

# Parent Handbook

for SPECIAL EDUCATION





# Introduction

# Dear Parents,

This handbook is designed to help you navigate the special education process. Although federal law assures that parents are equal players, sometimes even an experienced parent feels like an outsider on his or her child's team. As a parent, you play a unique role: you are the only one on your child's team who can provide history, certain types of information, planning and support, outside intervention, and commitment for the long haul. This makes you a key player on your child's school-based team; parents who understand how and where to make their unique contributions enhance the professionals' ability to do their parts. The art is in playing as strong a parental role as possible to add to—and not hamper—the ability of each of the professionals on your child's team to do the same.

## Why Navigating Special Education Is Tricky

The initial target for any school-based intervention is to keep the student in grade-level academics and provide developmentally appropriate social, behavioral, and emotional experiences. Schools are required to intervene (take action) if a student's achievement level diverges greatly from that of his or her peers. The school's goal is to keep its students on track with their peers, and if that's not possible, then to get them as close as possible. Also, the principles that dictate which targets in school are most important are increasingly informed, as the student gets older, by his or her future goals and needs for adulthood.

To complicate things further, parents and educators alike recognize the value in a certain amount of struggle. If everything is always easy, or accommodations, support, or expectations make things too easy, then our students may not be challenged enough. Parent-professional teams who support a student with a disability often wrestle with hard questions, such as whether independence is more important than academic achievement, the role of social success and opportunities now and in the future, and more. Time and priorities often conflict with each other; teams sometimes have to make difficult choices.



## **Our Goal: Improved Outcomes for Students by Helping Parents Function as Equal Players with School Professionals**

This handbook is intended to give parents a basic grounding in the special education process and the use of collaborative strategies and facilitation skills and techniques to improve that process. We hope to give parents tips, tools, tactics, and educator perspective—all of which will enhance collaboration with the school team. Ultimately, better collaboration among the adults in your child’s life will improve his or her educational outcomes.

### **Our Recommendation**

First, read the section “How Special Education Works” in its entirety. Then, feel free to jump to the section that makes the most sense for your situation. We hope you will return to the various sections of this handbook at different times as you navigate your child’s special education process.

## How This Handbook Is Organized

All special education requirements do not apply in every situation. Each student is an individual. Requirements and plans vary depending on the unique characteristics of the student and his or her instructional, social, behavioral, and functional needs.

This handbook tracks the fundamental steps of the special education process that apply to all students:

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## Within each section, you will find:

### **BASICS:**



This section provides fundamental information about each stage of the process. Our intention is to give you the essentials that any parent needs to play an effective role in the process. While we could provide much greater detail in each section, we have deliberately chosen only the most essential so that if the “basics” is all you have time for, you can go confidently into your child’s ARD/IEP planning.

### **TIPS:**



These are “how-to” strategies that you can use to make the process easier, either in your role as parent or for your counterparts on the school team. Tips incorporate suggestions from other parents and recommendations from educators.

### **COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES:**



These are approaches or perspectives that will help the best, most individualized information come up for discussion, regardless of how unlikely, or difficult, or who presents it. Collaborative strategies help both with delivering and receiving communication from another person. These strategies also facilitate relationship building, which acts like an insurance policy to prevent a slight bump in the road from becoming adversarial.

### **BEHIND THE SCENES WITH EDUCATORS:**



This section reveals parts of the educational process that parents typically don’t see. This is not to imply a deliberate lack of transparency on the part of educators, but more to acknowledge that, just like in any business, some parts of the public education system simply have more to do with operations, personnel, or preparing for students behind the scenes. We added this because sometimes parents unknowingly pressure relationships with school only because they are unaware of some of the realities of professional public school life. This perspective reveals some of the most common information that educators wish parents knew but often don’t state.

## WANT MORE INFO?

### FEDERAL AND STATE LAWS AND REGULATIONS REGARDING SPECIAL EDUCATION

#### IDEA 2004

Legal Framework for the Child-Centered Special Education Process  
<http://framework.esc18.net/display>

#### Parent Information Line

Texas Education Agency (TEA)  
1.800.252.9668

#### Special Education in Texas

Texas Education Agency (TEA)  
[www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147491399](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147491399)

### PARENT-TO-PARENT ADVICE, PERSPECTIVE, AND APPROACH TO SPECIAL EDUCATION

#### Partners Resource Network (PRN)

[www.partnerstx.org](http://www.partnerstx.org)  
1.800.866.4726  
[partnersresource@sbcglobal.net](mailto:partnersresource@sbcglobal.net)

#### Texas Parent to Parent (TxP2P)

[www.txp2p.org](http://www.txp2p.org)  
1.866.896.6011

#### Texas Project First

[www.texasprojectfirst.org](http://www.texasprojectfirst.org)

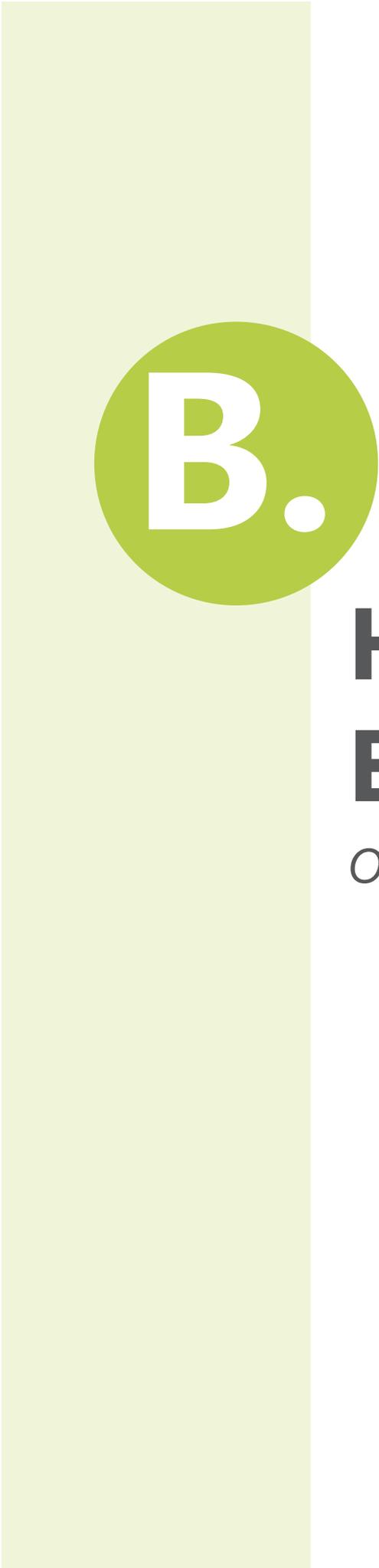
#### Parent Information Center

ESC Region 10  
[www.region10.org](http://www.region10.org)

### NATIONAL UNIVERSITY CENTERS

#### Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)

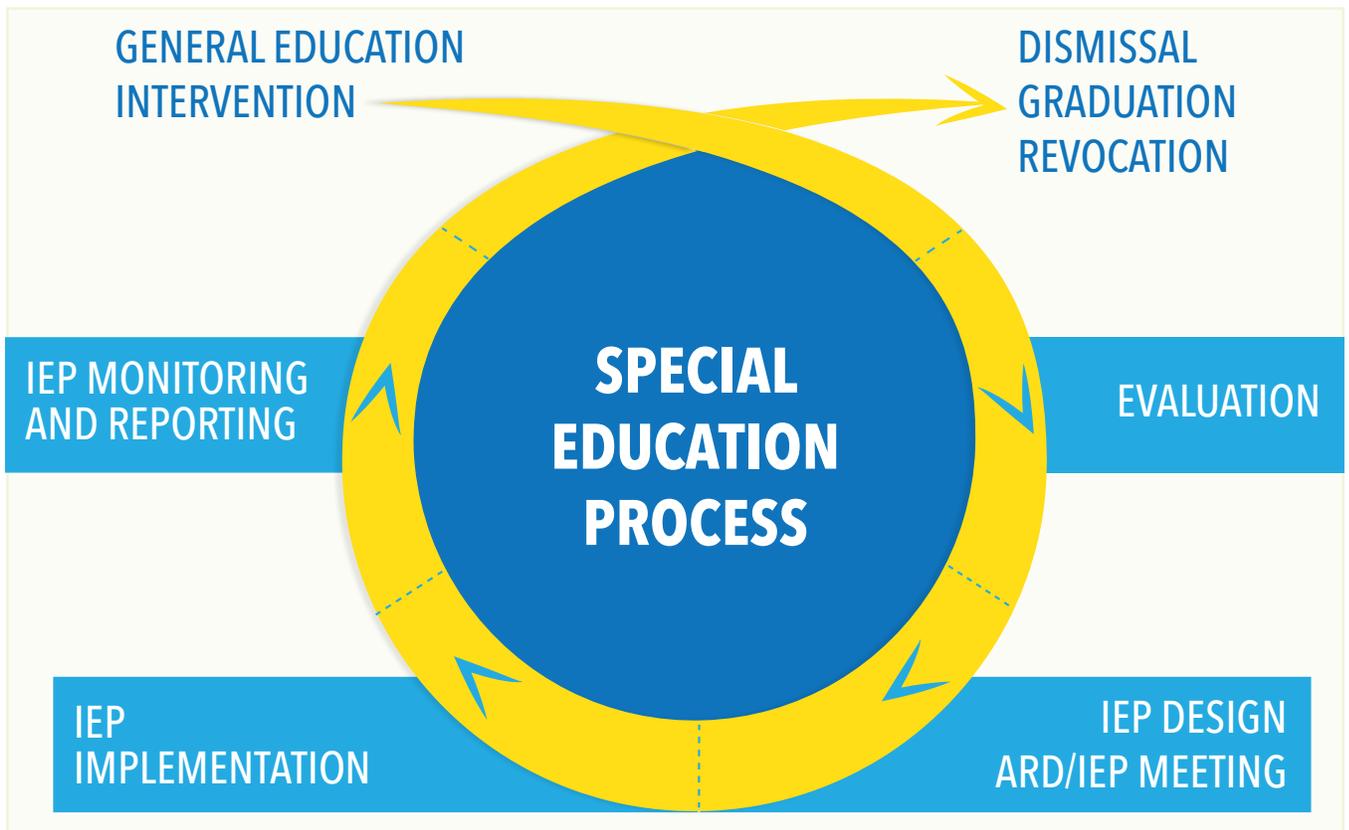
<http://aucd.org>  
1.301.588.8252



**B.**

# **How Special Education Works:**

*Overview*



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## BASICS

### Overview of the ARD/IEP Process

Each student who receives special education services has an individualized plan for progress. A team develops the plan, which follows an ongoing process with predictable stages. The student's plan is called the IEP (Individualized Education Program), and the team that designs it is a committee made up of the parents, the student (depending on age), and a number of school professionals, each representing different roles.

