

The Individualized Education Plan

Featured in the CdLS Foundation's free Education Handbook

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Each public school child (age three to 22) who receives special education must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) as required by IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Act). This is a document written specifically for an individual child. The IEP creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel, and students (when appropriate) to work together to improve educational results for children with disabilities. The IEP team comes together to look closely at the student's unique needs. The IEP guides the delivery of special education supports and services for the student with a disability.

The IDEA requires that certain information must be included in each child's IEP, however, states and school systems often include additional information to document that they have met certain aspects of federal or state law. IEPs may look different from state to state, or even school system to school system because school systems design their own IEP forms; however, they must include the same information regarding a plan for the child's education.

The IEP Process

The formation of an individualized program involves six steps, beginning with pre-referral and ending with evaluation of the child's program. These steps are:

1. Pre-referral
2. Referral
3. Identification and Eligibility
4. Development of the IEP
5. Implementation of the IEP
6. Reviews and reevaluation

Many children with CdLS who were diagnosed at birth or before age three may have been receiving services necessary to facilitate their development through an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP). When these children turn three, an IEP is developed for their education in the school system. These children bypass the referral, identification and eligibility steps and proceed directly to development of an IEP. Children with CdLS who are diagnosed after age three need to participate in the traditional referral steps of the IEP process.

Pre-referral

Prior to developing an IEP, the school will implement various interventions depending on the kind of problem a child is exhibiting. The student's difficulties and challenges would be documented. Effectiveness of classroom accommodations and modifications would be tested and the student's progress monitored. Students whose learning remains challenged are referred to special education through the next step: Referral.

Referral

Parents or school professional(s) may request an evaluation to determine if a child has a disability. Parents must consent to an evaluation. This evaluation must be completed within a reasonable time after consent is provided.

Identification and Eligibility

A group of qualified professionals and the parents look at the child's evaluation results. Together they decide if the child has a disability as defined by IDEA. For many children with CdLS this is evident, however, for some children with a mild form of CdLS, the disability might not be as evident. If parents disagree with the evaluation, they have the right to take their child for an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) and ask the school to pay for it.

Development of an IEP

The school system schedules and conducts the IEP meeting. School staff must:

- contact the participants, including the parents;
- notify parents early enough to make sure they have an opportunity to attend;
- schedule the meeting at a time and place agreeable to parents and the school;
- tell the parents the purpose, time and location of the meeting;
- tell the parents who are attending; and,
- tell the parents that they may invite people to the meeting who have knowledge or special expertise about the child.

The IEP team gathers to talk about the child's needs and write the IEP. Parents and the student (when appropriate) are part of the team. If a different group decides the child's placement, the parents must be part of that group as well.

Before the school system provides special education and related services to the child for the first time, the parents must give consent. The child begins to receive services as soon as possible after the meeting.

If the parents do not agree with the IEP and placement, they may discuss their concerns with other members of the IEP team and try to work out an agreement. If they still disagree, parents can ask for mediation, or the school may offer mediation. Parents may

file a complaint with the state education agency and may request a due process hearing, at which time mediation must be available.

Implementation of the IEP

The school makes sure that the child's IEP is being carried out as written. Parents are given a copy of the IEP. Each of the child's teachers and service providers has access to the IEP and knows his/her specific responsibilities for carrying it out. This includes the accommodations, modifications, and supports that must be provided to the child.

The child's progress toward the annual goals is measured, as stated in the IEP. Parents are regularly informed of their child's progress and whether it is enough for the child to achieve the goals by the end of the year. These progress reports must be given to parents at least as often as parents are informed of their typical children's progress.

Reviews and reevaluation

The child's IEP is reviewed by the IEP team annually, or more often if the parents or school asks for a review. If necessary, the IEP is revised. Parents, as team members, must be invited to attend these meetings. Parents can make suggestions for changes, can agree or disagree with the IEP goals, and agree or disagree with the placement.

If parents do not agree with the IEP and placement, they may discuss their concerns with other members of the IEP team and try to work out an agreement. There are several options, including additional testing, an independent evaluation, or asking for mediation (if available) or a due process hearing. They may also file a complaint with the state education agency.

The child must be reevaluated at least every three years. This evaluation is often called a "triennial." Its purpose is to find out if the child continues to be a "child with a disability," as defined by IDEA, and the child's educational needs. However, the child must be reevaluated more often if conditions warrant or if the child's parent or teacher asks for a new evaluation.

Contents of the IEP

The IEP is a very important document for children with disabilities and for their educators. Done correctly, the IEP should improve teaching, learning and results. The following are the contents of the IEP.

- Current performance – The IEP must state how the child is currently doing in school (known as present levels of educational performance).
- Annual goals – These are goals that the child can reasonably accomplish in a year. The goals are broken down into short-term objectives or benchmarks. Goals may be academic, address social or behavioral needs, relate to physical needs, or

- address other educational needs. The goals must be measurable – meaning that it must be possible to measure whether the student has achieved the goals.
- Special education and related services–The IEP must list the special education and related services to be provided to the child or on behalf of the child. This includes supplementary aids and services that the child needs. It also includes modifications (changes) to the program or supports for school personnel, such as training or professional development, that will be provided to assist the child.
 - Participation with non-disabled children – The IEP must explain the extent (if any) to which the child will participate with non-disabled children in the regular classroom and school activities.
 - Participation in state and district-wide tests – Most states and districts give achievement tests to children in certain grades. The IEP must state what modifications in the administration of these tests the child will need. If a test is not appropriate for the child, the IEP must state why the test is not appropriate and how the child will be tested instead.
 - Dates and places – The IEP must state when services will begin, how often they will be provided, where they will be provided, and how long they will last.
 - Transition service needs – Beginning when the child is age 14 (or younger, if appropriate), the IEP must address (within the applicable parts of the IEP) the courses he or she needs to take to reach his or her post-school goals.
 - Needed transition services – Beginning when the child is age 16 (or younger, if appropriate), the IEP must state what transition services are needed to help the child prepare for leaving school.
 - Measuring progress – The IEP must state how the child’s progress will be measured and how parents will be informed of that progress.

To read the full article, or for more information about the IEP, including IEP team information, visit <http://www.cdlsusa.org/request-information.htm> and request a copy of the CdLS Foundation’s Education Handbook, or call the CdLS Foundation at 800.753.2357.

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