

Start the School

SUMMER IS GREAT—NO SCHEDULE, FEWER DEMANDS, AND NO HOMEWORK! When August arrives, however, it is time to start thinking about putting some systems in place to ensure a successful school year for your child. Effectively communicating your child's needs to his or her teachers and setting up a home environment that facilitates homework completion can help get the new school year off to a good start.

One question to address is "How do I get pertinent information to the teacher or teachers who are working with my child?" A letter to your child's teacher can be a good start and a great vehicle to give the teacher an opportunity to become aware of your child's special education plan. If no formalized plan is in place and the teacher needs to know more about your child, then the same could apply.

Never assume that just because a formalized plan has been created that your child's teachers have been informed about its contents. Remember, it only takes a week to get behind in school, and then the stress for you and your child to play catch-up never seems to end. If the special education department within your district has a system in place for getting the details of your child's plan to the teacher, then collaborate with them to convey your child's information to the teacher.

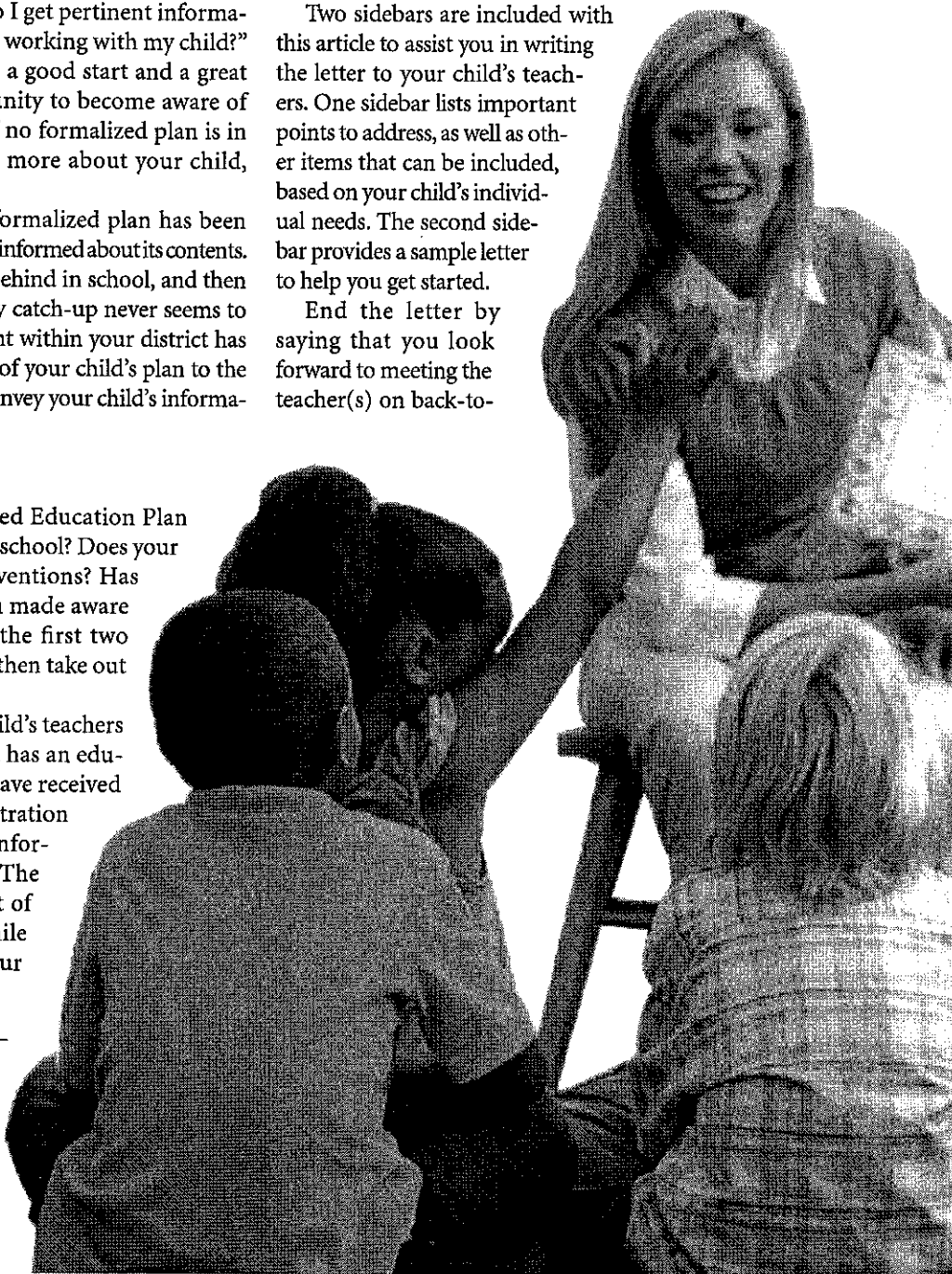
Write a letter to your child's teacher

Does your child have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Accommodation Plan for school? Does your child require special classroom interventions? Has your child's teacher (or teachers) been made aware of the plan? If you answered yes to the first two questions, and no to the last question, then take out your pen now and write a letter.