The stages of the special education process form a repeating cycle, beginning with an evaluation of where things are (student's strengths, needs, and performance) and moves next to the creation of a plan of action (the IEP). Next, the team implements the plan and monitors the student's progress. At the end of the cycle, the team examines the student's growth, determines his or her new starting place, updates the plan for further advancement, and begins carrying out the new plan. With each repetition of this cycle of "evaluate, plan, implement, monitor, re-evaluate," the team measures the student's growth as goals are mastered, continued, or reset at higher levels. Over time, the broad goal is for the student to close gaps relative to his or her peers and to work toward an age-appropriate grade level, and ultimately, adult-level independence.

In Texas, this special education process is called the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) process. Other states refer to this as the IEP process. For purposes of this handbook, we use both terms: you will see references to the ARD/IEP process, ARD/IEP meetings, ARD/IEP team or ARD/IEP committee.

### Who Is on My Child's ARD/IEP Team?

The IEP must be developed through mutual agreement of the team members, including parents. Schools must take steps to ensure that parents have an opportunity to participate in planning, decision making, and meetings. Decisions are made through consensus, or mutual agreement.

ARD/IEP committee members include the following:

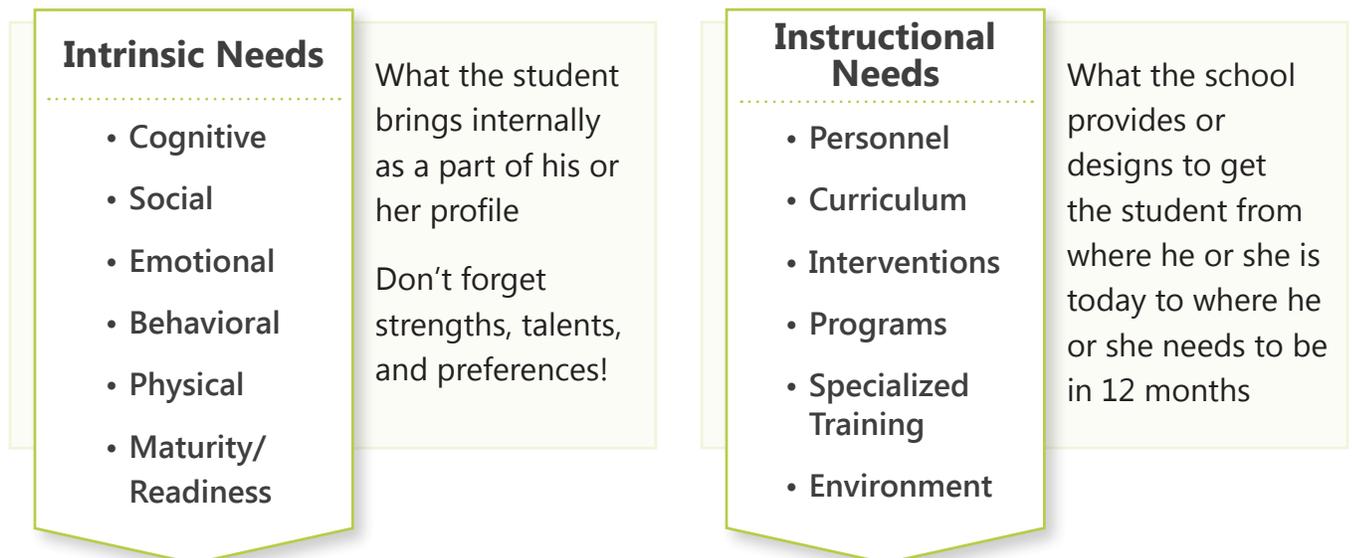
1. Parent/legal guardian or surrogate parent
2. At least one special education teacher or service provider
3. At least one general education teacher
4. School representative or administrator
5. An individual who can interpret instructional implications of evaluation results
6. Student, when appropriate, including when transition services are discussed
7. Other individuals who have knowledge of the student

8. Representatives of any participating agency potentially responsible for providing transition services, as appropriate
9. Others for specific situations, such as a member of the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC), a representative of Career and Technology Education (CTE) when considering CTE classes, or a teacher certified in the education of visual or auditory impairment

## Central Concepts in Special Education: Needs and Data

### Needs

All IEP planning hinges on the concept of the student's individual needs; your child's IEP is designed exclusively for him or her. There are two kinds of student needs: intrinsic and instructional needs. Intrinsic needs are internal to your child, a part of his or her profile (e.g., sensory needs, emotional needs, academic needs, social needs). Instructional needs comprise those things needed in school because of the student's internal profile, such as curriculum, tools, instruction, approaches, specialized staff support, or environmental considerations.



The ARD/IEP committee's charge is to discover and honor the student's intrinsic (internal) needs while designing a program to meet his or her instructional (school-based) needs. On the ARD/IEP committee, the parent's primary role is to advocate that the child's intrinsic needs be known and understood so that the educators can play their primary role, which is to design and implement instruction. Parents and educators play supporting roles for each other: school professionals help the parent to understand the child's internal profile, while parents can help educators with instructional choices by sharing both what has worked historically and goals and hopes for the future.

## Data

Decision-making throughout the special education process is always based on data. This means professionals and ARD/IEP committees must make choices based on facts and research-based strategies, not on fads, unsupported opinions, or emotions. Your child's team will track your child's performance using different instructional strategies so the ARD/IEP committee can tailor instruction to "fit" his or her needs best.

## Why These Concepts Are So Important

Common conflicts between parents and school professionals on teams can be avoided when parents can frame requests and concerns in terms of their child's needs. In addition, educators can more easily explain recommendations or decisions when parents are prepared to learn what the data reveal about their child's performance. Conversely, if parents do not understand the rationale for certain strategies or have concerns about a given approach, they can ask for data. Student performance data generally will reveal whether interventions are working; this information is essential to ongoing IEP planning.



## TIPS

1. There is no "menu" or comprehensive list of special education supports available to all students. Supports are tailored based on an individual child's needs. Just because one child receives a given support does not mean another will or should automatically get that same support. Your child's team may choose or design something for him or her that other students don't need or have. Teams may create something new for a unique situation, as well.
2. To help with communication: Ask for a list of your child's ARD/IEP team members and their contact information. Ask whether there is a particular day of the week your school schedules ARD/IEP Meetings. Ask whom you should contact if you have questions or want to request a meeting.



## COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES

1. When advocating for your child, remember to provide your team with the reasons for your request or concern. Providing the "why" (your reason) behind the "what" (your request) opens up possibilities for your team to respond creatively. Although your school cannot refuse to provide a service or item based on budget constraints (or issue the statement, "we don't do that"), schools are permitted the latitude to approach your request in another way. Sometimes a flat-out refusal indicates the school's inability to provide for the specifics of your request (e.g., a brand-name product, a specific program), but if you reframe your

request to reflect what is important about it, your team can often figure out how to meet the need that you are highlighting.

2. The agenda for an ARD/IEP Meeting follows a required sequence (i.e., evaluation information, eligibility, needs/strengths, goals, other factors, and recommended services.) Suggest your child’s team use a written agenda, visible to all, as a way of tracking where the team is on the agenda.



## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH EDUCATORS

Educators are advocating for you and your child, too. They want students to be successful and for parents to feel supportive of the school. They also want teachers to be acknowledged for their efforts, recognized for their competency and professionalism, and forgiven for human errors that may unintentionally have an effect on the parent-school relationship. Educators want to maximize instructional time available to all students and efficiently and effectively manage meetings so teachers spend more time in the classroom than they do in the conference room.

