



The National Autism  
Resource & Information Center

A national initiative of The Arc



# Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

**Public school students that have special needs, including people with autism and other developmental disabilities, may qualify for support services provided through Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). IEPs are required under federal law in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).**

## *IEP Support Services*

An IEP is the legal agreement between parents, the student, and a school about the student's educational program; goals; and support services. IEPs are designed to build on students' current strengths and address students' challenges. Therapeutic, counseling, and specialist services included in IEPs help students develop academic and functional skills. While IEPs attempt to provide these services in classrooms as benefits to the typical program, IEPs may designate another learning environment if it better suits students' needs.

## *IEP Development*

IEP development can be complex, involving several people and steps. Generally, this process includes:

1. **Referral** – A parent or someone working with a student has concerns about his or her difficulty learning and notifies a teacher or school principal.
2. **Information Gathering** – Parents, teachers, and the student discuss the student's current progress and challenges. Student-specific strategies may be developed to address challenges, or the student may be tested to see if they have a disability that affects learning.
3. **Determining Eligibility** – If the student has special needs or a disability that affects learning and his or her parents agree to see if the student is eligible for an IEP, professionals (i.e. psychologists; therapists; educators; and specialists) will meet to observe and test the student. They will compile their findings about the student's progress and challenges and about potential support services for the student. Then, the student's parents may review these findings.
4. **Initial IEP Meeting** – Parents, the student (if parents deem appropriate), educators, and professionals meet to create an IEP. A parent may also invite a friend, attorney, advocate, or anyone who knows the child whose input may be helpful. This team discusses the student's needs and develops short-term and annual goals. They also determine the amount and frequency of support services for the student.
5. **IEP Meetings** – The IEP team meets to update the student's IEP based upon progress or new challenges.



## Changing/Disputing IEPs

IEPs can be changed or disagreed with **at any time**. Parents or teachers can ask for an IEP meeting to discuss their concerns and make changes to help the student. Parents also may request an independent evaluation of their student by a professional who was not involved in the IEP planning process. The school may agree and pay for the evaluation or not. If not, parents may pay for the evaluation themselves or ask for a due process hearing. Due process hearings typically occur as a last resort. If you are considering that option, you may want to contact your state protection and advocacy organization ([www.ndrn.org](http://www.ndrn.org)) for more information.

## Private Schools

All schools have to identify students who have difficulty learning and determine whether they require support services. However, private schools that receive no federal government funding are not required to develop IEPs for their students. Even so, the public school needs to offer support services to students in private schools and, if a public school places a student with an IEP in private school as part of the student's IEP, the public school is responsible for paying for schooling and ensuring that the IEP is implemented.

## Resources:

### Wrightslaw.com

[www.wrightslaw.com/info/iep.index.htm](http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/iep.index.htm)

### National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities

<http://nichcy.org/laws>

### U.S. Department of Education – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004

<http://idea.ed.gov/explore/home>

### Your state department of education

<http://www.yellowpagesforkids.com/help/seas.htm>

### Your state protection and advocacy program

[www.ndrn.org](http://www.ndrn.org)

### Your state parent training and information center

<http://www.parentcenternetwork.org/parentcenterlisting.html>

## About The National Autism Resource & Information Center

**The National Autism Resource and Information Center** is a dynamic and interactive central point of quality resources and information for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and other developmental disabilities, and their families.

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