The purpose of the letter to your child's teachers is to make them aware that your child has an educational program. Teachers may not have received those records from the school administration yet, and you want to make sure the information has been conveyed to them. The letter needs to be written in the spirit of providing support to the teacher, while making sure the records regarding your child have been made available.

Two sidebars are included with this article to assist you in writing the letter to your child's teachers. One sidebar lists important points to address, as well as other items that can be included, based on your child's individual needs. The second sidebar provides a sample letter to help you get started.

End the letter by saying that you look forward to meeting the teacher(s) on back-to-



Beth A. Kaplanek, RN, and Linda Smith are two of the authors of *Parent to Parent: Family Training on AD/HD*, and two of the founders of *Parent to Parent*, a seven-session parent training class sponsored by CHADD.

Year Right

by Beth A. Kaplanek, RN,
and Linda Smith

school night, then be sure to attend! If your child's school does not hold such an event, say that you would like to meet them before the parent-teacher conferences at the end of the grading period, and ask what day and time would be convenient. Send the letter to all your child's teachers—including physical education teachers and coaches—and be sure to share a copy with the school principal.

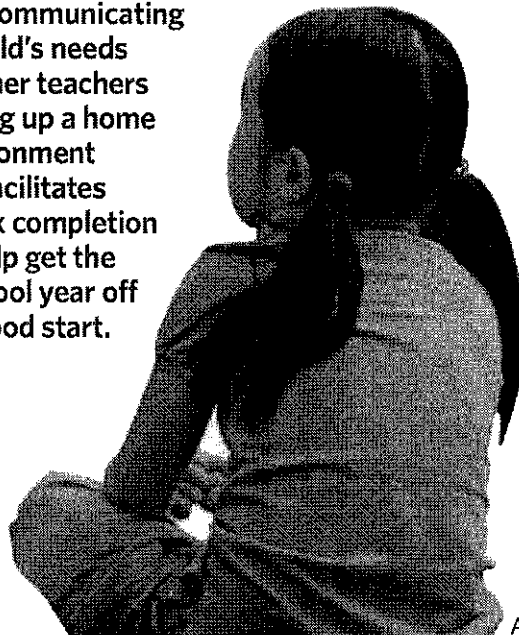
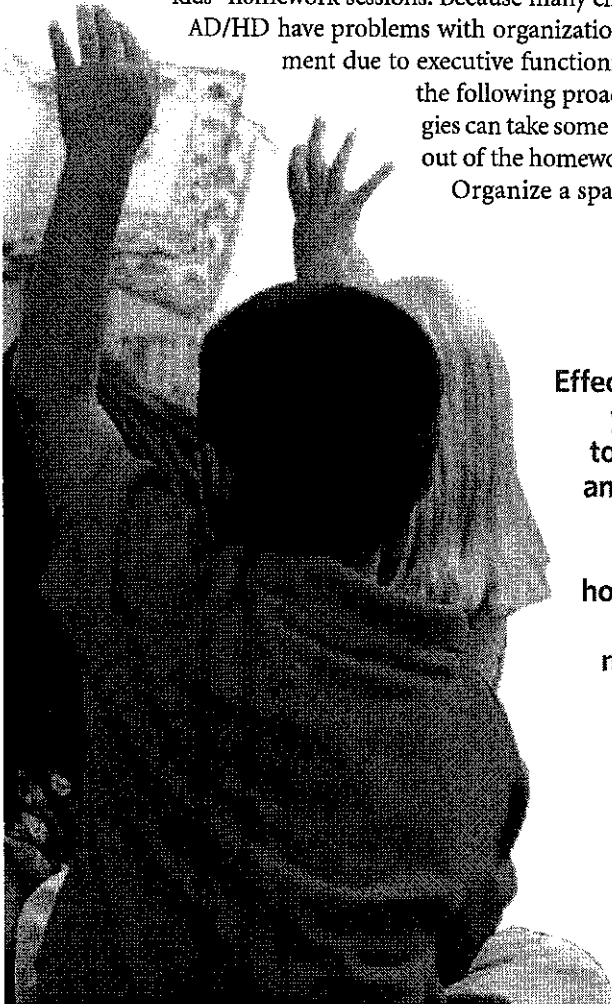
The home environment