### WANT MORE INFO?

#### STATE INFORMATION

##### IDEA 2004 Legal Framework

<http://framework.esc18.net/display/Webforms/LandingPage.aspx>

- **Notice of Procedural Safeguards**

- **Special Education Rules & Regulations**

“Side-By-Side” document includes Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), State Board of Education Rules, Commissioner’s Rules, Texas State Laws

- **A Guide to the Admission, Review, and Dismissal Process**

Electronic compilation of all rules and regulations related to special education

#### PARENT-TO-PARENT ADVICE, PERSPECTIVE, AND APPROACH TO SPECIAL EDUCATION

##### Disability Rights Texas

Federally Designated Legal Protection and Advocacy Agency for People with Disabilities in Texas  
[www.disabilityrightstx.org](http://www.disabilityrightstx.org)

##### WrightsLaw

Special education law, education law, and advocacy for children with disabilities.  
[www.wrightsLaw.com](http://www.wrightsLaw.com)

#### NATIONAL INFORMATION

##### U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)

Dedicated to Improving Results for Infants, Toddlers, Children and Youth with Disabilities ages Birth through 21  
[www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/index.html)

##### U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR)

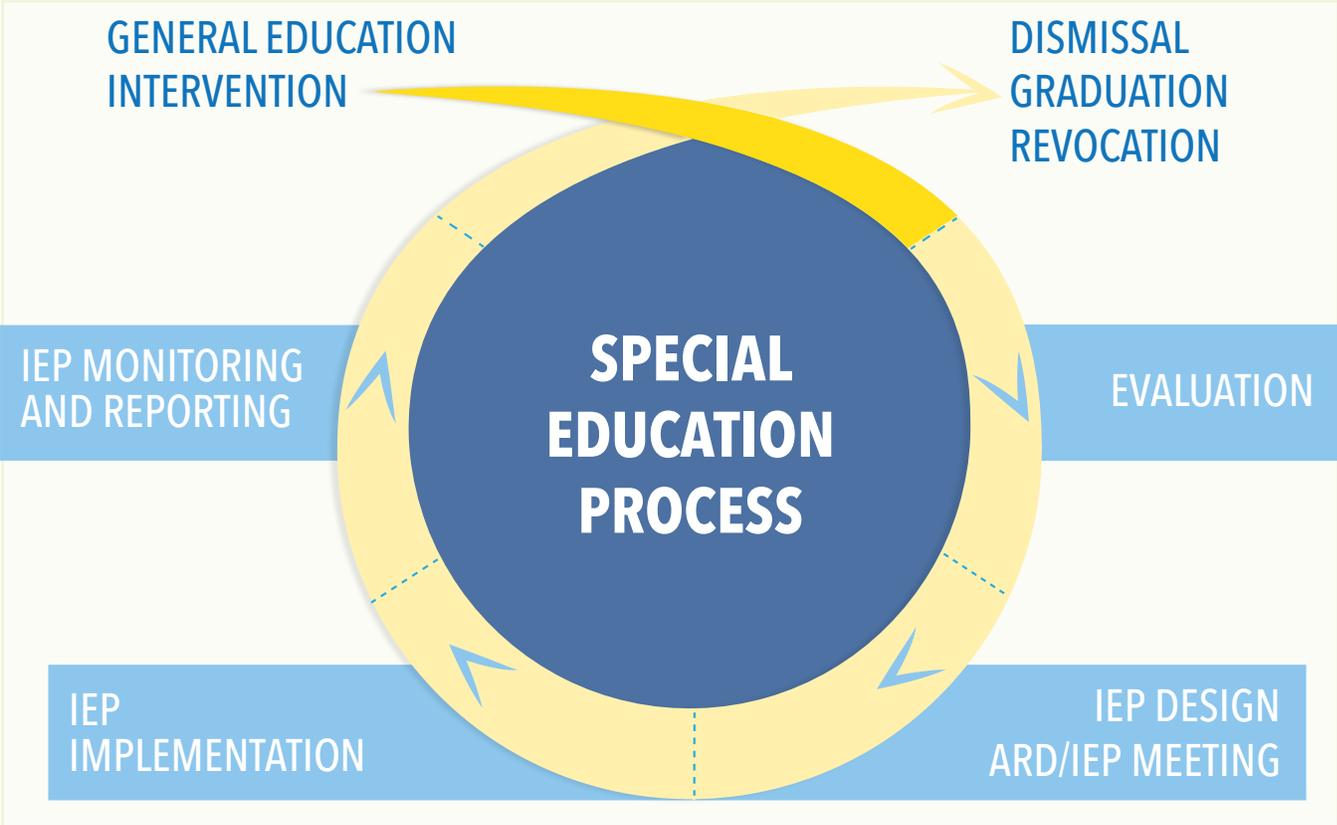
Protecting Students with Disabilities  
[www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html#introduction](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html#introduction)



1.

# General Education:

*Interventions outside, or leading  
up to, special education*

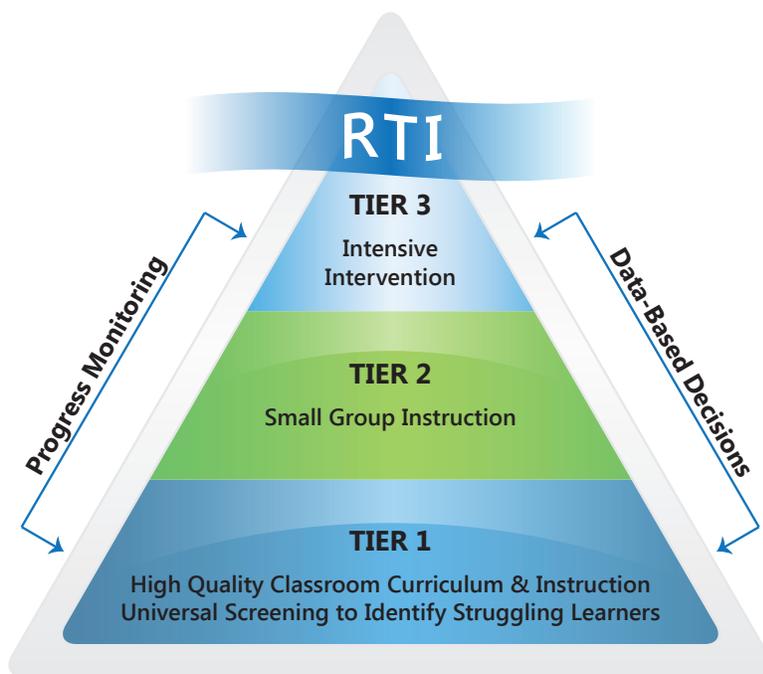


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## BASICS

### Help Available to All Struggling Learners

Students may struggle in school for a variety of reasons, and not solely because of a disability. When a student seems to be struggling with grade-level curriculum, or his or her social, emotional, or behavioral skills don't appear to be developmentally appropriate, the school may take a number of steps to help. The school will attempt to identify the reasons for the student's difficulty, which will help to determine which interventions might be most effective.



Because public schools are required to offer as typical a school experience as possible for each student, interventions are often introduced in order of their complexity. In other words, the school will start first with interventions that create the least amount of disruption in your child's school experience. Early interventions might include things as simple as moving the student's seat in class, providing some quick extra checks for comprehension, or giving visual instructions.

Only after the first level of intervention does not seem to help does the complexity increase. Schools generally will not advance to levels of intervention beyond what the student needs to function alongside his or her peers academically, socially, and behaviorally. Public schools do not add extra interventions "just in case," although there are several different "tiers" of intervention available to students who need them. A student's intervention level should be based on data gathered about his or her performance.

This process is called the RTI (Response to Intervention) process. Schools often have an RTI committee look into concerns about individual students and plan ways to help. Parents or school staff members may refer a student to the RTI committee when they have a concern. If your school does not have a committee for this purpose, you can ask your child's teacher or school counselor about RTI. Your school's committee or interventions may go by another name, but all schools follow this basic system of tiered, research-based intervention, in response to data about what the student needs for age- and grade-level success.

**Q: I’m pretty sure my child has a learning disability. How long does he or she have to follow RTI before we can consider special education support?**

**A:** You may request an evaluation for special education services while your child is receiving RTI. Your child does not have to receive all levels (tiers) of support from RTI before a referral for a special education evaluation can be made, and he or she can continue to receive general education/RTI supports while the evaluation is being conducted. There is no set requirement for how long a student must receive a given intervention; this normally depends on how he or she is doing with a particular approach/intervention.

**What Is a 504 Plan?**

The term “504” is shorthand for Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which mandates equal access to education and prohibits discrimination based on disability. The key feature of Section 504 is that it mandates access to school and not a given level of success. Any agency receiving federal money, including public schools and most colleges and universities, is subject to Section 504.

Section 504’s main emphasis is equal educational opportunity, which is usually accomplished by providing classroom accommodations and equal opportunity to participate in school extracurricular and nonacademic activities.

Section 504’s main emphasis is equal educational opportunity, which is usually accomplished by providing classroom accommodations and equal opportunity to participate in school extracurricular and nonacademic activities.

Accommodations or interventions that might appear in a 504 Plan might also be in place without one. A 504 Plan formalizes accommodations for a student and may be beneficial when the student works with many different adults or is at an age that possibly requires accommodations for a related educational experience, such as for college entrance exams.

A 504 Plan is used only when a student who struggles in school has a documented qualifying disability. Putting a 504 Plan in place may occur as part of the RTI process or it may be developed separately.

**Who Is Eligible for a 504 Plan?**

1. Student with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more **major life activities**; or
2. Student having a record of such an impairment; or
3. Student regarded as having such an impairment.

**Major Life Activities Examples**

- |               |           |
|---------------|-----------|
| Walking       | Seeing    |
| Hearing       | Speaking  |
| Learning      | Working   |
| Concentrating | Thinking  |
| Communicating | Self-Care |

## Referral to Special Education: What Happens If RTI Isn't Enough?

Sometimes a student continues to struggle despite the interventions available under general education/RTI, or a student's disability-related needs are greater than can be addressed by access to the general school experience.

If either situation is true, either the parent or the school may make a referral to special education for evaluation. This is a request for professionals with input from you to evaluate the child to determine whether the presence of a disability affects his or her school performance to the extent that the child requires some kind of specially designed instruction. Specially designed instruction, or special education, usually consists of interventions that go beyond simple accommodations designed for continued access to the general educational experience. It can include modifying or creating curricula, changing the environment in which instruction is delivered, supporting behavior and social skills, and more. Specially designed instruction is specific to the individual student based on his or her unique needs.

