



Sage  Alliance  
Schools

# IEP MEETING GUIDE



# RESOURCES FOR NAVIGATING YOUR CHILD'S OR YOUNG ADULT'S INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLAN IN NEW JERSEY

Embarking on the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process may seem daunting, but with this guide, you can find support and tangible takeaways to navigate the journey with your family.

## **Terms You'll Hear:**

The education field often has a lot of jargon that can make things confusing. Getting familiar with some terms you'll likely hear will help you better understand the process and who is involved.

## **Child Study Team (CST):**

The Child Study Team works with each student to determine special education needs and provide recommendations on appropriate services and therapies. The team consists of a school psychologist, learning disabilities teacher, school social worker, and related specialists deemed necessary like a speech therapist.

## **Department of Education (DOE):**

The New Jersey Department of Education supports schools, educators, and districts in the delivery of education in the state.

## **Extended School Year (ESY):**

Extended school year (ESY) services are special education and related services that are provided to a student with a disability beyond the regular school year and following the student's IEP.

## **Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE):**

FAPE requires students with disabilities to receive education and related services that support their individual needs.

## **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):**

IDEA is the federal special education law that ensures students with disabilities receive appropriate education and services tailored to their specific needs.



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## **Individualized Education Plan (IEP):**

The IEP document is a legal plan that guides the educational, instructional programming and necessary supports, therapies, and services to ensure a student's needs are met in the least restrictive environment.

## **IEP Team:**

The IEP team meets annually or as often as needed to develop and measure progress against the IEP. The team consists of the case manager, parent/guardian, regular education teacher, special education teacher, school district administrator, members of the Child Study Team

## **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):**

As mandated by IDEA, students must be served in the least restrictive environment, with the goal of students being in general education classrooms alongside their peers as appropriate. In some cases, a different in district classroom or out of district placement may be the most appropriate setting for the student.

## **Office of Special Education (OSE):**

The Office of Special Education provides oversight of special education services in the state.

## **Out of District Placement:**

In some cases, an out of district placement is recommended to provide students with continued academic programming, with therapeutic support provided during the school day. Once the student is prepared, they will work with the district to successfully transition back to the public school.



# TIP #1

## GET ORGANIZED

Special education comes with a lot of paperwork and finding a way to organize all the information can be a lifesaver. Whether you're using hard copy or digital materials, consider using this framework to keep you organized.

- Current and past IEPs: Next year, when you get a new IEP, you will want to be able to compare the two documents to see what has been accomplished and what still needs work.
- Letters or communications: Saving copies of your communications with your public school, district, doctors, or other entities can be helpful so that you can have a record you refer back to.
- Testing results and recommendations: Keep all your documents explaining your child's needs in one place. Your child may be working with different professionals, like doctors and therapists, as well as in the school with their teachers and support staff. When the next IEP meeting comes up, you'll want to bring information and updates to help inform your CST.
- Brochures: There are lots of community resources you may encounter or hear about. Grab a brochure and keep them in your binder to refer back should your child ever qualify for such services.
- A list of phone numbers and email addresses. You'll want contact information for your child's:
  - Teachers
  - School leadership team
  - District special education director/person who oversees special education for the school
  - Medical providers
  - Any other groups you become a part of who help with your child's trajectory

When you have all your materials in one place, you will be more able to connect the dots, spot inconsistencies, and provide full and accurate information about your child's progress. As you go, and as they grow, you may need to organize all your information in a different way. Give yourself the time to organize all your materials so that you're less stressed when it really counts.



# TIP #2

## PREPARE FOR AN IEP MEETING

Special Let's be honest, the idea of sitting around with a group of professionals and a dense stack of documents placed in front of you, outlining your child's academic abilities and behaviors, is rather intimidating. If you're stressed, remember, you do not need to fret about an IEP or CST meeting. These meetings are tailored to be a conversation about your child's strengths and needs, while providing the opportunity for you to ask any questions you may have regarding their educational programming.

Here are answers to questions you might have.

### **What happens in the first IEP meeting?**

After evaluations are completed by the Child Study Team and a student is deemed eligible for special or alternative education services, an IEP meeting will take place to discuss results of evaluations and determine the best set of programming and therapeutic services to meet the needs of the child or young adult.

### **What is an annual IEP meeting?**

The IEP meeting occurs annually to measure progress against a student's IEP goals and determine what adjustments need to be made or goals need to be added for the next year.

