

A PEATC

Do You Know...



Parent & Student Input in Special Education Processes

Fact Sheet for Virginia's Parents

You have a Key Role in Your Child's Education

As a parent, you know your child best. Your expertise is critical to your child's success in school. As a parent, you know your child best. You have valuable knowledge about your child's strengths, needs, and history that no test or teacher can fully capture. This expertise is essential to your child's success in school, and it becomes even more important when your child has a disability.

If your child receives special education and related services under the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**, you are legally an **equal member of your child's Eligibility and Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams**. If your child receives accommodations under **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (504 Plan)**, the school is not legally required to include you on the team, but your input should still be considered.

Why Your Participation Matters

Teachers and service providers may work with your child for a school year or even a few years. You are the one who knows your child across **time, settings, and transitions**. You bring continuity between teachers, classrooms, grades, and schools. By actively participating in meetings, you can help the team see the "whole child" and not just isolated test scores or classroom performance. Your input is not optional; it is a critical part of the process.

Information Parents Can Share

- **Background and History:** Share your child's physical, emotional, social, and developmental history. Include family background and any insights into how their disability affects daily life.
- **Strengths and Challenges:** Highlight what your child does well and where they struggle. Explain strategies you use at home that may also work at school. This is especially important for writing the **Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP)** in the IEP.

The Importance of Student Participation and Input

Students should be involved in their education program and decisions as soon as they are able. This helps build important life-long, self-advocacy skills. Your child can and should provide input into:

- ✓ Their hopes and dreams for the future
- ✓ What they are good at and what they are not yet good at
- ✓ The services, supports, and accommodations they need to be successful
- ✓ Their desired plans after high school (community college, university, job)
- ✓ The challenges they are experiencing and how their teachers can help them succeed
- ✓ How their team can best communicate with them

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- **Evaluations and Testing:** Tell the team which tests or assessments have provided accurate results and which have not reflected your child’s true abilities. Note whether school evaluations match what you see at home.
- **Life Circumstances:** Mention anything that could affect learning or behavior, such as a recent move, divorce, medication changes, or medical conditions.
- **Your Vision for the Future:** Share your dreams and expectations for your child’s life, both now and as an adult. This helps the team set meaningful goals.
- **Learning Style:** Describe how your child learns best and if current teaching strategies are effective.
- **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):** Give your perspective on where your child’s IEP should be carried out—for example, in a general classroom with supports or a more specialized setting.
- **Diploma Options:** In Virginia, removing a student from the Standards of Learning (SOL) curriculum means they cannot earn a Standard or Advanced Studies Diploma. Be clear about your expectations.
- **Technology Supports:** Share what devices, tools, or apps help your child learn and communicate.
- **Behavior Supports:** Explain what strategies work well (or do not work).
- **Transitions:** Talk about how your child handles changes between activities, classes, grades, or schools, and what supports make these transitions easier.
- **Communication Needs:** Describe how your child communicates best and what strategies you use to support them.
- **Accommodations and Modifications:** Identify other needs for reasonable accommodations or modifications needed for your child to benefit from their IEP and participate fully.

By consistently sharing your knowledge and perspective, you help ensure your child receives the most appropriate services and supports. Your role is not just to attend meetings but to be a full partner in planning and decision-making. Schools provide expertise in education, but **you are the expert on your child**. Together, you and the school form a team working toward the same goal—your child’s success.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/RESOURCES:

Developing Your Child's IEP - Center for Parent Information and Resources

5 reasons parents play a key role in the IEP process - Understood.org

The Role of Parents in the IEP Process - The Tech Advocate

PEATC’s mission focuses on building positive futures for Virginia’s children by working collaboratively with families, schools, and communities to improve opportunities for excellence in education and success in school and community life.

For more information about us, please contact:

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