

Empowering Parents as Partners: Advocacy and the IEP Process

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What will we cover today?

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- Referral Process
- Eligibility
- REED (Review of Existing Educational Data)
- MET (Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team)
- IEPT (Individualized Educational Planning Team Meeting)
- Where To Go From Here....

Referral Process

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- When a student is suspected of having a disability, a written referral is sent to the school district. Any parent or school representative can refer a student as possibly needing special education services.

- **Advocacy Tip: A written referral by a parent should describe all reasons why you suspect that your child may have a disability that qualifies him/her for special education services. Be sure to date and sign your letter.**

Review of Existing Educational Data (REED)

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- Within ten calendar days after receipt of a written referral, the school must notify the parent of the referral and request written consent to evaluate the student.
- This notice must include the parent's procedural safeguards, the reason and scope of the evaluation and a list of available resources within the intermediate school district.

Review of Existing Educational Data (REED)

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- Protections of IDEA apply to a student for whom it can be determined that the school has some indication that special education services may be needed.
- ▣ **Advocacy Tip: Document any difficulties that your child is having in school. This includes concerns about academics/grades, social/interpersonal relationships and/or behavior. Be prepared to discuss these concerns at the REED Meeting.**

Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team Eligibility

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- Qualifying for special education services under a specific category does not determine or limit placement or services.
- All special education services determined by the evaluation process to be necessary for the student to benefit from his/her education must be provided.
- **Advocacy Tip: Different systems (Community Mental Health, Social Security) have different eligibility criterion. Eligibility is determined by the IEP Team and not by labels from other systems.**

Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team (MET)

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- **Advocacy Tip: Parents should request to review all evaluation reports prior to the Multidisciplinary Team Meeting. This enables you to come prepared to discuss the evaluations completed and ask necessary questions.**
- A student must be assessed in every area of the suspected disability. The REED will determine what evaluations need to be done.
- **Advocacy Tip: Parents should submit to the school any outside evaluations that they want considered PRIOR to the MET/IEP Meetings.**

Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team Meeting (MET)

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- The MET/IEP Meetings will be held within 30 school days of signing the consent to evaluate. The MET Team will review all of the evaluation data. This includes information submitted by parents and school staff.
- The MET will discuss the evaluations that were completed and make an eligibility recommendation.

Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team Meeting (MET)

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- Evaluations form the basis for special education services, but the IEP Team can make decisions that vary from the evaluation recommendations if there is data that it will lead to an educational benefit for the student.

Individualized Education Program Process

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BEFORE THE IEP TEAM MEETING

- Discuss who will be invited to the meeting, assuring that all required individuals are invited and available. Date and time should be mutually agreed upon.
- **Advocacy Tip: Consider offering a couple of dates and times that are convenient. It is crucial that you participate in the IEP Meeting. If you absolutely cannot attend the IEP Team Meeting in person, consider participating by phone.**

Individualized Education Program Process

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BEFORE THE IEP TEAM MEETING

- Assure that ample time is scheduled complete the IEP Team Meeting.

- ▣ **Advocacy Tip: Pre-IEP Meetings and discussions are a valuable tool to address concerns and share information. Ask the school to send you the DRAFT IEP document to review before the meeting. Developing an appropriate IEP document is a process, it is not a one time event.**

Individualized Education Program Process

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BEFORE THE IEP TEAM MEETING

- Prepare information about your child's strengths, how his/her disability affects education, concerns you have and what has worked and what has not worked. Prepare a list of your questions.
- Consider long range goals, as well as goals for the current year.
- Consider supports, services and accommodations that your child will need to be successful in school.

Individualized Education Program Process

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BEFORE THE IEP TEAM MEETING

- **Advocacy Tip: Bring someone with you for support to the IEP Team Meeting. This can be a friend, relative, another parent whose child receives special education services or an advocate. This person can help take notes, remind you of priorities you discussed and offer moral support. It is also helpful to invite a teacher or therapist who has knowledge or special expertise working with your child. It is a courtesy to notify the school team if you are bringing someone with you to the IEP Team Meeting.**

Individualized Education Program Process

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THE IEP TEAM MEETING

- You will be asked to sign in that you are participating in the IEP Team Meeting. This is not a signature of agreement or disagreement with the IEP document or services/supports being offered.
- Information will be reviewed and discussed and eligibility will be addressed. Goals will be developed. Placement will be decided.

Individualized Education Program Process

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THE IEP TEAM MEETING

- ▣ **Advocacy Tip: Remember that special education is an array of supports and services, not a place.**

- ▣ **ASK QUESTIONS!** Share information about your child. Describe him/her at home and in the community. Discuss his/her interests and activities.