Now, let's talk about setting up the home environment to effectively organize and plan out those "dreaded by parents and kids" homework sessions. Because many children with AD/HD have problems with organizational impairment due to executive functioning deficits, the following proactive strategies can take some of the stress out of the homework process. Organize a space in your

Important Points to Address in Your Letter

- Your name and relationship to (child's name)
- Your contact information
 - phone numbers
 - fax number
 - mailing address
 - email address
 - best times to reach you
- Your aim to work as partners to ensure a successful year (for teacher and child)
 - establish positive, open communication between home and school
 - offer cooperation, collaboration, assistance, support
 - provide helpful information about your child
- Information about your child's disability and educational program (IEP or 504 Plan)
 - instructional needs, modifications, and/or accommodations in the plan
 - behavioral needs, modifications, and/or accommodations in the plan
- System for home-school communication
 - daily homework and assignment sheet
 - daily/weekly behavior report
 - progress report, problem-solving, as needed

Effectively communicating
your child's needs
to his or her teachers
and setting up a home
environment
that facilitates
homework completion
can help get the
new school year off
to a good start.



Sample Letter to Your Child's Teacher

Date _____

Dear Mr./Ms./Mrs. _____,

My husband and I are writing this letter to introduce ourselves and to open a door of communication. We are the parents of [child's name], who will be a student in your class this year. We are looking forward to a successful school year for both you and [child's name], and as parents, we want to work with you and the school as partners in [child's name]'s education. We will be happy to help you and [child's name] in any way we can.

In case you have not had the opportunity to receive the records from special education, [child's name] has an educational program [insert IEP / 504 Plan as appropriate] to address needs related to attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), which affects [insert appropriate information here; for example: his/her ability to sit still, pay attention, and control his/her behavior. He/she has particular trouble getting organized, staying focused, completing and turning in assignments on time, and memorizing information, such as math facts.] We want to take this opportunity to share information about his/her educational services in a simplified format, including the modifications and accommodations he/she receives.

Listed here are the main provisions of his/her [insert IEP / 504 Plan and list specifics below]:

- Preferential seating
- Extra time on tests (time and a half)
- Test answers recorded in an alternate manner, as needed—especially for short-answer and discussion items (oral, audiotaped, dictated, or typed responses)
- Second set of books at home
- Use of a calculator for math
- Shortened homework assignments for math and writing
- Homework, long-range assignments, and tests recorded in planner, signed by teacher, and sent home every day
- Resource room, 45 minutes 4 times per week for math
- Foreign language exemption
- Home-school reward system for homework completion and turning in assignments on time

We would also like to take this opportunity to set up a system of communication between home and school. You may already have such a system for your class that we will be happy to adapt and use. If not, then we will send a planner to school with [child's name] everyday. It will always be in his/her backpack. He/she is to use it to write down his daily homework assignments, as well as any long-range assignments, such as upcoming tests, so that we can help to monitor his/her schoolwork at home. I will also use the planner to communicate with you on a weekly basis. Would you please assist us by reviewing and signing his/her planner before he/she leaves school each day and sending a note home in the planner on Fridays, so that we can help [child's name] come to school prepared and reward him/her for his/her weekly school progress?

