Conducting an IEP Meeting

FEDERAL LAW

“Recent national research on due process hearings confirmed that most hearings result from a lack of staff knowledge concerning due process.”

“Conducting a team meeting and documenting its’ actions and decisions has become increasingly important in respect to student success, allocation of resources such as; staff, utilization, materials, and funds. In this litigant minded society, leading and documenting this process has also become extremely critical in regard to ensuring that due process is adhered to and thereby protecting school/district against legal actions.”


PRE PLANNING FOR AN IEP MEETING

Prior to holding an IEP meeting, several tasks need to be completed to ensure that the required team members are in attendance and that the information presented is organized. If possible, begin planning for IEP meetings three to four weeks prior to the anticipated meeting time. This will give all team members ample time to prepare and ensure availability for them to attend the meeting.

1. Plan the date and location of the meeting.
2. Verify the time and date with parents/guardians first. Inform parents of who will be attending the meeting as well as the purpose of the meeting. You may also want to provide parents with information about how they can contribute to the meeting.
3. Once the date has been verified with the parent/guardian, coordinate the time and location with the required team members. Federal law requires the following team members to be present at all meetings: parent/guardian, school district representative, special education teacher, and regular education teacher representative.
4. All students should be encouraged to attend their IEP meeting. Students in grade nine or age 14 should always be invited to the meeting. If they do not attend, the student should be consulted as to their interests and preferences regarding their educational program.
5. Send a notice of the meeting to parents and enclose the parent’s rights brochure with the meeting notice.
6. If it is an annual IEP, begin to compile data on the previous years goals and objectives. Data should be presented in a manner that reflects the criteria statements in the objectives.
7. Prepare statements on the strengths of the student as well as concerns that need to be addressed.

BEFORE THE IEP MEETING

The physical set up of the room can lend to a positive and effective IEP meeting. Note the following:

- A room free from outside distractions
- Ample room for all team members to sit and space to take notes.
- Water or beverages if the meeting will run over an hour.
- Alert office personnel to expect parents and make them feel welcome.
- Hold phone calls.
- Have pencils, paper, and copies of reports available for team members.
- Position team members. The facilitator should sit next to the parent.

BEGINNING THE IEP MEETING

When conducting an IEP meeting, as case manager, it’s important to set the tone and purpose of the meeting. Note the following:

- Introduce yourself and invite the other team members to do the same having them state their relationship to the student.
- Welcome the parent and give them a copy of parental rights.
- Explain the purpose of the meeting. Set the agenda and ask if there are any additions to the agenda. A typical IEP meeting agenda will review the following components of the students IEP program:
  1. Introductions
  2. Overview of the current services offered
  3. Parent/guardian comments or questions
  4. Review degrees of progress on goals and objectives
  5. Review progress in the mainstream curriculum
  6. Reevaluation data, if any
  7. Identifying student educational needs
  8. Identifying new goal areas
  9. Discuss accommodations & modifications
  10. Determine placement and services
- Set time parameters. Communicate with the team that if all agenda items are not addressed, another meeting may need to be held. This motivates all members to stay on task.
- Inform parents that notes will be taken and incorporated into the IEP. You or another team member should take minutes of the meeting. Determine this prior to the meeting.
Be sure to record the minutes on the Record of Team Meeting form.

MEETING ETIQUETTE FOR ALL MEMBERS

“Successful, productive meetings do not just happen. They depend on the behaviors of both the meeting leader and the meeting participants.”


Note the following traits for a meeting facilitator and a meeting participant.

Meeting Facilitator

• Be open and encouraging
• Serve as a catalyst by posing questions
• Maintain harmony; remind participants of shared goals and appropriate meeting behaviors
• Don’t ramble
• Gather support for ideas before the meeting
• Don’t control or dominate the discussion
• Take notes on all that occurs
• Use and elicit “WE” behaviors
• Exercise follow-up questions
• If consensus can’t be reached on an issue, discuss follow up options

Meeting Participant

1. Decide to make the meeting worthwhile
2. Attempt to answer the leader’s questions, especially if there is long silence
3. Defend your ideas, but exercise appropriate meeting behavior
4. Don’t ramble
5. Study the agenda; assemble your information to share. Don’t wing it.
6. Practice listening skills; don’t engage in side discussions
7. Take notes and ask questions. Note errors that occur, so they can be corrected.
8. Demonstrate a “WE” attitude
9. Suggest closure for items that aren’t resolved within allotted time.
10. Volunteer for follow up tasks that are assigned

CONDUCTING THE MEETING

When conducting the meeting, note the following tips:
1. Stay student focused
2. Stick to the agenda; ignore irrelevant comments.
3. Use the term **APPROPRIATE** when describing the students program. Do not use the word **BEST**.
4. Watch body language and voice tone. Sandwich problematic issues with positive statements. Disgruntled parents walk away upset because of poor communication.
5. Meet with staff in advance to make sure they are familiar with the needs of the student.
6. Do not take parents complaints personally, however, feel free to adjourn the meeting if members become verbally abusive and reconvene at a later date.
7. Steer away from past problems and focus on the student’s future needs.
8. Give consideration to all the parent requests; however, make recommendations based on data and professional expertise.
9. Try to have staff members at the meeting who the parent has developed a level of trust.

**DEALING WITH DEMANDING PARENTS**

If a meeting with parents becomes volatile, facilitators should use the following tips to maintain a functional meeting.

1. Stay calm. Don’t be defensive
2. Again, if the parent uses the term **BEST** to advocate for their child’s program, remind the team that their task is to determine the most **APPROPRIATE** program for the student.
3. Do not take parents complaints personally, however, feel free to adjourn the meeting if members become verbally abusive and reconvene at a later date.
4. Maintain an exceptional tracking system that will assist you in meeting due process timelines and progress on goals and objectives. It’s easier to defend the student’s program when there is data to support the school districts position.
5. Remember parents do not have the right to demand the type of curriculum used with the student.
6. The assignment of teaching or paraprofessional staff that works with the student is a school district decision.

**10 THINGS THAT CAN SLOW A MEETING DOWN**

During a meeting, avoiding these problems can lead to a more productive and shorter meeting. Whether you’re a facilitator or participant, **try and model the following behaviors**: 

1. Don’t interrupt too much
2. Start on time
3. Follow up on your responsibilities
4. Listen and refrain from side bar conversations
5. Try to avoid arriving late
6. Refrain from sarcastic comments that stifle creativity
7. Come prepared
8. Deal with unanticipated issues
9. Stay positive
10. Encourage others who don’t participate to share their ideas or concerns

**ENDING THE MEETING**

When ending the meeting, it’s important to bring proper closure to the decisions made, so every team member understands their responsibilities with the student’s educational program.

1. Inform parents that the minutes from the meeting will be incorporated into the IEP.
2. Briefly review the minutes of the meeting from the Record of Team Meeting form
3. Recap the services being offered and any changes that are being recommended.
4. Encourage the parent to review the IEP upon receiving it and call if they have any questions.

Thank the parents and team members for coming in and taking the time meet.