Individualized Education Program Process

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THE IEP TEAM MEETING

- Use data, progress reports and other information to make decisions. Diagnostic tests and assessments are not the whole picture.
- **Advocacy Tip: If the meeting seems unsatisfactory to you, ask for it to be adjourned and reconvened at a later date (if the timeline permits). This will allow you time to review information and get advocacy assistance.**
- Obtain a copy of the IEP document before you leave the meeting. If the final document will be typed later, request a hand-written copy until the typed copy is completed.

Individualized Education Program Process

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PLAAFP, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- The IEP document should include a statement of the Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP).
- The PLAAFP includes your child's strengths, weaknesses, what helps your child learn, what interferes with your child's learning, objective data from current evaluations of your child and how your child's disability affects their ability and progress in the general education curriculum

Individualized Education Program Process

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PLAAFP, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- The PLAAFP must also include parent input and concerns
 - ▣ **Advocacy Tip: This is the time to share your information that you prepared prior to the IEP Team Meeting. You can submit your written information to be attached to the IEP document. Ask the school personnel documenting the meeting to write “see attached parent letter of input and concerns” on the appropriate line of the IEP document.**
- From the PLAAFP Statement, goals and objectives will be written to address the skills your child needs to learn.

Individualized Education Program Process

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PLAAFP, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- From the PLAAFP Statement, goals and objectives will be written to address the skills your child needs to learn.
- Short term objectives are then written. These objectives are the individual skills needed to achieve the goals of your child's education and are used to determine when the goal is achieved.
- **Advocacy Tip: Parents have input into their child's goals and objectives. Ask questions and discuss what skills your child needs to learn to be successful in school.**

Individualized Education Program Process

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- At the conclusion of the IEP Team Meeting, a Notice of Provision of Programs/Services will be given. Parents will be asked to sign the Initial IEP document.

- **Advocacy Tip: Speak up if you disagree with the eligibility decision or if you have other concerns with the offer of FAPE. Your concerns must be documented. Parents do not sign the IEP document with agreement or disagreement. There are several ways to address disagreement with the offer of FAPE.**

- Changes to the IEP will be documented on the Notice page.

Individualized Education Program Process

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- Progress Reports should be issued as often for children without disabilities, or more frequently, if determined by the IEP Team.
- If your child is not making adequate progress, you may, at any time, request an IEP Team Meeting to review the IEP document and make necessary changes.
 - **Advocacy Tip: An addendum can be used to make changes to the IEP document, but are not used for a change of placement. Remember-the IEP document can always be changed as needs arise or progress is made.**
- An IEP Team Meeting will be held, at least, annually.

Where To Go From Here....

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- Work hard at building positive, productive relationships with your child's IEP team.
- Speak open and honestly about your thoughts and concerns regarding your child.
- **Advocacy Tip:** Address concerns or worries immediately. It is a lot easier to resolve issues as they arise, than trying to address multiple concerns that have been going on for a long time.

Where To Go From Here.....

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- If you have a concern regarding evaluations, services or supports, discuss it with your child's teacher/case manager/main contact person. Document the issues that you discuss and the proposed solutions.
- Work your way up the chain of command, if the issue does not get resolved. Talk to the principal, supervisor of special services and then the director of special services.
- If needed, request a review meeting with necessary IEP Team members. While most concerns can be addressed one on one, resolution may require the team to get together face to face to brainstorm a plan of action.

Where To Go From Here.....

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- If you feel that your concerns are not being addressed and you have gone through the chain of command to seek resolution, there are tools and outside resources that are available to assist you.
- **Mediation/Facilitation:** The Michigan Special Education Mediation Program (MSEMP) can provide a neutral facilitator to run a meeting (Facilitation) and offers mediation to resolve disputes related to special education services. These services are available at no cost to families and schools.

Where To Go From Here.....

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- There are formal processes you can follow if you feel that your rights have been violated or the law has not been followed. These could involve filing a State Complaint or filing a complaint to request a Due Process Hearing.

Resources

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- The Arc of Northwest Wayne County

www.thearcnw.org

- Michigan Alliance for Families

www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org

- Michigan Protection & Advocacy Services, Inc.

www.mpas.org

■ **Special Education: An Advocate's Manual (Resources section)**

- Michigan Special Education Mediation Program (MSEMP)

www.msemp.cenmi.org

- Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency (Wayne RESA)

www.resa.net