We would like to thank you in advance for taking the time to read our letter and helping with this important program. Having a system of support in place at the beginning of school will help to get the year off to a good start. My husband and I look forward to meeting you on back-to-school night, [insert date if known].

Please do not hesitate to contact us about problems or call on us for assistance at any time. We have included our phone and fax numbers and email addresses below.

Best regards,
[signature]

Parent(s) Full Name(s)

Street Address

Town, State, Zip Code

Home Phone, Cell phone, Fax number

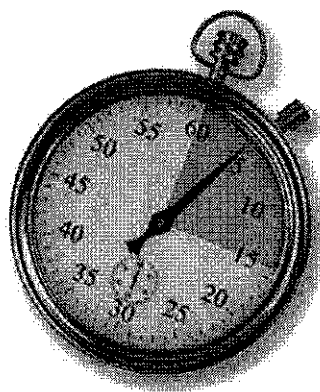
Mother's email, Father's email

CC: Principal, Resource Room Teacher, Music Teacher,
Art Teacher, Coach [all that apply]

home for doing homework. Choose an area that is away from distractions and has ample room. Depending on their age, some children do better working independently in a quiet place that is away from other family members and distractions. Younger children often need to be in an area close enough to mom or dad so that progress on homework can be monitored.

A large calendar on the wall can be helpful for keeping track of your child's assignments, when they are due, and when your child will be working on parts of long-term assignments. It can also be beneficial to include the dates of other activities such as soccer games, piano lessons, and so forth. This will help you and your child see the big picture of what needs to be done each week. Post-It Notes and a bulletin board to put them on can also be helpful organization tools for older children.

Make sure all supplies for doing homework are organized and accessible close to the homework area. It can be helpful for the supplies to be sorted in containers or bins or placed in a regular spot on a shelf. Items that students often need to complete homework



Setting the timer for fifteen minutes of on-task work followed by a five-minute break can give the fidgety or frustrated child an opportunity to get up, move about, and then refocus on the work.

assignments can include paper, pencils, pens, colored pencils, crayons, erasers, magic markers, a ruler, a calculator, a stapler and staples, scissors, glue sticks and report folders. Different kinds of paper, such as lined, graph, computer, and construction paper are important to keep in your designated homework area. And for those moments when your child announces at 9 PM that he just remembered he has a project due for his science class tomorrow, it is wise to keep a supply of poster paper and maybe even project board on hand.

An essential tool to have in the homework area is a timer that can be set to break the homework session into manageable units for the child with AD/HD. Setting the timer for fifteen minutes of on-task work followed by a five-minute break can give the fidgety or frustrated child an opportunity to get up, move about, and then refocus on the work.

Repeat this process for as long as is necessary to complete the evening's homework.

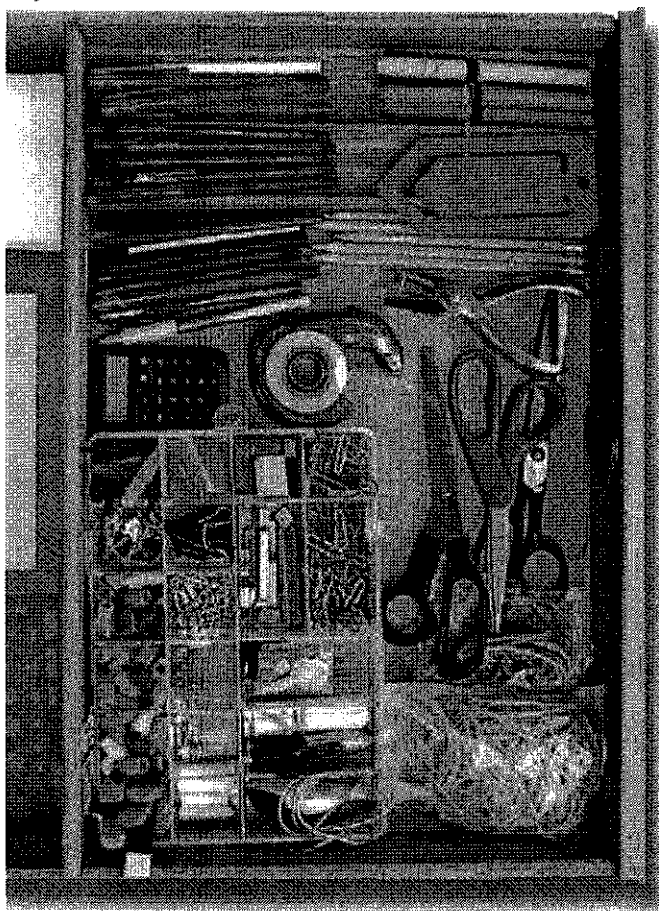
Time limits will vary depending on the age of the child, his/her ability to stay on task, and the child's difficulty with

