



Special Education: Individual Education Program (IEP)

Overview:

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a document that defines a free, appropriate public education for students with disabilities.

To determine if a student is in need of an IEP, the students' school district should conduct a [multidisciplinary evaluation](#). This evaluation can be initiated by the parent or the school district.

If the evaluation is [initiated by the parent](#), the district has 60 days to complete it and produce an [evaluation report](#) (ER) stating whether or not the student qualifies for special education services.

Evaluations are often conducted when:

- a general education student or an already identified student with disabilities is struggling with the curriculum and/or not making academic progress for reasons that aren't readily apparent
- a special education student, identified in another state, moves to Pennsylvania
- a student with a disability is transitioning from Early Intervention to school-age services.

The evaluation report will provide the results of any [assessments](#) and provide recommendations and information that will promote the academic progress of the student.

If the student is determined to be eligible for special education services, an IEP team meeting will be convened. The [IEP team](#) must include a parent, the student (if 14 years of age or older) a special education teacher, a general education teacher, a Local Education Agency (LEA) representative (usually the principal or a member of the school administration), and the person who conducted the evaluation or another individual who is qualified to discuss the results, such as the school psychologist.

The team reviews the evaluation report and designs the [individual education program](#) to meet the needs of the student. After the initial IEP meeting, the presence of the evaluator or psychologist is not mandated.

As a parent, you may bring anyone to the meeting who has “knowledge or special expertise regarding the child.” You may also bring an advocate or other support person. As a courtesy, let the IEP team know in advance if you are bringing someone with you to the meeting.

Under Pennsylvania and federal law, a child with a disability has a right to special education and related services that are provided:

- under public supervision and direction
- without charge to students ages three to 21
- in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). This means that children with disabilities are educated to the maximum extent appropriate with children who do not have disabilities, in the general education class and in their neighborhood school

Together, these items make up what is referred to as a Free and Appropriate Public Education, or FAPE.

FAPE also includes related services that help your child get to school and benefit from the special education program, such as:

- transportation
- speech, physical, or occupational therapy
- mental health services

The IEP should also address [Extended School Year](#) (ESY). ESY services are special education and related services provided to students with disabilities beyond the regular 180-day school year. Interruptions in the school schedule, such as summer break, and the related absence of therapies and other supports sometimes results in children with disabilities losing basic skills.

ESY can be provided during these breaks to prevent this loss. The IEP team should discuss whether or not the student needs ESY services at the annual IEP meeting. If it is agreed that ESY is necessary, the school team will recommend a placement.

Once you have an individual education program in place for your child, the IEP team must meet every year to review the program. Students must be reevaluated at least every three years; every two years for students with intellectual disabilities. However, if you have concerns about your child’s progress, question whether the IEP is providing the right support, or notice that there are parts of the IEP that aren’t being followed, you may request an IEP team meeting at any time to discuss your concerns.

If you have questions about the education of a school-aged child with a disability, you may wish to call the Pennsylvania Office for Dispute Resolution’s ConsultLine, a toll-free information helpline.

ConsultLine specialists answer questions and provide information about special education, gifted education, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. You can reach the ConsultLine at 800.879.2301.

[Additional Resources](#)

[Education Law Center](#)

[Office for Dispute Resolution](#)

[PA Bureau of Special Education](#)

[PEAL Center](#)

[Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network](#) (Pattan)

[U.S. Department of Education](#)

[Wrightslaw](#)

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