### **Q: Does a referral mean that my child is now in special ed?**

**A:** No. At this stage, a referral is only a request to evaluate to gain more information about your child as a learner and to determine whether special education is needed. Special education professionals must obtain your informed, written consent before beginning any assessment. Similarly, parents may request that a child be evaluated for special education, and the school may deny the request. If this happens, the school must provide its reasons for the denial and explain the next steps that are available. This communication must be made in writing within a certain amount of time.

### **Q: How long will a referral take?**

**A:** The school has several weeks (up to 45 school days) from the date it receives your signed, written consent to test and write the evaluation report. After the report has been completed, the team is allowed to take up to a month (up to 30 calendar days) to schedule the IEP/ARD committee meeting, where the formal plan is adopted. After the ARD/IEP meeting, the new plan can go into effect for your child.

### **Q: What if I change my mind and do not want testing for special education services?**

**A:** Consent for initial evaluation is voluntary, and you can revoke consent at any time before the activity (i.e., testing) takes place. However, if you revoke consent for an activity, it is not retroactive. If you refuse consent for testing, school staff members may take additional steps to discuss with you why they want to evaluate your child.

**Q: If my child qualifies for special education, does he or she have to receive those services?**

**A:** No. As a parent, you have the right to decline special education services even if you consent to evaluation and your child is found eligible. Similarly, if your child is receiving special education services, you can revoke your consent at any time, and those services will no longer be provided. If you decide to revoke consent for services, be sure to discuss the consequences with your team beforehand (e.g., removing special education services can have an impact on discipline actions, statewide assessment decisions, graduation plans).



**TIPS**

1. Ask the school professionals for an estimate as to how long the evaluation and report writing will take. Referral for an evaluation or testing is the first step in the process of determining whether your child is eligible to receive special education services. This stage is sometimes frustrating for parents who want special education help for their child sooner than the team can put the required pieces into place. Ways to speed up the process: tell the school if you have previous evaluation results so that tests are not repeated too soon or unnecessarily; ask the school to clarify information requests rather than leaving checklists or questionnaires blank; and tell the school if your child is receiving therapy outside the school so information can be shared.
2. Gather any nonschool information together and be thinking about what will help to describe your child's needs to the school team. Your child's progress in general education intervention programs/RTI becomes a part of the data used in the special education evaluation process. Other information might include reports from outside professionals (if you have them), parent interviews, checklists, teacher reports, and observations from private schools or outside activities.
3. Set up a notebook or filing system for all the information you collect about your child, (e.g., report cards, work samples, your request for evaluation, communications between you and the school, evaluation reports, meeting documents). This can be handy over time as new professionals are introduced to your child. Often a new evaluation person—whether at school or in the community—will request to see previous evaluation information as he or she gets to know your child. You can also use a system to access documents more easily for meetings or to check back on details.



## COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES

1. Provide open, honest information about your concerns or observations, or what another professional may have already brought up. Sometimes, someone at school has the same concern you do, and your speaking up can provide confirmation that some action needs to be taken to help your child. In addition, a different perspective could shed light on how frequently or consistently the concerning event is occurring. Students sometimes present differently in different environments. Either way, being open about information (whether your own or from an outside professional) that suggests a potential problem or strength will help the school to understand your child's overall experience more accurately. This will lead, in turn, to more precise planning on your child's behalf.
2. Listen with an attitude of curiosity. Sometimes, coming into a conversation anticipating what will happen causes us to try to preplan talking points and responses. While preparing for a conversation about your child is important, when you're actually in the conversation, try to listen first and then think about your response. You will still be able to address the points you know ahead of time are important, but by listening with a "blank slate" mindset, you are likely to absorb more accurately the information presented to you by the school.
3. Ask follow-up questions, whether in the moment or they occur to you after a meeting or conversation. Asking follow-up questions allows you to understand the information in as much detail as you need and prevents misunderstandings.

### Ask Questions To:

- **Gain additional information**  
"What progress has Billy made in math?"
- **Solicit facts**  
"What are my child's grades; how many homework assignments has my child turned in?"
- **Solicit opinions and judgments**  
"What do you think led to his actions?"
- **Solicit feelings**  
"How did you feel when that happened? What do you need to say or do (or hear) to move forward?"
- **Confirm your understanding of information**  
"You said you agree with the IEP accommodations. Is that correct?"
- **Invite elaboration**  
"You mentioned you worked with Susie at school on her behavior. Talk about what you have done and how effective it has been."
- **Check reality**  
"If we aren't able to work this out, what impact do you think that will have on my daughter?"



## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH EDUCATORS

It takes time to complete a quality evaluation. Evaluation professionals often spend some time at first getting to know your child and building rapport before beginning the testing. If your child is already in school, the professional likely will work with the classroom teacher to choose testing times that minimize disruption in your child’s day. The evaluations themselves often take hours to complete, and professionals frequently break tests or subtests into smaller chunks and spread them out over a few days to help your child do his or her best on all components. After your child has taken all the tests, the evaluation professionals have to score them, interpret them, and write a report that summarizes the results and makes specific recommendations about whether school-based support might help your child. You can help the process move more quickly by completing and returning all the parent forms ahead of time and by being sure your child is in school on the days his or her assessment is scheduled (understanding that some absences are unavoidable).

While schools are allowed a certain amount of time to complete steps in the process, usually staff members will try to accomplish things as soon as they can get to them. The timetable depends on many things, including the level of complication of your child’s testing needs, the number of other children in the referral process at the same time, the time of year, and more.

### WANT MORE INFO?

#### STATE INFORMATION

##### Response to Intervention (RTI)

Texas Education Agency (TEA)  
<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147500224>

##### Curriculum Programs-Response to Intervention

Texas Education Agency (TEA)  
[www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=5817](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=5817)

##### Section 504

Texas Education Agency (TEA)  
<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147496918>

##### Dyslexia Services

Texas Education Agency (TEA)  
 The Dyslexia Handbook: Procedures Concerning Dyslexia and Related Disorders  
<http://www.region10.org/dyslexia/links/dyslexia-handbook-english/>

#### PARENT-TO-PARENT ADVICE, PERSPECTIVES, AND APPROACH TO SPECIAL EDUCATION

##### Texas Project First

Search for prereferral and referral process  
[www.texasprojectfirst.org](http://www.texasprojectfirst.org)

#### REGIONAL INFORMATION

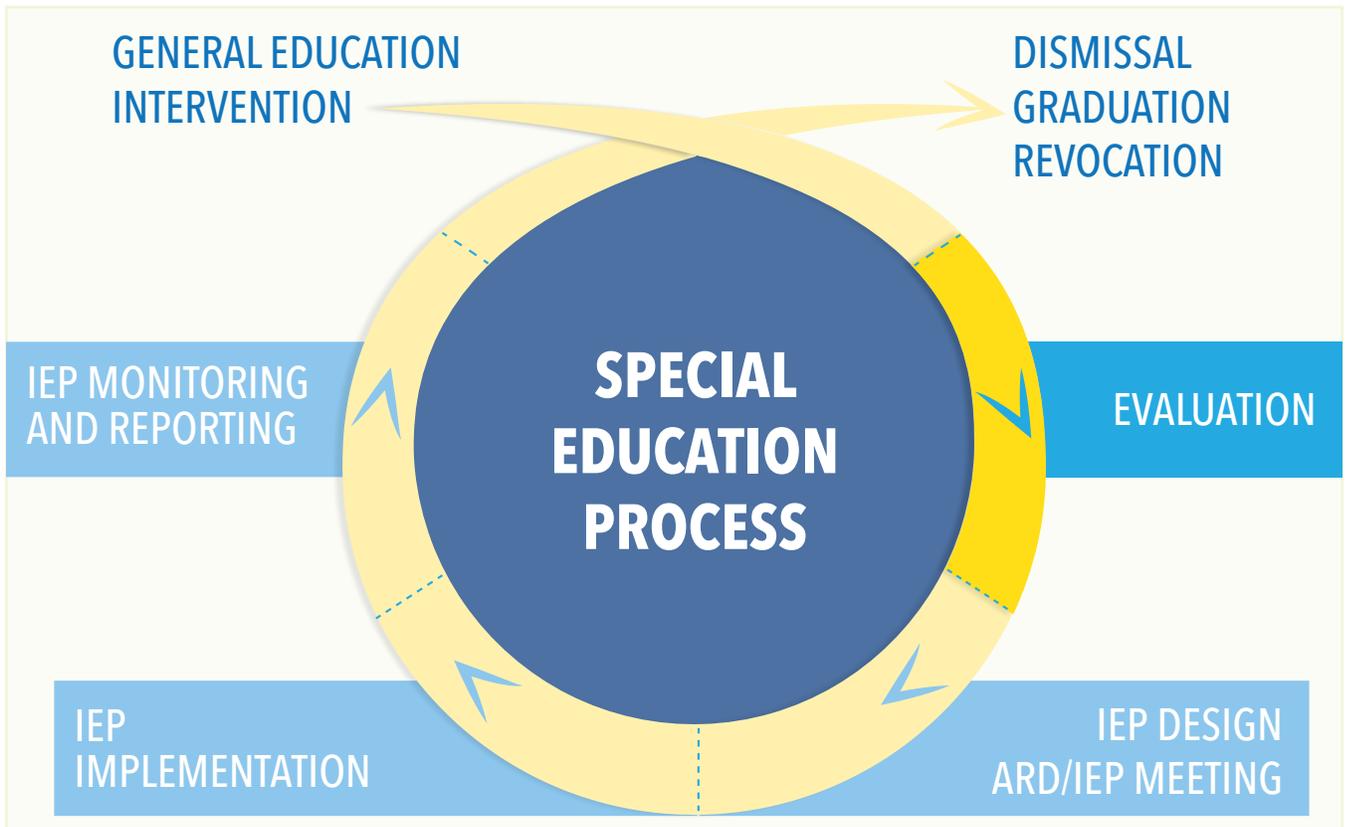
Texas has 20 Regional Education Service Centers (ESCs) which provide training and technical assistance to school districts and charters within their area. To locate the ESC for your school district or charter visit [www.tea.state.tx.us/regional\\_services/esc](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/regional_services/esc)



2.

