance of the meeting. In that case, it is likely that the district also will record the meeting.

Continued

Tips for a productive IEP meeting *(Continued)*



DURING THE IEP MEETING

- **Be on time and be prepared.** The meeting will be most productive if everyone comes ready to work together on supporting your child.
- **Know that you are an equal partner** in the process.
- **Take in what the professionals have to say, but add your perspective as well.** While they have educational expertise, you know your child best. Together, you make up the team to support your child and his or her learning.
- **Share information about your child** that may be helpful in planning, including strengths, weaknesses, likes and dislikes, interests, etc.
- **Be prepared for district staff to refer to assessment data and their observations** in order to support their opinions about what is appropriate for your student. This is important information to help gauge your child's progress and set future goals.
- **It's important to "see the big picture"** to assist in educational planning. During the IEP meeting, you will hear different professional points-of-view that will help you better understand your child's classroom behavior and academic progress.
- **Keep focused on what you want answered or provided for your child, not how to get there.** That's the job of the professionals. For example, you may want your child to make more growth in reading. However, don't get hung up on a specific method of teaching you heard about from a friend. The special education team will look for the best way to achieve desired results, though special education and related services should be based on peer-reviewed research (to the extent possible).

- **Ask questions and seek clarification.** Ask for explanations of acronyms or special vocabulary used that you don't understand.
- **If you're unable to make a final decision about the IEP during the meeting, you may ask to take it home and review it before signing.** However, you should sign the portion that shows you attended the meeting.

AFTER THE IEP MEETING

You've completed writing your child's IEP. What should you do now?

- **Stay in contact** with your child's teacher.
- **Volunteer at school.** You will become familiar with the school climate and you'll get to know the staff members who interact with your child each day.
- **Monitor your child's progress.**
- **Keep up with dates** of important meetings and conferences.
- **Attend parent-teacher conferences.**
- **Request a meeting** to discuss your questions and concerns, if needed. Another IEP meeting can be called during any time of the year to discuss changes that need to be made.
- **Keep your child's school records in order.**
- **Keep in mind that developing an IEP is a learning process.** With time, it gets easier. Maintain your sense of humor and try to stay relaxed.
- **Know that school staff members want the best for your child, just as you do.** When parents and the school work together, the process works well and children benefit from their combined efforts.



Together, we will be there for our students—
Gwinnett County Public Schools and YOU!

Make the ordinary extraordinary!

437 Old Peachtree Road, NW, Suwanee, GA 30024-2978 • 678-301-6000 • www.gwinnett.k12.ga.us

*Some information was adapted from
the National Dissemination Center
for Children with Disabilities
(also known as NICHCY)
and www.greatschools.org by
GCPS Special Education
Parent Mentors Jackie McNair
and Dawn Albanese*