What is Parent to Parent (P2P)?

PARENT TO PARENT: FAMILY TRAINING ON AD/HD was developed by Linda Smith, Beth Kaplaneck, and Mary Durham to provide educational information and support for individuals and families dealing with AD/HD and learning to navigate its challenges across the lifespan. Courses are offered in local communities across the country. The highly structured curriculum was developed by parents who have lived the experience but have also had access to the best researchers and practitioners. The course is usually offered as a seven-week class that meets for two hours once a week. Participants receive extensive supporting materials, including articles, reference materials, handouts, and homework assignments.

To find a Parent to Parent (P2P) program near you, go to www.chadd.org/parent2parent. There you will learn whether there is a certified instructor in your local community. If not, CHADD has an online P2P class running several times per year; learn more about the online program at www.chadd.org/P2PTraining.





Make sure all supplies for doing homework are organized and accessible close to the homework area.

and/or interest in the assignment. The timer can also be a tool for teaching the child time-management strategies. Parents can make the child aware of the importance of using strategies, such as the timer, when they model using the timer to break homework completion into manageable parts.

Another helpful proactive strategy is to prepare a notebook for all of the handouts your child's teacher will send home. This notebook will be for you. It is hard to remember classroom policies, course outlines, and grading scales for all teachers. Create a section in a three-ring binder for each of your children, using notebook dividers with pockets. When your child (or children) brings home correspondence during the school year, you will have a place to keep it. When you need to refer to the information, you will know right where to find it.

Schoolwork and the stress that it brings can be difficult for families dealing with AD/HD. Writing a letter to your child's teachers and setting up your home environment so that you are ready to meet the challenges of homework completion can help your child and family get off to a good start in the coming school year. **A**

ROBERT ELLIS / IZBER.COM

Educators Day at Conference

CHADD IS PLEASED TO AGAIN HOST THE ONE-DAY EDUCATORS TRAINING ON AD/HD during its annual international conference, to be held in Anaheim, California, this November. The training will take place on Saturday, November 15, 2008, and will feature sessions that address the needs of educators who want to help students affected by AD/HD to succeed. Additional track sessions for educators will be conducted on Friday, November 14.

Geared toward teachers, administrators, school psychologists, counselors, nurses and other who work with students and young people in the field of education, the Educators Day is filled with sessions that address positive behavioral supports, classroom behavior management, family and school success, instructional handouts, and evidence-based strategies to effectively teach students coping with AD/HD.

Educators Day was a dramatic hit among last year's conference attendees. Its sessions, specifically dedicated to the needs of education professionals, supplemented sessions offered throughout the conference that addressed the needs of children and young people affected by AD/HD in an educational setting. Education professionals filled the sessions to room capacity, and requested that we host the day again during this year's conference.

Visit **www.chadd.org** to register for this year's Educators Day.



Before the IEP Meeting: A Parent Checklist

(Be sure to maintain a copy for your records)

