

# IEPs: The Process, Tips for Improvement and Writing Goals

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# The Process

Based on <http://www.autism-pdd.net/iep.html>

The Complete IEP process includes:

- Identification and intervention
- Multi-Factored Evaluation
- Development of the IEP
- Implementation of the IEP
- Annual Review
- Tri-annual Review of Eligibility

# The Process for Identification and Interventions to Determine Special Needs:

- Step 1. Referral - by parent(s) or teacher(s).
- Step 2. Intervention - with a written intervention plan.
- Step 3. Develops a plan which includes strategies and intervention in the classroom.
- Step 4. A timeline for the intervention needs to be established.

## Steps to Beginning the Multi-Factored Evaluation (MFE) Process:

- Step 1. Set a meeting with parent(s).
- Step 2. Parental permission must be obtained for any testing to occur.
- Step 3. Multi-Factored Evaluation (MFE) testing can include, but not be limited to, medical, psychological, communication, and vision/hearing evaluations.
- Step 4. Some districts, after the MFE, hold MFE team meetings to review evaluation results and determine eligibility for services.

# Development of the IEP

- An IEP meeting will be scheduled at a mutually acceptable place and time.
- Maximum amount of time from beginning of MFE testing to IEP development is 120 days.

# The IEP Team

The following people shall be included in an IEP meeting:

- Parent(s).
- The child's teacher(s).
- A district representative who is able to provide or oversee the delivery of special education services.
- The child, where appropriate.
- Additional individuals who may attend are:
  - Representatives from the MFE team, if this is an initial evaluation or re-evaluation.
  - Appropriate service providers.
  - Other individuals chosen by the parent(s) or school district.

# IEP Agenda

- During the IEP meeting team members will:
  - Review evaluation results.
  - Review the current IEP.
  - Determine the area(s) of strengths and needs.
  - Write goals and short term objectives.
  - Determine services needed and the duration of services. (If the student is 16 years old or older, the IEP must include a description of transitional services.)
  - Determine the least restrictive setting in which to deliver the services.
  - Ensure that the student participates to the maximum extent appropriate.
  - Consider the need for extended school year.
  - Review criteria for evaluation and...
  - Finally, develop a written plan.

# Implementation of the IEP

- Law requires that an Individual Education Plan be implemented as soon as possible after the IEP.
- All education employees who work with the child are legally responsible to help the child meet the objectives of the IEP.
- Lack of participation in the IEP conference does not exclude any education employee from this responsibility.
- Imperative that the education employee has access to the child's IEP. **GIVE THEM COPIES!**

# Review of the IEP

- The IEP may be reviewed at any time during the school year at the parent's or teacher's request, but must be reviewed at least annually.
- The teacher has the authority to reconvene the IEP team to:
  - Review goals and objectives.
  - Modify the plan.
  - Request additional assessment(s).

# A Dozen Tips to Improving the IEP

## 1. Don't be afraid.

- You do NOT have to sign the IEP until you are happy with it.
- Ask for help! Many of us have been in your shoes.

# Tips to Improving the IEP

2. Request a Draft IEP in writing BEFORE the meeting.
  - Without too much provocation, explain that you do not want to waste time reviewing a new document in a meeting with 10 people
  - If they can't provide it 3 days ahead of time, request formally to reschedule the meeting.

# Tips to Improving the IEP

## 3. This isn't a war.

- These professionals will be working with your children every day for hours.
- State your point of view
- Stand your ground
- Pick your battles.

# Tips to Improving the IEP

## 4. Shorter is Better!

- A shorter IEP is often times much better than a longer IEP!
- Set your child up for success with a smaller number of key goals.
- Set your teachers up for success with an IEP they can memorize.

# Tips to Improving the IEP

## 5. Goals must be measurable

- Avoid language that needs a PhD in Mathematics to decipher.

**WRONG!!!** Dillon when polled 2 out of 3 times will 80% of the time correctly identify 3 out of 4 objects with 100% accuracy.

# Tips to Improving the IEP

6. Avoid long-reaching "feel-good" goals.
  - They need to be achievable in one year.
  - The need to be realistic.
    - Dillon will achieve a 90% or better on all his tests.  
Why not just write: Dillon will graduate, marry a nice girl, have two kids, a house with a picket fence and die in bed at an old age surrounded by grandchildren.
    - Avoid goals that are a setup for failure – A goals of "Child will successfully cross the road 4 out of 5 times" leads to 100% failure even 20% of the time.

