

10 TIPS TO PREPARE FOR YOUR CHILD'S IEP MEETING

*BY ARLENE BELL, ATTORNEY AT LAW**

1. KNOW WHAT YOUR CHILD NEEDS

Read and attend parent workshops to become knowledgeable about your child's disability. Read your child's past and current IEP's and evaluations to learn as much as possible about how your child learns and is functioning. Request that your child's school district provide you with recent reports prior to the IEP meeting so that there will not be any surprises. Similarly, provide any private evaluations to the school district if you want the IEP team to consider those reports in making educational decisions regarding your child. Be sure that you understand the results of all the reports and that the recommendations are relevant to a school environment.

2. CONSULT WITH YOUR PRIVATE RESOURCES

Consult with professionals regarding your child's level of functioning, progress and recommendations. In some cases it may be helpful to request your private therapist or evaluator to attend the IEP meeting with you.

3. BECOME INFORMED ABOUT RESOURCES AND SERVICES THAT CAN BE PROVIDED BY YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL DISTRICT

Learn what accommodations, programs and services are available through the school district that will meet your child's needs. This information will assist you in knowing what to request. Be prepared to articulate and document what professionals are needed for your child and what benefit your child will receive from these services.

4. COMPILE AN IEP BINDER.

Organize documents pertaining to your child in a binder. Put a photograph of your child on the front cover so that those people at a meeting, who have not met your child, will have a visual picture of him/her. Keep all your documents in chronological order. The documents should be kept in separate sections for IEP's, assessments by the school district, private assessments, notes and reports from your child's teachers and other staff, work samples and letters to and from your child's school district. Highlight or tab important positive and negative statements.

5. BE INFORMED ABOUT GRADE LEVEL STANDARDS

If your child is capable of meeting grade level standards, know what your child is expected to achieve. In California, grade level standards for academic subjects are available on the website of the California Department of Education: www.cde.ca.gov.

6. CREATE YOUR IDEAL IEP

Obtain and review a copy of the blank IEP form used by your child's school district so that you will be prepared for the discussions at the meeting. Devise goals and objectives for your child prior to the IEP meeting and do not just react to what the school district recommends. Remember that goals and objectives must be specific, measurable, incorporate action words, are relevant and evaluated at regular time intervals.

7. PROVIDE NOTICE TO THE SCHOOL DISTRICT IF YOU PLAN TO TAPE RECORD

Generally, state law determines whether a parent may tape record an IEP meeting. In California, parents must provide notice to the school district at least 24 hours prior to an IEP meeting if they intend to tape record the meeting. It is best practice to give notice in writing.

8. PREPARE YOUR CHILD

If your child will be attending all or part of the IEP meeting, inform him of the purpose of the meeting, of the necessity for his attendance and the people who will be in attendance. If a transition plan is to be developed, your child should be prepared to discuss his/her plans for future living arrangements and career goals.

9. CONSIDER BEHAVIORAL ISSUES

If your child is experiencing behavior problems in school, consider requesting a functional behavioral analysis and/or a behavior management plan from the school district. Your knowledge about your child will provide valuable information as to what will constitute positive reinforcement for desirable behavior.

10. WORK COLLABORATIVELY WITH YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL DISTRICT

Remember that you will have long-term relationships with the school staff. Get to know the individuals working with your child and make every attempt to personally contact them and maintain positive relationships. Be sure to thank the staff for their support and efforts in working with your child. Bringing a supportive and objective person with you to the IEP meeting, i.e. your spouse, relative or friend, may be advisable in some situations.

Seek advice from an advocacy organization or seek legal advice if you have a problem that you cannot resolve. The information provided in this article is for educational purposes only and is not intended as legal advice.

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