- Read your notice to see what issues will be discussed and who will attend.
- Be sure enough time is allotted.
- Ask the school for copies of any relevant information you do not already have, including:
 - Latest Full and Individual Evaluation and any new testing the school has done;
 - Teacher progress notes (if necessary, talk with the teacher(s) and others for information on the student's progress);
 - State curriculum for your child's age-appropriate grade level;
 - Student Code of Conduct (discipline code); and
 - Blank IEP forms and/or any drafts of IEPs the school may have done for your child.
- Gather any reports you have from outside therapists, tutors, consultants or doctors.
- Make a list of your child's strengths and talents.
- Read the state's age appropriate curriculum and list the ones you think your child could learn "as is" or with modifications. (Check with your state department of education for the curriculum guidelines.)
- Make a list of other things you would like your child to learn during the year. How is this going to help him/her? Will your child be able to participate more fully in school life? Will your child become more independent? How will your child's life change or improve?
- Review the lists and mark 4-5 things you think are most important for your child. These will be the basis for developing the IEP goals and objectives during the IEP meeting.
- Make a list of your child's areas of function that would increase with assistive technology (communication, mobility, etc.) Be prepared to make requests for assistive technology if it is needed.
- Make extra copies of each list to bring to the meeting.
- Decide who you will bring to the IEP meeting. Always try to bring a spouse, friend or advocate along with you for moral support.
- Decide if you want to meet with the teacher(s) or diagnostician/psychometrist before the IEP meeting.
- If you want to tape record the IEP meeting, gather equipment, including: recorder, several high-quality tapes, new batteries and an extension cord. Remember to disclose that you will be taping the meeting.

WORKSHEET THAT PARENTS MIGHT TAKE TO AN IEP OR 504 ACCOMMODATION PLAN MEETING

Rob Smith, First Grade

PURPOSE: To create positive school and learning experiences for Rob

STRENGTHS:

1. He is spontaneous
2. Has a good sense of humor
3. Fast learner

LEARNING DIFFERENCES:

1. Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
2. Developmentally delayed self-regulation
3. Low tolerance for frustration

WHAT HAPPENS TO HIM IN THE CLASSROOM:

1. Has trouble staying on task for any length of time
2. Very fidgety- can't stay on the rug at "rug time"—is usually crawling under the desks
3. Has a difficult time transitioning between activities
4. Has some anxiety issues
5. Does not like extra attention drawn to him — especially negative
6. Doesn't handle disappointment — tends to sulk or tantrum
7. Is stubborn—will cut off his nose to spite his face
8. Struggles to follow instructions

WHAT WOULD HELP HIM IN THE CLASSROOM

1. Preferential seating in close proximity to direct eye contact with the teacher
2. Use of a point system to help him earn rewards at home as he is able to improve behavior at school. He must have help in learning how to stay on task for increasingly longer periods of time.
3. Allow him to use Wikki Stix at appropriate times to help with his fidgety hands.
4. Do not punish him for his inability to sit still. Allow him to move to another seat or specified area when he becomes restless
5. Try to re-direct him when possible and build his self-esteem
6. Home/school collaboration — work on same behaviors at home and school where applicable to help him to be able to develop the skill or ability to stay on task for a longer period of time or sit still a little longer.
7. Work out a plan for helping him transition from activity to activity
8. Provide a visual schedule for activities and routine for the day to help with transitioning

OTHER: Ask Rob what would make school easier for him. Make specific interventions for rug time, learning centers, desk work, speciality time.

**WORKSHEET THAT PARENTS MIGHT TAKE TO
AN IEP OR 504 ACCOMMODATION PLAN MEETING**

PURPOSE: To create positive school and learning experiences for _____

STRENGTHS:

4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

LEARNING DIFFERENCES:

4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

WHAT HAPPENS TO HIM/HER IN THE CLASSROOM:

9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____

WHAT WOULD HELP HIM/HER IN THE CLASSROOM

9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____

OTHER: _____

Parent to Parent – Session Five

At the IEP Meeting: A Parent Checklist

(Be sure to maintain a copy for your records)

Be sure the IEP for your child includes:

- A statement of progress your child has made on previous IEP objectives (if this is not an initial IEP).
- Information about current educational performance and how the disability affects the child's involvement and progress in the general curriculum.
- Measurable annual goals and short-term objectives or benchmarks for each annual goal.
- Method for measuring progress toward goals and objectives and how and when progress will be reported to you.
- Special education and related services to be provided.
- Positive behavior strategies or a behavior intervention plan, if needed.
- Modifications of the general curriculum (such as a different instructional level) your child needs to participate in the same learning activities as other students his/her age.
- Supplementary aids or services your child needs to participate in regular education classes and activities.
- Supports to be provided for school personnel.
- Specifics about each instructional and related service, including date to begin, minutes per session, frequency of sessions, location and position (e.g., "special education teacher," "physical therapist," rather than someone's name) responsible for each service in the IEP.
- Special materials, equipment, resources and/or assistive technology needed, and when they will be made available.
- A statement of any academic or extracurricular activity in which your child will NOT participate with non-disabled students, and the reasons why.
- Any accommodations your child needs to take the state assessment test, or a determination that the child will take a specific level of a state-developed alternative assessment or a locally determined alternative assessment.
- If necessary, a statement of any exceptions to the district policies such as participation in extra-curricular activities and the student code of conduct, and the reasons for the exceptions.