## **Evaluation:**

*Eligibility determination and  
foundation for planning*



## 123 BASICS

### Components of Every Evaluation

The initial evaluation answers three questions: (1) Does my child have a disability? (2) What is his or her profile as a learner? (3) Does my child need special education and related services? This information is the foundation upon which the IEP is built. Evaluation connects how the child presents intrinsically (internally) with his or her needs in school.

### Making an Evaluation Plan

Evaluation begins with a planning meeting, either as part of an ARD/IEP meeting or as a separate, less formal planning meeting. The evaluation plan includes a review of existing evaluation data (REED). This includes testing or data you may have obtained from private providers. Your school evaluation professional will lead the planning session, and parents are included. The goal of the evaluation plan is to explore the areas of suspected disability and to decide which tests and professionals might be involved in the evaluation process.

### Evaluations by Outside/Nonschool Professionals

Sometimes a student has been evaluated by or sees a professional outside of school (e.g., a doctor, therapist, or other professional). If you have evaluation information from other professionals or agencies when your child is referred to special education, the school will start by conducting a REED with you to determine the scope of evaluation needed. Sometimes schools accept outside evaluations to avoid duplicating data. At other times, the school will want its own version of the outside evaluation or a separate evaluation in addition to what has already been completed. To request confidential information from others, the school must obtain your signed, written consent. All evaluation information is confidential; only people directly involved with your child will see it.

### Informed Consent

The school may not test your child without your signed, written consent after you have had a chance to understand the information about the skills, abilities, and knowledge to be evaluated and the tests or instruments to be used.

## Information That Goes into the Evaluation

A team collects evaluation information and writes an evaluation report. The evaluation may include the following:

- Standardized tests and checklists
- Classroom observations and other general education/RTI data
- Information from parents and teachers
- Report cards and other assessment data

## The Evaluation Team and the Parent's Role

The evaluation plan will determine which and how many professionals team up for testing. Your child's evaluation professionals might be any combination of a licensed specialist in school psychology (LSSP), an educational diagnostician, a speech and language pathologist, a physical or occupational therapist, a teacher certified in visual or auditory impairment, or any number of other related service providers.

Parents have important information to contribute to the evaluation. Usually, there will be a parent interview, checklist, or history to complete. If prior or outside evaluations have been completed, it is usually very helpful for the parent to provide these, as well.

## Requirements

All evaluations must:

- Be in your child's native language or communication mode
- Be completed by trained and knowledgeable personnel
- Use more than one measure or assessment
- Evaluate all areas related to suspected disability
- Be sufficiently comprehensive to identify all of your child's special education and related services needs
- Not be culturally, racially, or sexually discriminatory

## The Evaluation Report

The professionals on your child's evaluation team will collaborate to create a written report of the results of the testing. The report describes your child's strengths and needs, how your child's skills compare with others of the same age or grade level, whether your child has a qualifying disability, and what instructional or related services are recommended to help your child. You will receive a copy of the report, and your team will schedule an ARD/IEP meeting to formally review the new evaluation data. When possible, schedule a conference or phone call with the evaluation professional to review the report prior to the ARD/IEP meeting.

**Q: What if I feel the report is inaccurate or incomplete?**

**A:** You may ask for corrections or amendments to the report. You may also request additional school-based testing or an independent educational evaluation (IEE). An IEE is an assessment by an outside professional paid for by the school. If you decide to request an IEE, the school will provide you information that includes guidance on the selection criteria for the examiner (e.g., credentials, ability to observe your child in school, reasonable financial limits). When making its recommendations, the ARD/IEP team must carefully consider the extent to which it will incorporate the IEE's findings into its own recommendations. The school is also allowed to deny your request for an IEE. In that event, it must take additional steps to show that its evaluation is appropriate.

**Eligibility for Special Education**

After the initial evaluation has been completed, the ARD/IEP committee will meet formally to decide whether your child qualifies for special education services. To be eligible, the student must (1) have a qualifying disability, and (2) as a result of this disability, require special education services to benefit from his or her public school education. The evaluation, the Full Individual Evaluation (FIE), is the basis for eligibility.

**The following are the recognized eligibility categories in Texas:**

- Auditory Impairment (AI)
- Autism (AU)
- Deaf/Blindness (DB)
- Emotional Disturbance (ED)
- Intellectual Disability (ID)
- Multiple Disabilities (MD)
- Noncategorical Early Childhood: for students ages 3-5
- Orthopedic Impairment (OI)
- Other Health Impairment (OHI): includes medical condition that a doctor might diagnose such as Attention Deficit Disorders.
- Specific Learning Disability (LD)
- Speech Impairment (SI)
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Visual Impairment (VI)

A medical diagnosis and an eligibility category under special education laws are not necessarily the same. Part of determining eligibility includes deciding which special education eligibility category a diagnosis may fit into, if any.

### Differences between Medical Diagnosis and Determination of a Disability Condition for Education

#### Medical Diagnosis

Made by a physician based on an assessment of symptoms and diagnostic tests

Based on *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)* criteria

Allows extensive number of medical conditions to be considered

May or may not consider learning problems within the educational setting

Prescribes medical treatment to maximize recovery

#### Educational Determination of Disability

Determined by a multidisciplinary team (MDT) composed of school professionals, parents, and when appropriate, the student

Based on federal and state laws and regulations

Allows only 13 disability categories to be considered

Considers a medical diagnosis, along with other sources of data, in relation to learning problems and behaviors displayed in the educational setting

Recommends services to enable the child to access the general curriculum to the extent possible

#### **Q: My doctor has already diagnosed my child. Is this enough to qualify him or her for special education services?**

**A:** No. The disability categories recognized by the special education law are not the same as specific medical, psychiatric, or psychological diagnoses. Although most conditions or diagnoses fit into one of the special education eligibility categories, a school evaluation has to confirm the presence of a qualifying disability and determine its impact on your child's school experience. For this reason, a doctor's or other professional's diagnosis does not automatically qualify a student for special education services, even if it is in writing or in the form of a report or prescription.

#### **Q: What if my child qualifies for special education but I decide I don't want him or her to receive services?**

**A:** Special education and related services may not be provided without your consent. The written consent you gave to have your child evaluated does not extend to receiving services. If the ARD/IEP Committee finds your child eligible for services, but you do not give consent, your child will not receive special education services.

## Different Evaluations for Different Stages of the ARD/IEP Process

Evaluation is a repeating component of the ARD/IEP process. In addition to determining or confirming eligibility for special education, an evaluation also drives your child’s programming needs and IEP development. Informal measures, such as class work, teacher reports, and information from home, also go into the “snapshot” of your child that evaluation provides.

### The Initial/Full Individual Evaluation (FIE)

The first assessment that takes place as a result of referral to special education is called the “initial evaluation.” This evaluation assesses your child in all areas of suspected disability and lays the groundwork for the ARD/IEP committee to determine your child’s eligibility for services. The initial evaluation also sets the first baseline for special education programming and monitoring of progress moving forward.

### The “Three-Year Reeval”

Under the law, your child must be reevaluated at least every three years. The purpose of the reevaluation is (1) to determine whether your child continues to be eligible for special education, and (2) to take a fresh look at your child’s educational needs. The ARD/IEP committee or evaluation planning team reviews existing records and data and decides whether additional evaluations are needed. Parents are part of the planning team.

After reviewing the records, the committee may decide no new evaluations are needed and your child continues to qualify for special education services. Or, the team may decide a reevaluation is needed, in which case the planning team will determine which specific assessments are needed. The plan may include new evaluation in all areas, only in those areas in need of updating, or in new areas that haven’t been assessed before.

The evaluation team must obtain your written consent to reevaluate (unless the school can show that it took reasonable measures to get your consent and you did not respond).

### **Q: My team tells me updated testing is not needed. Should I agree?**

**A:** Sometimes the ARD/IEP committee believes there is enough information available to determine the student’s current educational needs without further formal testing. It is permissible to not update formal assessment as long as the team (including parents) believes no significant new information will be generated by it. The team continues to assess your child’s progress throughout the year. If the information generated from ongoing progress monitoring is sufficient to give an updated picture of your child’s strengths and needs, and for the team to continue planning, you do not have to do formal evaluation, even at the three-year mark. You may request a reevaluation even if the school determines that no additional testing is needed.

## Other Situations When Evaluation Might Be Warranted

Evaluation is required even if between the required three-year intervals (1) when the student is being considered for dismissal from special education or a specific service (e.g., speech therapy, counseling, other related services) and (2) when the student is graduating under certain graduation options.

In addition, evaluation may be appropriate (and parents or the school may request it) when additional information may shed light on new or changed circumstances or needs. In this case, this does not have to include a repeat of assessments that have been completed in the past; new or as-needed evaluation might be performed only in the specific area of change or to gather new information.



