



Individual Education Programs 101

The purpose of an IEP is to ensure your child obtains a **free and appropriate public education** (FAPE) in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990. It is a legally binding document.

Components of an IEP include:

1. Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAPF): a data-informed description of your child's abilities and needs. If you do not agree that this description is accurate or that testing is missing or inaccurate document it! You can request an **Independent Educational Evaluation** if you believe it's necessary.
2. Measurable Goals and Objectives: Goals can be about anything that is school related including social-emotional, behavioral, executive function, vocational, or for related services for which your child is eligible. Transitional goals should be developed starting around middle school. Stick with your highest priorities! Don't be afraid to set the bar high!
3. Placement: Many factors included in decisions about placement including need for accommodations, modifications, and whether your child will engage in statewide standardized testing. You'll also discuss the **Least Restrictive Environment** for your child. Fairfax County is not meeting state targets for inclusion and has a new calculator to help them include more students with disabilities in general education settings. The least restrictive environment is sometimes equated with inclusion with typical peers, but it doesn't always involve this. LRE for your child may be any setting that best meets their needs. If inclusion is on the menu consider your child's *real* opportunities for engagement with peers. **Your child's plan should be built for them.**
4. Services: Many types of services are available to students on the autism spectrum. General education is considered along with adapted physical education, executive functioning and social skills curriculums, and reading and math intervention services. **Related services** including physical and occupational therapy, speech and language services, assistive technology, and counseling are also considered if your child is eligible. You must often ask for evaluations for related services—PUT IT IN WRITING!
5. Other: Behavioral support is often needed if your child's disability affects their or their classmates' **access to the curriculum**. You or your school can request a **Functional**

Behavioral Assessment which usually leads to a **Behavioral Improvement Plan**. Again, if you're the requester, put it in writing!

Your rights as the parent or guardian of the student in the IEP process:

1. Appropriate meeting notification (scheduled at a mutually convenient time)
2. You SHOULD attend and are part of the IEP team
3. You may bring anybody who can help you advocate for your child (advocates or attorneys, outside providers, family members), It's nice to have somebody even if it's just for moral support.
4. Receive goals drafted by the school team (48 hours is the standard)—be ready to suggest revisions or additions if you believe it's necessary.
5. Have your input documented in the IEP including requests for testing, evaluations, etc.
6. Stop the meeting if policies or data are provided and you need to review
7. Take your time in reviewing the document—you can agree to the whole plan or just parts (Don't sign at the table!)
8. *Don't* wait a whole year if things aren't working out—ask school to convene a new IEP meeting.

MOST IMPORTANT RIGHT: *Prior Written Notice*: Requires your school district to provide reasonable notice if it intends to change anything in your child's IEP OR if it refuses to do something you have requested!

What to do if you can't reach agreement

1. Start with a proactive approach with your child's case manager or teacher—you can add something in the IEP about meeting to review data on a periodic basis.
2. Mediation
3. Facilitated IEP meeting
4. State complaints
5. Due process hearing

Read more about each of these processes [The Virginia Family Guide to Special Education](#)

[Special Education in Virginia: A Guidebook for Parents \(dlcv.org\)](#)

Other Sources of Help

1. Advocates or Educational Attorneys
2. State or School System Special Education Ombudsman or Family Resource Centers
3. Nonprofits like [POAC-NoVA](#)
4. [Virginia's Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center](#) (Spanish and military)
5. Special Education PTAs
6. Special Education Advisory Committees (in FCPS, Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities)