



## SPECIAL EDUCATION RIGHTS: ILLINOIS EDITION



# Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

This fact sheet answers:

- What Is an IEP and How Do I Get One for My Child?
- When Does My Child Need an IEP?
- What Can I Do If the IEP Isn't Working?
- And More

### What Is an IEP?

An IEP is the plan that you and the school come up with to help your child in school. It lists the special education and services your child needs to be able to learn and make progress. It also explains what your child should be able to do in one year's time.

### Why Is an IEP Helpful?

Schools need to give children with IEPs special help so they can do better in school. An IEP lists all the things the school will do to help. IEPs also give your child protections from being suspended or expelled.

### What Is the Difference Between a 504 Plan and An IEP?

Both a 504 Plan and an IEP help students with disabilities in school. A 504 Plan can give your child special accommodations to make school less hard. Your child can also get special therapies called related services (like speech therapy or social work) through a 504 Plan. If your child needs time with a special education teacher to help her learn academics, then she probably needs an IEP.

An IEP is different from a 504 Plan because it will give your child goals that she is supposed to work on all year. An IEP will put a bigger responsibility on the school to help your child and it gives you more rights.

### When Does My Child Need an IEP?

A child needs an IEP if she has a disability that makes her struggle in school (learning, behavior, social.), and she needs specialized instruction because of that disability.

These are the disability areas that IEPs target:

1. Other Health Impairment - for students with health issues, like ADHD/ADD.
2. Specific Learning Disabilities - for students who have average intelligence but are still behind grade level in one or more areas.
3. Speech Language Impairments - for students who speak unclearly, who cannot understand what others are saying, or who cannot express themselves.
4. Autism - for students who have significant struggles with communication (speaking/ listening) and social skills.
5. Hearing and Visual Impairments - for students who are completely or partially deaf or blind.
6. Intellectual Disabilities - for students with low IQs who need help learning and taking care of themselves.
7. Orthopedic Impairments - for students who have a hard time getting around and/or doing motor tasks (like writing) because of an illness, disease, or birth defect.
8. Emotional Disabilities - for students with depression, anxiety, or a behavior disorder.
9. Traumatic Brain Injury - for students who continue to have long term effects from a head injury.
10. Developmental Delays - for students age 3-9 who have a delay in their physical development, speech, thinking, behavior, or ability to follow routines/care for themselves in an age appropriate way.



## How Do I Get My Child an IEP?

If your child has a disability that stops her from learning and doing well in school, email the school and ask for a “**Full Individual Evaluation**” to have her tested for an IEP.

See Equip for Equality’s “**How to Help Your Child Be Successful in School - Getting a 504 Plan or IEP**” fact sheet to learn more about getting a plan for your child.

## When Can My Child Get an IEP?

Your child can get an IEP from the time she is 3 until she graduates from high school.

## What Is in an IEP?

### Strengths and Needs

The IEP should say what your child can and cannot do compared to children her age. It should be specific and detailed.

#### Bad explanation of a child’s skills:

Sarah’s disability makes it so she cannot read on grade level.

This is not enough detail. It will be hard to tell if Sarah’s reading gets better because you don’t know her reading level.

#### Good explanation of a child’s skills:

Sarah’s disability makes it so she reads at the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level and spells at the 4<sup>th</sup> grade level as an 8<sup>th</sup> grader.

This is specific and tells you how far behind she is.

## Annual/Yearly Goals

Goals should help your child’s biggest problems in school. They should be easy to understand. You should be able to tell how your child is going to be “scored” or graded.

#### Examples of bad goals:

- Latoya will participate in class.
- Latoya will not get angry.

You cannot tell how the school will figure out if Latoya is meeting these goals.

#### Examples of good goals:

- Latoya will raise her hand to participate in class 5 times in a 50-minute class.
- If Latoya gets angry, she will cope with her anger by asking for a break or telling a teacher she is upset instead of hitting.

These are good goals because they explain what Latoya doing better in school will look like.

The IEP team must send you IEP progress reports 3-4 times a year to tell you if your child is on track to meet her goals. If her goals are the same every year, she is not learning and big changes to her IEP should be made.

## Services

These are special therapies or instructions the school will give your child to help her learn. Some examples are:

- A special education teacher to teach math, English or any other subject.
- Social work services to improve self-esteem.
- Physical therapy to improve walking.
- Speech therapy to help your child talk more clearly.
- A nurse to give your child medicine.

### Accommodations and Modifications

If there is a rule or routine that is extra hard for your child because of her disability, she could get an accommodation or modification so she doesn't have to follow the rule or routine. She can also get help from teachers. This can include:

- Checking your child's assignment notebook if your child has a hard time writing down assignments by herself.
- Taking tests in a smaller room and having them read aloud to her.
- Giving your child less homework or extra time to study for tests.

### The School/Classroom Your Child Needs

Your child's IEP will list the kind of classroom or school your child needs to be able to learn. Your child may need to be in a special education classroom for part or all of the day. The goal is for your child to be with her non-disabled peers as much as possible.

### Other Parts of an IEP

IEPs can also have a transition plan, behavior intervention plan, special equipment or services, extended school year, and transportation services. Contact the Special Education Rights Helpline if you would like more information on these topics.

### What Can I Do If the IEP Isn't Working?

If you don't think your child is not making progress, talk with the team about what can be changed or added to her IEP to make it work better.

### Can the School Take Away My Child's IEP?

Yes, a team can take away your child's IEP. This can happen if she has made good progress or if her disability no longer significantly hurts her performance in school. Your child may be changed to a 504 Plan or no plan at all.

The school should test your child before taking away her IEP. If you do not agree with the school, request mediation or file for due process within **ten business days** of that meeting.

See Equip for Equality's "**What to Do When You Disagree with the School**" fact sheet to learn more. ■



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## Have More Questions?

Call our Special Education Rights Parent Helpline.

**1-866-KIDS-046** (1-866-543-7046)  
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