### TIPS

1. The evaluation planning meeting or discussion is a good time to ask any questions you may have about your child's needs during the testing experience (e.g., if he or she needs testing to be attempted in small chunks, with a known adult, etc.).
2. A private evaluation sometimes will produce different results or recommendations than will a school-based evaluation. This is because the school evaluation looks specifically at how your child's disability affects his or her profile as a learner and his or her school experience. This is narrower than the perspective of a private evaluator, who is likely assessing the impact of the child's disability on life both in and out of school. A school-based evaluation looks at the student's educational needs. This does not negate other needs that might be revealed by an outside professional, but the recommendations in the school-based evaluation will be tailored closely to the purposes of furthering the student's education.
3. For your student to be eligible for special education, he or she must have a documented qualifying disability. Beyond the determination of disability for eligibility purposes, the true value of an evaluation is in the description of your child's profile as a learner. His or her IEP should be based on unique needs and not on diagnosis. For example, if a child has a need that doesn't seem typical for a given diagnosis, special education usually will still address that need without the requirement of an additional label. By the same token, a child with a given diagnosis may not have an educational need for specialized support in areas that other children with the same condition do. Even within a diagnostic category, each student still has an individual profile of strengths and needs. Special education programming is based on the student's unique needs and not on a label.

4. Clarify, as needed, any information in the report that you feel could be expressed more accurately. This is especially important in the social history section, where evaluation professionals depend on parents' descriptions.
5. Ask your team whether there is a form for your doctor to complete. Medical professionals sometimes submit diagnostic information in the form of notes or prescriptions; schools usually require medical information to be presented on a specific form so that required information is available to the team.



## COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES

Try to provide information as completely as you can for your child's school evaluation team. Accurate and complete information allows the team to create the most precise individualized plan possible for your child. For a number of reasons, parents sometimes hesitate to report the depth of their concerns or feel reluctant to share certain types of information. Remember that your child's confidentiality is protected by state and federal law; your team—and ultimately, your child—will benefit from having access to the full picture.



## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH EDUCATORS

1. Withholding information can have the unintended consequence of creating a lack of trust on your school team. While parents usually have a positive intention in withholding information or concerns, teachers become frustrated when they perceive that they could have served a child more appropriately had they had access to complete information. Regardless of the parents' true intentions, this frustration on the part of professionals sometimes accompanies a sense of being misled. Though inaccurate, this assumption can erode trust among the adults and frustrate the professionals when the student is perceived to pay the price.
2. ARD/IEP team members want the best evaluation information available and carefully consider an Independent Education Evaluation (IEE). Quality IEEs include information from your child's current teachers and therapists as well as data from classroom observations. The omission of this essential information may prompt the team to have reservations about the IEE and its recommendations. More often, a quality IEE contributes meaningful information that allows the team to plan more precisely for the student.

3. Arriving at the conclusion that a child has a given diagnosis can be delicate for all involved. Educators are reluctant to label a condition or disability too early. They also recognize that an accurate label helps professionals who work with the child, in that a diagnosis can provide a baseline understanding about the child's profile. At the same time, most educators are aware of parental sensitivity around labels and sometimes will not broach a conversation about a new or different diagnosis if they fear upsetting the parent, even when they believe it is appropriate. Evaluation professionals also have an ethical obligation to describe accurately what they observe. Occasionally, a diagnosis may prompt the need to obtain outside or community-based services. Educators often are motivated by concern for the students, having access to all the support possible when they approach parents with a conversation about labels or eligibility categories.

## WANT MORE INFO?

### STATE INFORMATION

#### IDEA 2004 Legal Framework

<http://framework.esc18.net/display/Webforms/LandingPage.aspx>

- **Notice of Procedural Safeguards**
- **Special Education Rules & Regulations**  
“Side-By-Side” document includes  
Individuals with Disabilities Education Action  
(IDEA), State Board of Education Rules,  
Commissioner's Rules, Texas State Laws

#### A Guide to the Admission, Review, and Dismissal Process

Electronic compilation of all rules and regulations related to special education  
[framework.esc18.net/display/Webforms/LandingPage.aspx](http://framework.esc18.net/display/Webforms/LandingPage.aspx)

#### Project IDEAL Online Informing and Designing Education for All Learners

Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities  
Explore the Disability Categories module  
[www.projectidealonline.org/](http://www.projectidealonline.org/)

### PARENT-TO-PARENT ADVICE, PERSPECTIVE, AND APPROACH TO SPECIAL EDUCATION

#### Texas Project First

Search for evaluation procedures, evaluation rights-overview, special education eligibility rules  
<http://texasprojectfirst.org>

### NATIONAL INFORMATION

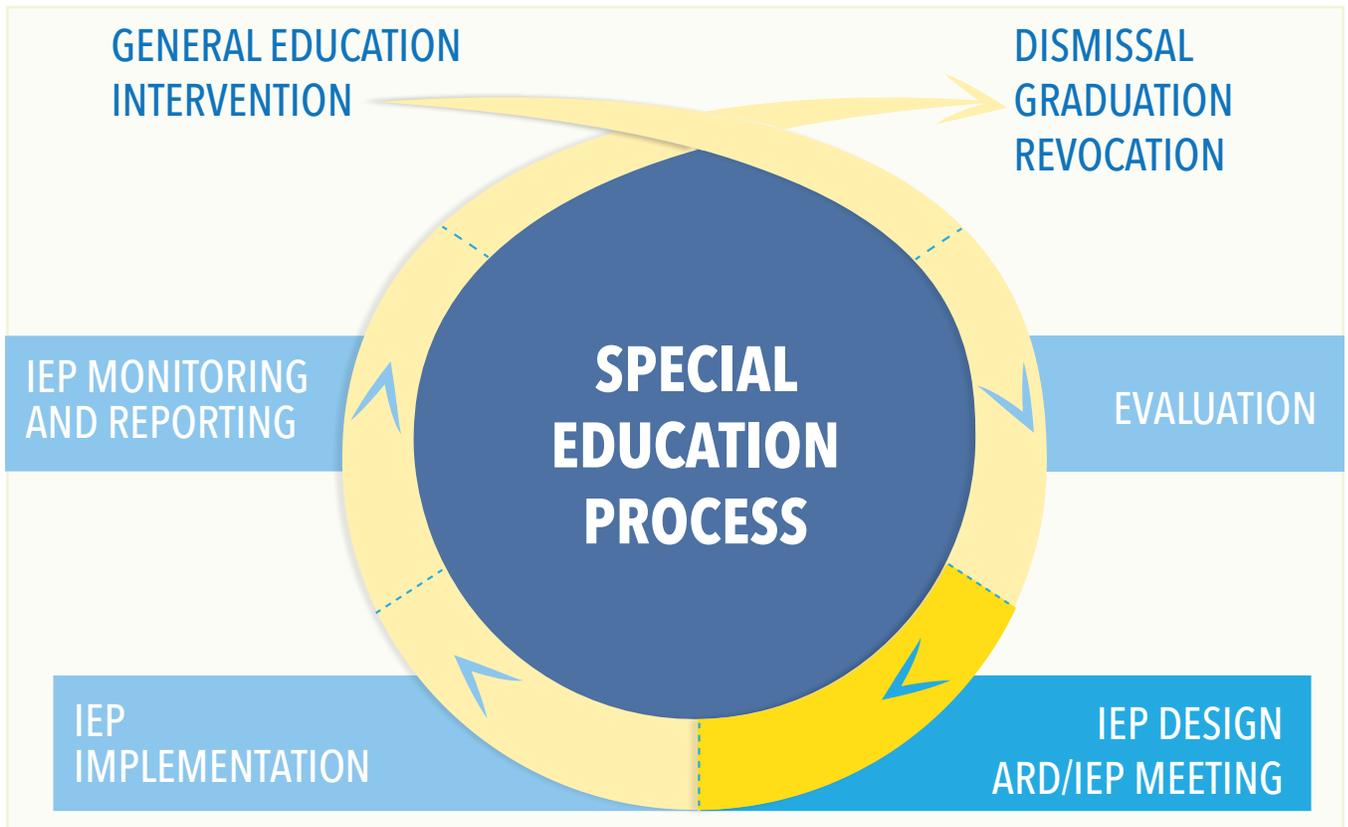
#### U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)

Dedicated to Improving Results for Infants, Toddlers, Children and Youth with Disabilities ages Birth through 21  
[www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/index.html)  
Click on Parents and Families and Parent and Family Involvement Topics

3.

## **Individualized Education Program (IEP):**

*Plan for instruction and related  
services*



## 123 BASICS

### What Is the IEP?

Once your child is eligible for special education services, the ARD/IEP committee decides which services are needed and develops an IEP (Individualized Education Program). The IEP describes the specific services and support your child needs and the school will provide. It is a written plan that guides all the specialized aspects of your child’s instructional day and school experience, and it functions like a contract.

The IEP is a complex document. There are many components, and every IEP is customized to the child and the situation. Therefore, most IEPs require substantial preparation before they’re ready to be put in place formally. Even experienced parents and educators sometimes struggle with the details of the IEP because each child has individual needs and there are many technical requirements for documenting the ARD/IEP process and plans. In Texas, the IEP is woven throughout a larger document, the ARD Committee Report. For the purposes of this handbook, we use the term IEP to refer to the entire document, as it reflects the entire program individually designed for your child.

#### The IEP answers two main questions:

- What does the child need to learn or do academically?
- What does the child need to learn or do functionally?

School districts use different commercial computer programs to generate ARD/IEP paperwork. This means that your child’s IEP may look different in one school district than that in another—or, if your district changes to a new product, the IEP may look different from one year to another. However, the contents of the IEP are set by federal law, so regardless of the format, if you understand which components to expect, you’ll find them more easily in the paperwork.

