




IEP Welcome Kit

Includes information and resources tailored to meet the needs of new families navigating special education.

Welcome to the Table - Where Every Voice Counts

"Stronger Together: We're Excited to Work with You!"

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Eligibility Comes First

Before your child with a disability receives an Individualized Education Program (IEP), they have to be evaluated to see if they qualify for special education and related services. This is called the eligibility process. By law, the school has **65 business days** (about 3 months, not including weekends or holidays) to complete this process. The timeline can only be extended if you agree, and the school needs more time to gather important information.

Once the evaluations are done, the IEP team, which includes you, will meet to go over the results. During the meeting, the team will decide:

- Does your child have a disability a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)?
- Does that disability make it harder for your child to learn or benefit from the school program without extra support?
- Does your child need specially designed instruction because of their disability?

The answers to all of these questions has to be “yes” in order for your child to be determined eligible. The eligibility is a very important meeting, and your voice matters. You’ll be able to ask questions, share what you’ve observed at home, and help the team make the best decision for your child.

As soon as you receive the Meeting Notice:

- Confirm if you can attend the meeting. If you are not available, ask for a different date or time. If you prefer to meet virtually, let the team know as soon as possible.
- If English is not your primary language or communication method, please let us know if you need an interpreter or other communication support.

Preparing for the meeting?

- For families preparing for meetings, email the school to ask when you’ll receive the evaluation reports or IEP. Written communication creates a clearer record than a phone call.
- Take time to read all the reports. Highlight or take notes on anything that stands out. Some reports may be easy to understand, while others may use terms or scores that are confusing.
- If you have any reports from private evaluators, review those too. See if their findings and recommendations are the same or different from the school’s.
- Write down any questions you have, especially about things you don’t understand—like testing terms, numbers, or scores. Bring those questions to the meeting.

Testing terms you may see in your child's reports

Age equivalent scores (AE) - This is your child's performance compared to age groups whose average scores are in the same range. So, if your 12-year-old child achieves a score for reading that is average for a 10-year-old, the AE score would be 10.

Grade equivalent scores (GE) - This compares your child's performance on grade-level material against the average performance of students at other grade levels on the same material. So, if your 15-year-old receives a GE 4 in math, they are performing at the 4th-grade level.

Standard scores (SS) - This is a score that is transformed to fill a normal curve with a mean (average) and standard deviation that are the same across ages. So, if 100 is the standard score with a standard deviation of 15, a score within 85 and 115 would be within normal limits.

Raw Score - A raw score is based on the number of items answered correctly on a test. So, if there are 20 questions and 15 were answered correctly, 15 is the raw score.

Standard deviation (SD) - This measures how spread-out numbers are. By looking at the average (mean) and the variance from the mean, it provides a standard way of knowing what is "normal" and what is outside the range. So, for example, if the average IQ is 100 and the standard deviation is 24. A 76 would be low normal and 124 would be high normal. Below 76 would be below average and over 124 would be above average.

Percentile Rank - These are usually a number between 1 and 99 with 50 being average. So, if your child has a percentile rank of 90, they are performing better than 90% of students in their norm group (the students for whom the test is intended).

What if I get emotional during the meeting?

It's completely normal to feel emotional at a meeting about your child, especially when the focus is on test scores or what your child struggles with, rather than their strengths.

- You might also feel overwhelmed or unsure when surrounded by professionals, but remember: you are the expert on your child. Ask questions, share your thoughts, and make sure your voice is heard.
- You can also bring someone with you — like a friend, family member, or advocate — to help take notes or offer support.
- If you need a break during the meeting, it's okay to ask for one.

Preparing For Your Child's IEP Meeting

A Checklist For Families

Now that your child is eligible for special education and related services, you will have a meeting to develop the IEP. This is an important meeting for you and your child. You'll meet with teachers and school staff to talk about your child's strengths, abilities, challenges, and needs. The IEP team will decide what services and supports your child needs and where those services will be provided. Your child is entitled to be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) appropriate to their needs. For most children, the general education classroom will be the LRE. Other children may need a different or more restrictive environment in order for the IEP goals to be implemented.

As you learn more about what is available to your child based on their unique needs, your child's rights, and how to help create a strong plan, you'll feel more confident and better prepared to be the equal team member that you are.

The IEP meeting must take place within **30 calendar days** after your child is determined eligible for special education and related services. Related services are things like speech therapy, physical therapy, transportation, and much more.

Remember To:

- **Gather Your Paperwork:** Bring any documents that may be helpful, such as notes, evaluations, or test results from professionals who know your child.
- **Know Who's Attending:** Ask the school who will be at the meeting. Let them know if you're bringing someone with you — like a family member, friend, advocate, or therapist — to support you or take notes.
- **Think About Your Child's Strengths and Needs:** Be ready to share what your child does well and where they may need extra help. You know your child best, and you are their strongest advocate.
- **Ask for Documents in Advance:** Request that copies of reports and draft IEP goals be sent to you at least 2 days before the meeting.
- **Request a Meeting Agenda:** Ask for an agenda ahead of time so you know what topics will be discussed.
- **Review the Goals:** IEP goals should be clear and measurable. Consider whether each goal can realistically be achieved within the time given and how it will be tracked.
- **List Your Concerns:** Write down any concerns or questions you have about your child's progress, behavior, or learning needs and discuss at the meeting.

- **Think About Teacher Support:** Ask what support your child's teachers will receive to help implement the IEP, and how you can help from home.
- **Know Your Rights:** You can request another IEP meeting at any time if you're concerned about your child's progress or the current plan.
- **Take Your Time:** You don't have to sign the IEP right away, or at all. If you need more time to review it or aren't sure you agree with everything, ask to take a copy home to think it over.

Important To Remember:

If this is your child's first IEP, services will not begin until there is an agreed upon, signed IEP.



Helpful Resources

Navigating special education can feel overwhelming, but you don't have to do it alone. This resource includes 15 helpful tools to guide you step-by-step through the process.

From understanding common acronyms to learning key terms, these tools are designed to help you feel more confident, informed, and ready to advocate for your child every step of the way.



New to Special Education?

- [IEPs vs 504 Plans - Which is Right for My Child?](#)
- [Medical Diagnosis vs. Educational Label in Special Education](#)
- [Parental Consent in Virginia](#)
- [What Does That Mean? - Guide to SPED and Disability Terms in Virginia](#)

Assessments and Standards of Learning

- [Assessments - Types](#)

Eligibility, Identification, and Evaluations

- [Eligibility Categories](#)
- [From Referral to Eligibility Infographic](#)

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and Instruction

- [IEP Checklist](#)
- [IEP Roles - Who's Around the Table](#)
- [Parent IEP Input Form](#)
- [Student IEP Input Form](#)
- [Teacher IEP Input Form](#)

Family and School Engagement

- [Parent School Partnerships](#)
- [Why Parent Engagement is Critical to Student Success](#)