### **Can I request an IEP meeting?**

Yes. While they typically will occur on an annual basis, you can request an IEP meeting at any time.

### **What should I wear?**

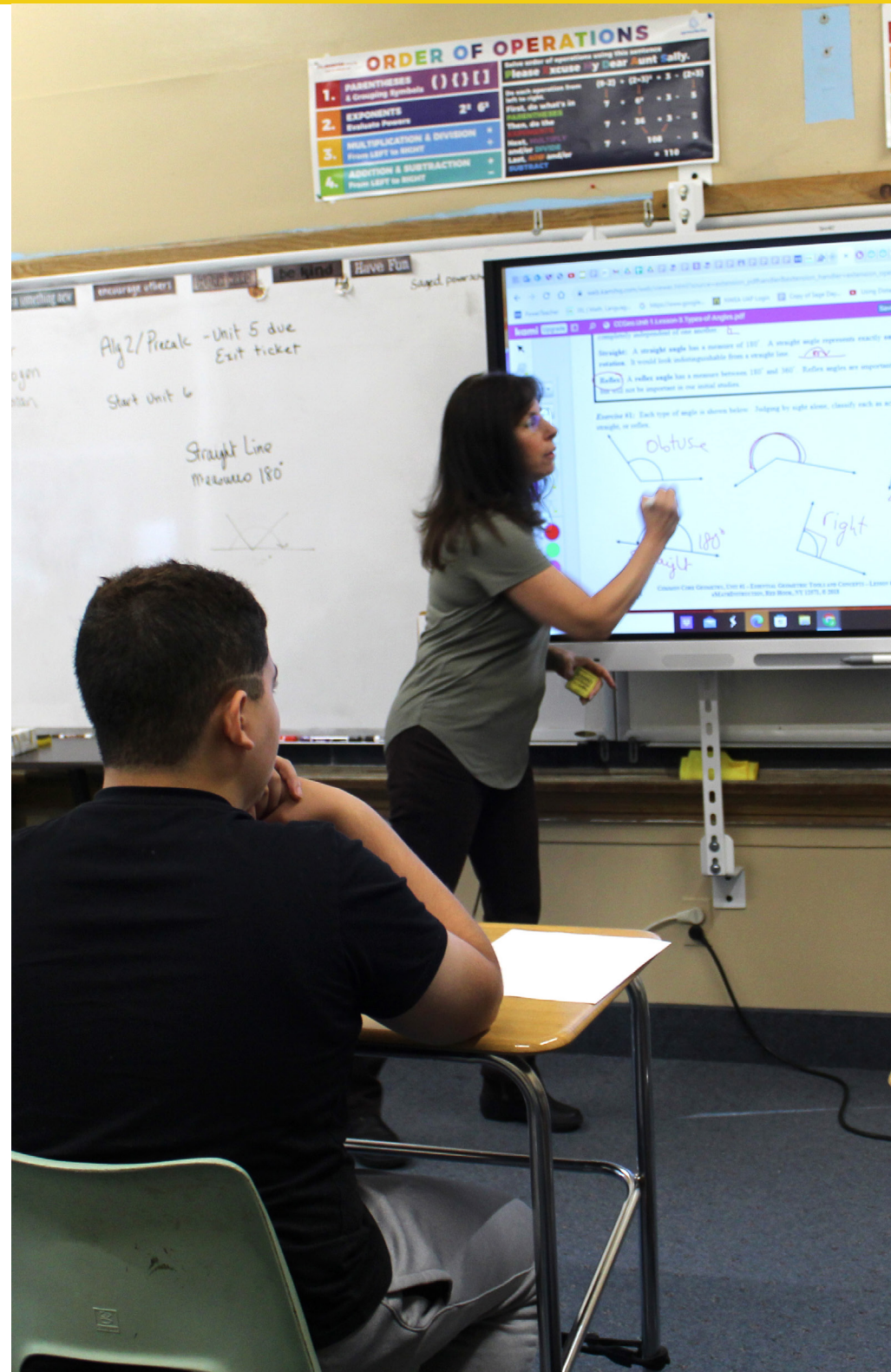
Whatever makes you comfortable! The CST team will typically come in their normal school attire.