#### Q: How long does an IEP last?

**A:** At the longest, 12 months. The IEP contains goals or targets for your child’s performance in identified areas for one year from when the program is put in place. Sometimes parts of a student’s program are designed to last for a shorter amount of time (e.g., if the length of a class is shorter than a year or when shorter-term objectives are included). Also, changes may be made to a student’s IEP at any point if the need arises, so some IEPs originally designed to last a full year are updated or altered sooner. If the student’s progress has gone as predicted and no changes are needed throughout the year, a new IEP must be put in place before the 12-month “due date” arrives.

## Basic Components of Every IEP

### Eligibility/Evaluation

The IEP contains a statement of the student’s eligibility for special education (the category of his or her diagnosis and the need for special education), as well as sections detailing the evaluations completed and when the next reevaluation is due. Eligibility information is usually near the beginning of the document. Information from the Full Individual Evaluation (FIE) and other data are the basis for recommendations throughout the ARD/IEP.

### PLAAFPs (Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance)

A PLAAFP describes what your child can do now or at what level your child is performing in a particular area (e.g., math, social skills, career exploration). PLAAFP statements can be located in various places in the IEP. Often, you will find specific PLAAFPs just before the IEP goal that is meant to strengthen that particular academic or functional skill. The PLAAFP data become the baseline of where to start when implementing an IEP goal.

PLAAFPs describe current performance and behaviors in measurable ways. PLAAFPs should not consist only of grade or age levels or standard scores. They should not be subjective or framed too generally (e.g., the student is good/bad at something, “has difficulty,” “is a pleasure”).

#### PLAAFP is the Cornerstone or Foundation of the IEP

##### PLAAFP:

- Based on current information from a variety of sources
- Spotlights the area of need (academic and/or functional)
- Focuses instructional support
- Describes CURRENT performance in measurable terms
- Provides baseline data to measure progress and starting place for instruction

## **Goals and Objectives**

Goals and objectives are the heart of the IEP, for this is where the specially designed instruction is found. A goal is designed for a specific skill or competency and is meant to develop the skill from where it is today (the PLAAFP) to where one would like to see it in a year. Goals take into account overall targets for students, such as functioning within a grade-level curriculum, engaging in socially appropriate play, developing independent living skills, self-advocating, managing emotions, and more. They specify the next steps or priority areas that the student must master to reach the ultimate target. Shorter-term objectives, or benchmarks, are smaller steps leading up to reaching an IEP goal. Objectives are not required, except in certain situations, but they can be useful for progress monitoring if the ARD/IEP team chooses to put them in.

Goals and objectives must be measurable. This means they should clearly state how the team will know whether the student is progressing toward the goal or has mastered the goal. Well-constructed goals contain action words and connect back to the PLAAFP. They specify the student behavior or action the team is looking for (e.g., reading, greeting, completing a task). A good goal also contains mastery criteria. This refers to the kind of measurement to be used (e.g., accuracy, frequency, or duration) and at what level the team will consider the goal mastered (e.g., 75% accuracy, four of five opportunities, 15 minutes).

### **Q: If my child is in general education all day, do we still have to have goals?**

**A:** Yes. All students who receive special education services have at least one measurable annual goal. The committee must develop the goals from an area of need addressed in your child's PLAAFP that affects his or her ability to access or make progress in the general curriculum. The goals must clearly define the specially designed instruction that your child will receive.

Example: "By the end of the fall semester, with direct instruction on organizational skills, Johnny will log home work, projects, and test dates in his student planner 90% of opportunities." This reflects the specially designed instruction the student needs to pass or perform in the class.

Nonexample: "Johnny will pass the general education class with a grade of at least 70." This does not reflect specially designed instruction.

#### **One Way to Look at Writing Goals:**

The 6 Ws: By When? Who? What? How Well? Under What Conditions?

### Annual Measurable Goal:

- The goal is based on your child's present level of academic or functional performance (PLAAFP).
- The goal is written to project growth/progress over the next 12 months or less if short-term objectives or benchmarks are included.
- The goal may include what resources or supports your child needs.
- The goal must identify an action or what we want your child to achieve.
- The goal must include a way to measure how your child is doing on the specific academic area or skill or behavior.

### Components of a Standard-Based IEP

**Timeframe, Conditions, Behavior (Performance or Skill), and Criterion**

#### Amount of Time:

Number of weeks or completion date

#### Resources or Supports:

With graphic organizer, physical prompts

#### Action that can be measured:

Points to, reads, writes

#### Amount of Growth Expected:

How much, how often, or what standard to demonstrate progress:  
**Speed, Latency, Accuracy, Frequency, Duration**

**Speed** = rate at which the skill or behavior is being performed within a set time

Examples: reading fluency, math probes, work completion

**Latency** = the length of time it takes for a student to respond

Examples: time to sit down, to begin reading, to start work

**Accuracy** = how well a student performed a specific behavior or skill

Examples: number of words read correctly, percentage of math problems answered correctly

**Frequency** = how often a behavior occurs

Examples: Number of misspellings on final draft, talking out, attempts to turn in homework

**Duration** = how long a behavior lasts

Examples: length of on-task or off-task behavior

## **Schedule of Services**

The ARD/IEP document will specify which classes your child will take, including grade level and content. It will identify which classes are general education classes and which, if any, are special education classes. If an IEP spans two different school years (most do), you will likely find two different schedules: one for this year's grade level and one for the part of the next school year until the ARD/IEP's due date.

## **Placement in the Student's LRE (Least Restrictive Environment)**

A statement is included in the ARD report/ IEP document about your child's placement in his or her Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). "Least restrictive" means the most mainstream, or as typical as possible and appropriate for the student. To determine a student's LRE, the ARD/IEP team first looks at where the student accesses curriculum, what his or her goals are, and what supports he or she needs for success. Then, the team decides which learning environment is appropriate to deliver the student's needed curriculum and support. The ARD/IEP committee is required to consider general education placements with necessary supports first before justifying something outside of or different from (i.e., more restrictive) what the typical student placement would be.

LRE also includes the campus that would be the typical placement for your child. Schools must provide your child's education as close to your home as possible and, if possible, at the school your child would attend if he or she did not have a disability.

## **State Assessment**

The ARD/IEP document includes a section that describes which state assessment your child will take if his or her grade level has required subjects for testing. The state assessment your child takes corresponds to where he or she accesses the curriculum and the specially designed instruction he or she is receiving. All students must participate in state assessment, but in some situations, the ARD/IEP committee has the discretion to waive passing as a requirement. Depending on the student's graduation plan and other factors, some students must both participate and pass.

## **Prior Written Notice**

After the ARD meeting, the school will give you a summary of the decisions made in the meeting and actions to be taken by the school. This is called Prior Written Notice (PWN), because it gives you written notice of actions to be taken before they actually go into effect. The new plan may not be implemented for five school days after you receive the PWN. This is to ensure that parents have time to understand and think about the decisions made in the ARD/IEP meeting.

You have the right to waive this five-day waiting period, and your team can begin implementing your child's new program the next school day after the ARD/IEP meeting. The IEP will reflect the waiver of the five days if you elect it.

## **Other Mandatory IEP Components**

When certain special factors are present, other components of the IEP become mandatory. Examples include planning for visual or auditory impairment services or for a student with autism, specific assistive technology or communication needs, or behavior plan.

## **Transition Planning**

Transition planning refers to postsecondary goal setting and planning for the student's life after high school. In Texas, this is a mandatory part of the special education process for all students beginning at age 14 (nationally, age 16). The first step in transition planning is identifying the student's strengths, preferences, interests, and needs, including needs for family, community, or agency support in the future. The next step is to design postsecondary goals, which become the targets for current IEP planning and goal design. This process may be documented in supplements to the ARD/IEP paperwork. References to transition and future planning are often found in other places in the ARD/IEP paperwork.

Although formal documentation of the transition planning process is not required for students under age 14, it is never too early for parents and professionals to think about and discuss the relationship between the student's current IEP and student and family goals for life in the adult world. Key areas to think about include independence, self-advocacy and self-determination, postsecondary education and employment, social life, and mental health.

## **As-Needed IEP Components**

### **Related Services**

Related services are supportive services that a student may need to benefit from special education. Common related services include assistive technology, occupational therapy, psychological services, physical therapy, and special transportation. Related services cannot stand alone as the only special education service provided.

### **Q: Why do some children receive speech therapy and no other service?**

**A:** In Texas, speech services can be considered stand-alone special education instruction. If you are coming from another state, you may have seen speech therapy listed as a related service. In your child's Texas IEP, you will find speech therapy in the instructional section of the schedule of services and not in the related services section of the ARD/IEP document.



## TIPS

1. Ask for a “Pre-ARD.” This is an informal planning meeting that can also take the form of phone calls, e-mail exchange, or a combination of both, for the same purpose. At a pre-ARD meeting, or during the pre-ARD process, your team can offer you its ideas for proposed services and supports as well as draft goals. This is a good time for you to provide your input on past progress and the development of the next plan.
2. When you make notes to prepare for a pre-ARD discussion, include all topics that you wish to cover and decide which of those have a higher priority than others.
3. Find time to talk to individual teachers or service providers contributing to draft IEPs because they may not all be at the ARD/IEP meeting.
4. Consider the potential benefits and downsides of services that take your child away from the general education classroom. More services may mean that your child spends less time with his or her peers. This requires a careful balancing of priorities so that all of your child’s needs are appropriately met. Consider a variety of different ways and times for integrating services into your child’s program to strike the right balance.
5. A student may be placed in different environments throughout the day, depending on his or her strengths and needs.