- Statements of needed transition services by age 14 and for students age 16 and over any parts of the individual transition plan (ITP) that are the responsibility of the school district.
- Goals and objectives for extended school year (ESY) from the current IEP.
- Signatures of the IEP committee members and statements of your agreement or disagreement with any part of the IEP.

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After the IEP Meeting: A Parent Checklist

Now that the IEP meeting has been completed, you want to make sure that the IEP is implemented and your child is progressing in the general curriculum according to the IEP. Following are some of the ways parents can stay involved to ensure effective implementation:

- Become a support member of your child's team.
- Stay actively involved and offer to help.
- Give positive feedback to teachers and administrators about things that work well for your child during the school year.
- Become involved and visible by volunteering in the classroom, library or other school program; attend school functions; join the P.T.A. and participate in site-based management teams, meetings and special events.
- Communicate regularly with teachers throughout the year (notebooks, phone calls, e-mails, meetings and conferences).
- Share articles and other resources of interest with teachers and other school personnel.
- Attend joint training sessions with school staff.

Way You Can Participate:

- Review your child's IEP often and when you receive your child's regular progress reports. Bring questions, concerns and/or praise to parent/teacher conferences.
- Know who is responsible for providing copies of the IEP to all the teachers who are working with your child and check to make sure they have each received copies of the IEP.
- Save your child's IEP and progress reports each year. They can help you better monitor his progress.
- Remember that IEPs must be reviewed at least once a year. The required meeting is often called the "annual IEP meeting." However, the IEPs can be revised by the IEP team whenever needed. The team must revise the IEP if the student does not make expected progress toward annual goals or in the general curriculum or if the student makes so much progress that new objectives need to be developed.

Communication, Collaboration and Organization

Quality Communication and Collaboration is key to a successful team relationship.

- The team wants to work together to meet the needs of your child and values your input. You know the most about your child.
- Always handle communication, including concerns and requests, in writing when you can. If it is easier to explain something verbally, follow up with letter of understanding.
- Address concerns early and be specific. Have suggestions ready and be willing to think out of the box.
- Document phone calls with log that includes date, time, person, and discussion bullet points.
- Follow up meetings, both impromptu and scheduled, with a brief letter of understanding.
- The IEP is only available to teachers and service providers. It is best practice to provide a Student Resume and/or intro letter to special area teachers/bus drivers/anyone else working with the child.
- Letter writing "etiquette"
- Before the IEP Meeting make a Checklist and start communication early.

Organization

- Start Early
- Beneficial in order to communicate effectively.
- Prevents stress when looking for a document
- Find a system that works for you.
 - Categories (Communication, IEP drafts, IEP finals, Medical sorted by profession, Evaluations, Works Samples)
 - Color coding, labeling, sorting

12 Rules for Writing Effective Letters

Read 12 Rules for Writing Effective Letters. If you follow these Rules, you make it more likely that you will get the relief you want.

1. Before you write a letter, answer WHY and WHAT.
2. First letters are always drafts.
3. Allow time for "cooling off" and revisions.
4. You are always negotiating for services.
5. Never threaten. Never telegraph your punches.
6. Assume that you won't be able to resolve your dispute, that the dispute will escalate, that a special education due process hearing will be held, and that you won't be able to testify or tell your side of the story.
7. Make your problem unique.
8. You ARE writing letters to a Stranger. You are NOT writing letters to the school.
9. You ARE writing business letters. When you write business letters, you DO use tactics and strategy (your brain). You DON'T ventilate anger or frustration (your emotions).
10. NEVER make judgments.
11. You are telling a story. Write your letter chronologically. Don't broach the main issue in the first paragraph of the letter.
12. Write letters that are clear and easy to understand. Make your letters clear, short, alive, and right.