# Tips to Improving the IEP

## 7. Goal Oriented

- Identify your child's needs or weaknesses first.
- Identify how to MEASURE those needs/weaknesses objectively
- Identify goals that can meet the needs or improve the weaknesses
  - Remember the three R's

# Tips to Improving the IEP

## 8. SMART Goals

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Time Limited

# Tips to Improving the IEP

## 9. Follow through at home!

- Consistency at Home and School = Success!
- Rewards and Token systems can be very beneficial!
- Positive Behavior Reinforcement works on anyone, even the dumbest humans alive (Husbands).

# Tips to Improving the IEP

## 10. Constantly Review:

- Think of goals like a resume. Update them continuously.
- Constantly jot notes about problems and possible ideas.
- Run your ideas by others using on-line forums

# Tips to Improving the IEP

## 11. Involve Others

- Always have someone else read the IEP.
- Always involve your child's therapist(s).
- STs, OTs, PTs, ABA, etc. can all add great goals and feedback!

# Tips to Improving the IEP

## 12. IEPeese

- I refer to IEPs as being written in another language called IEPeese.
- Focus on what the problem is and how you think it can be fixed
- Use the IEP team to determine how to translate your problem/fix it into IEPeese.
  - There is no inventory list!

# Tips to Improving the IEP

## 13. The Baker's Dozen

- Spelling
- Tell Don't Ask
- Speaking of baking...

# WrightsLaw

This statement (citation follows) summarizes the IEP process:

"The heart of better IEP development is a sequential, three-fold inquiry made by the IEP team:

- (1) What are this child's unique educational characteristics / needs that must be taken into account in a truly individualized education program?
- (2) What will the district do / provide in response to each of these characteristics?
- (3) If the services are effective, what goals and objectives will the child reach? In other words, what accomplishments will indicate that the services are on the right track?

(From "Better IEPs: How to Develop Legally Correct & Educationally Useful Programs" by Barbara Bateman and Mary Anne Linden, page 91)

# Karin's Tips

Tips from Karin Frenze:

- If your child has behaviors that interfere with school, have a behavior intervention plan (BIP) after a functional behavior assessment (FBA).
- Have a goal related to the documentation of progress on CBI trips. Otherwise parents do not know what is going on and if progress is being made.
- Require that written examples of your child's work is be sent home weekly or at least every other week. As the children get older, it seems that less and less, to the point of nothing, is sent home, particularly if children are in self-contained classes.

# Sue Watson's Tips

- Be very specific about the action. For instance: raise his/her hand for attention, use a classroom voice, read the pre-primer Dolch Words, complete homework, keep hands to him/herself, point to what he/she wants, needs augmentative symbols.
- AVOID: A vague, broad or general goal is unacceptable in the IEP.
  - Goals that state will improve reading ability, will improve his/her behavior, will do better in math should be stated much more specifically with reading levels or benchmarks, or frequency or level of improvement to attain and a time frame for when the improvement will occur.
  - Using "will improve his/her behavior" is also not specific. Although you may want behavior improved, which specific behaviors are targeted first along with when and how are a critical part of the goal.

# Sue Watson's Tips

- Provide a time frame or location/context for the goal. For instance: [during silent reading time, while in the gym, at recess time, by the end of 2nd term] point to 3 picture symbols when something is needed.
- Then decide what determines the success of the goal. For instance: how many consecutive periods will the child remain on task? How many gym periods? How fluent will the child read the words - without hesitation and prompting? What percentage of accuracy? How often?
- **AVOID:** Setting a goal too high is almost as bad as not having a goal at all.

# Sue Watson's Tips

- Include the child in setting goals if appropriate.
  - This will ensure that the student takes ownership over reaching his/her goals.

# Sue Watson's Tips

- Know your Curriculum and include any curricular modifications. If the curriculum states that the goal is to count to 50 and you state count to 10, this is a modification.
- Include any curricular accommodations.
  - This will include things like: scribing, a quiet setting to take tests, assistive technology etc.
  - There are many accommodations such as Simple English Instructions, Use of Calculators, "Crib" Sheets, Verbal Review of Instructions prior to Starting, etc.

# Sue Watson's Tips

- Provide for any support staff that will be involved in the IEP
- Indicate materials and or resources to be used

Based on work by Sue Watson <http://specialed.about.com/od/iep/a/iepGoalWriting.htm>