### **How do I get ready?**

Review the IEP draft prior to the meeting so you can highlight or jot down any questions you would like to ask during the meeting. Sometimes it is easier to gather your thoughts in advance. The document in front of you is a working document, meaning changes can be made. Therefore, it is important for you to point out any errors or request anything you'd like worded differently. As a guardian, your voice and input are important to your child's education.

### **Who comes to these meetings?**

The IEP meeting includes members of the Child Study Team, your child's teacher, school district administrators, and related specialists deemed necessary like a speech



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## PREPARE FOR AN IEP MEETING

therapist. You can also invite any advocates to join you. No matter how many or few people are on your child's team, the goal remains the same: to work together to provide the best quality of programming and services for your child and to meet their individual needs. If you need an interpreter, you can request one before the meeting that will be paid for by the state.

### **Who leads the meeting?**

The Case Manager for the IEP document and will lead the IEP meeting. They will walk you through all of the documents presented to you and explain in layman's terms what you are signing and agreeing to. The other IEP team members are there to provide more information, weigh in on the plan, and answer questions.

### **What will we talk about?**

The team will work through the document discussing your student's present levels of academics and behavior, as well as their progress in any related services they may receive. The team will also discuss the individualized goals they have developed for your child to work on throughout the duration of the IEP year. The school personnel will share the modifications provided to your child, necessary for their success in the educational placement. These are the important pieces that help your child be successful in the school environment.

Some of these modifications include preferential seating, extended time on assignments, the ability to retake tests, and small group settings, among others. These modifications will also be discussed when talking about standardized testing, state assessments, and Extended School Year (ESY). If your child is 14 years or older, the team will discuss Transition Services that will provide your child with support in getting a job, independent living, and post-secondary education goals.

### **Can I ask questions?**

YES! Throughout the meeting, the presenter will frequently ask if anyone has any questions or concerns. Do not feel intimidated to ask for further explanation or share your thoughts or feelings – that is why the team is gathered together.

IEP meetings are designed to be a way for your child's caregivers to converse and explore options for your child's educational experience. The CST works collaboratively to design the best individualized education program for your child.



# TIP #3

## GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE IEP MEETING

As you read above, the IEP meeting is a group of professionals who care about your child's success like you do. Below are some tips to help you make the most out of the IEP meeting.

**Take Notes:** You will cover a lot of information during an IEP meeting, so take notes. This way, after the person (therapist, teacher, etc.) discussing your child's plan is finished speaking, you can circle back and ask questions for clarification. Additionally, you'll have reference for any future meetings. You can audio record the meeting but must make the request to record ahead of the meeting.

**Ask Questions:** There will likely be tests administered to assess your child's progress over the past year. Some of the tests, assessments, and results can be confusing when brought up at an IEP meeting. Don't be afraid to ask questions. You'll want to fully understand your child's progress and what next steps the team wants to take, and why.

**Ask what can be done at home:** If you notice your child is having problems at home with items discussed at the IEP meeting (example: writing), find out if there are ways to carry over skills taught in class to home. Reinforcing learning at home can help to solidify skills and possibly prevent any regression in your child's progress. Ask yourself what you are seeing at home. If some of those behaviors are less desirable, find out if the professionals have any ideas to help mitigate them. What is taught in the classroom extends into the home and vice versa.

**Don't rush through the meeting:** Teachers and professionals like to know that you are participating. Also, you don't want to miss any information, as all of it is likely vital. Your child's progress and the plan for future progressions are important parts of your child's success, both academically and behaviorally. Taking your time allows you to truly understand what is going on in your child's life.

These tips should help prepare you for your child's next IEP meeting and should make sure you get the most out of these meetings. Once you go through the first few meetings, you might even come up with some helpful pointers of your own. Just remember, the point of these meetings is to set your child up for success, and there is nothing to worry about!







# RESOURCES

There are many resources available to help you navigate the IEP process, and your child's educational journey.

## Tools:

- Explore [Steps to getting an IEP in New Jersey](#)
- Curious what an IEP looks like? Check out the [New Jersey IEP Template](#)
- Understand [your legal rights](#)

## Organizations:

- [Youth Resource Spot](#) is a NJ Department of Education website developed by youth council members for their peers
- [New Jersey Department of Education's Office of Special Education](#) provides information for families, educators, and districts
- [LSNJLAW](#) is a non-profit that provides free civil legal assistance to low income people in New Jersey
- [U.S. Department of Education](#) has extensive online resources explaining your rights and responsibilities in securing additional support for your student through an IEP