Tips created by Pam and Pete Wright.

Letter Writing Tips by Pam and Pete Wright

Make It Clear

It's incredibly easy to get side-tracked when writing letters, especially if you're feeling upset or emotional. Remember: You are writing to make a point, clarify an event, make a request, and create a paper trail. Refer back to the sheets of paper you used during the brainstorming stage. Have you answered these three questions?

- Why are you writing?
- What is the point you want to make?
- What do you want?

Talk out loud. Avoid vague words, jargon, and long rambling sentences. Use short words when possible. If you naturally use long words to express yourself, try substituting short words that mean the same thing. Long rambling letters put people off because they are hard to read. You don't want this to happen. You want the reader, your Stranger, to **enjoy reading your letter**.

Make It Short

Say what you have to say. Be succinct. Most people don't have the time to read long letters. If you repeat yourself, you're wasting the reader's time and your letter will generate a negative response. Keep your message short and to the point.

There is one exception to this rule. If you are writing a letter to request a due process hearing, then the letter needs to be a comprehensive "Letter to the Stranger." This letter should tell story, from the beginning, using visual imagery.

Make It Alive

Speak directly to the reader. Use the same words and figures of speech you use in your day-to-day speech. Think about the Stranger as a real person. Visualize the Stranger and imagine yourself talking with him about your problems. This is the person you are writing to. You're not firing a letter off to the person who chaired the IEP meeting and didn't have the courage to tell you that the school had just suspended your child, as you see in the example below.

Use words like "you," "we," "us," "our" to make your letter more personal. Everyone who reads the letter will feel that the message is directed at them.

Make it RIGHT

Letters filled with errors are distracting. Readers get so distracted by misspelled words and poor grammar that they miss the point. If you send a letter that's filled with mistakes, your real message is that you are sloppy and careless. If you prepare your letter on a computer, it will be easier to read. The Stranger will thank you for little touches like this.

Your goal is to eliminate all spelling, grammatical, and formatting errors from your letters. **The problem?** We don't notice our own errors! **The solution?** Always have at least one other person proof-read your letters. Try to locate more than one proof-reader. Buy a book about "How to Write Business Letters."

Letter writing is an art. A well written letter is a pleasure to read. It's also **very** hard work.

Example of Good vs. Bad Letter

Dear Dr. Smith:

First, let me thank you for allowing me to participate in the development of my daughter's IEP. I appreciate your willingness to meet with me so that I could share my concerns about her and what she needs in her education.

At the IEP meeting last week, your staff was very kind in answering my questions. Their kindness was especially appreciated since I had not met most of the people at the IEP meeting before. I was very sorry that neither of my daughter's teachers could make the meeting. I understood that one teacher was on a field trip and the other teacher had a doctor's appointment.

I had concerns that we did not have enough time to develop an IEP for Carrie. Although 25 minutes was allotted for the IEP meeting, we started more than 10 minutes late. I understand that several earlier IEP meetings ran late. I know that things get very rushed at the end of the year, which makes scheduling these meetings especially difficult.

I was also concerned that we did not have time to discuss the recent testing done on Carrie. You may recall that I had additional testing completed on her two months ago. After I received the test results, I provided you with a copy of the new testing. At that time, I shared concerns with you that Carrie had not made any progress during the two years she's been receiving special education services.

Unfortunately, the results of this testing were not included in the new IEP. The psychologist thought the new test results may have been mislaid. Perhaps this is why the school team gave me an IEP to sign that placed Carrie back into the same program. You will recall that I expressed serious concerns about her IEP and its lack of objective measures and evaluation procedures.

I'm sure you can understand why I did not sign the IEP presented to me at this meeting. Given the rushed atmosphere and general confusion at that time, I thought it would be better to schedule another IEP meeting later, so that we can discuss these issues in depth. I thought the IEP team needed to have a chance to review the new testing before trying to write an IEP. I'm including another copy of the evaluation with this letter.

Please check with your staff and send me some times so that we can get together for a productive meeting. If you have any questions, please call or write.

Sincerely,

Jim Manners