Example: a student whose disability creates the need for a modified curriculum in English and specially designed instruction in social skills is also working at grade level in math. This student’s IEP might place him or her in a general education math class and a special education English class, and could specify that he or she is working on his or her social skills goals across environments.

6. Services and placement are based on your child’s needs, as described in the IEP, and not on a diagnosis or program title. Your child cannot be placed in a specific class simply because of a type of disability, nor can he or she be placed automatically in a separate or more restrictive environment simply because he or she requires a modified curriculum. Special education is a service, not a place.

**Ask for a draft of the IEP prior to the meeting.**

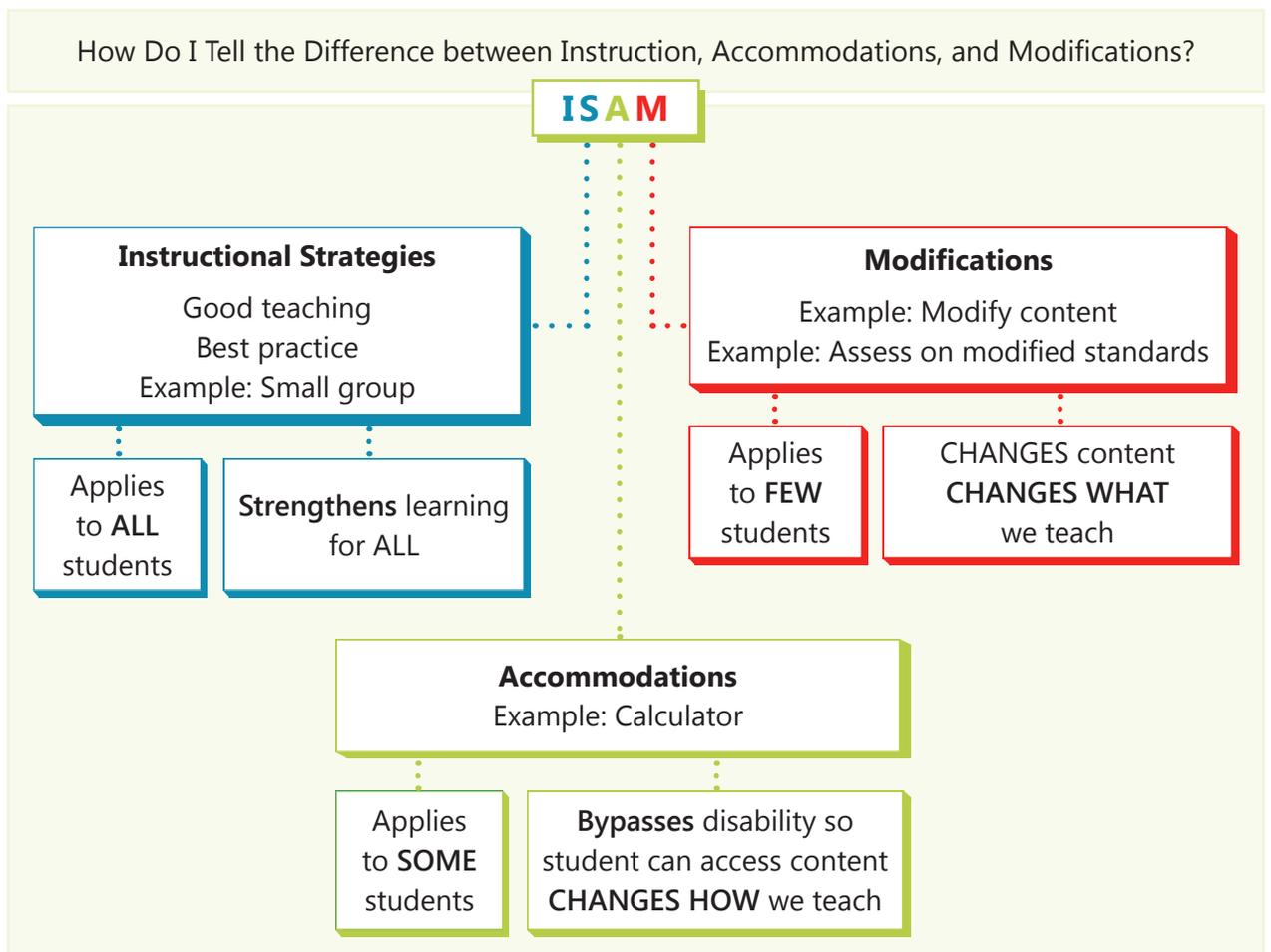
7. Know the difference between accommodations and modifications. Though many experienced parents and professionals use these terms interchangeably, accommodations and modifications are different from one another!

An **accommodation** is a tool that provides equal access to students. It is intended to bypass or help the student work around the effects of his or her disability but does not reduce learning expectations. Accommodations often indicate *how* something is taught.

Example: Large print might be used to accommodate a student’s visual impairment while his or her learning expectation does not differ from that of other students.

A **modification** changes the nature of the task or target skill by changing or reducing the concept to be learned. Modifications often indicate *what* is being taught.

Example: In a science class where the grade-level curriculum requires students to describe the function of the parts of a plant, a modification might set the learning expectation for a student with the IEP at identifying the parts without describing the function. Or, where grade-level curriculum might provide for 10 vocabulary words in a unit of study, a modified curriculum might provide for five.





## COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES

1. Frame requests for instructional needs (such as specialized staff, methodology, curriculum, supplies, or equipment) in terms of your child's characteristics and not by name. This allows your child's team the flexibility to think creatively about how to craft a plan that is responsive to his or her unique needs. When parents make a specific teacher request or advocate for a particular brand of item, it sometimes puts the school in the position of having to say no, not because staff members can't meet the need but because they cannot deliver the specificity. If your child's team denies a request that you are making, ask yourself whether you can reframe it to describe its characteristics or importance; your team may be able to address the need with a solution you haven't thought of.
2. Don't forget to talk about the positive. IEP planning naturally addresses your child's deficits, but it also should include discussion of his or her strengths and victories. This provides important information to the team in designing strategies. Equally important, recognizing your child's strides and crediting team members for their roles provides needed encouragement. Talk about natural strengths, positive progress, and strategies and people who have made a difference.
3. Adopt a "menu" approach to generating ideas for how to address needs. This means that you may have one solution while others on the team have different or contradictory solutions. Remain open (and encourage the team) to first allow all suggestions into the discussion to generate a variety, or menu of options. Initially, resist the desire to judge or reject a suggestion (and encourage your teammates to do the same). Don't risk shutting down brainstorming when a mutually agreeable solution could be right around the corner. Just as when dealing with a restaurant menu, the team probably will not select every item on the list. Some options may be less feasible than others, research may support one item more definitively than another, or a teacher may have more experience with one strategy. Even putting off addressing the need or waiting for maturity to kick in could be viable options. Remaining open to multiple ways of addressing a need allows for more creativity and individualization in the planning process.

### Menu of Options

- Options address needs from a variety of ways or viewpoints.
- Invent first; evaluate later.
- Expand the menu; include wild ideas.
- There probably are options that you haven't thought of.
- All players contribute.



## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH EDUCATORS

1. Your child will learn and be exposed to more than what appears in the IEP. Teachers still teach the course curriculum *in addition* to whatever is in your student's IEP. Although an IEP should consider the student as a whole child, and all of his or her disability-related needs should be addressed, the IEP is not meant to set forth every topic and skill the child will learn during the year. In IEP design, it is important to balance the child's specialized needs (which should be addressed) with not making the IEP so cumbersome that the student has no time to cover regular group lessons, games, breaks, spontaneous "teachable moments," and other experiences that make up a typical school day. The goal is to prioritize the contents of your child's IEP so that it allows him or her access to the larger school curriculum and experience.
2. Don't get bogged down in the technicality of drafting IEP goals—this is the professionals' job. *Do* be sure that goals address or feed into your child's bigger-picture needs, and *do* check to be sure that you understand the function of each component in each goal (time frame, conditions, desired behavior, and mastery criteria). If you do not understand why a teacher has selected or eliminated a goal or component, ask about his or her reasoning.

Sample questions:

- "What are we trying to accomplish?"
- "What makes this goal preferable?"
- "How is this condition more or less important than another?"
- "What's important about this mastery criterion?"

Exercise caution when looking at generic IEP goals that you might find on the Internet; aspects of them may not fit your child individually.

3. Educators share parents' desire for students to be included in typical school life as well as the ultimate goal of preparing them for adult life in the "real world." Tension can arise when these two goals conflict with each other, which sometimes happens when a student needs to learn skills or curriculum that will strengthen his or her future independence but that are not a part of the general education curriculum for that grade or developmental level. Situations in which a student needs instruction in a special education setting call for careful conversations about what the student stands to gain and lose in all proposed settings.

It is important to consider:

- The extent to which inclusion is meaningful for your child (in other words, is he or she gaining something, academic or otherwise, by placement in a less restrictive or less specialized environment?)
- Whether the gains made in a more specialized or restrictive environment will pay off in greater independence and integration in the long run
- Which set of gains outweighs the other (the gains of inclusion vs. specialized skill development that builds greater long-term independence and inclusion)

These are not easy questions, and the right answer may shift over time and across situations. Thoughtful, honest conversation with school professionals often reveals that other team members feel the same conflict as parents do about how to achieve the right balance.

## **WANT MORE INFO?**

### **STATE INFORMATION**

#### **Standards-Based IEP Development**

Texas Education Agency (TEA)

<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147494485>

### **PARENT-TO-PARENT ADVICE, PERSPECTIVE, AND APPROACH TO SPECIAL EDUCATION**

#### **Texas Project First**

Search for Individual Education Program (IEP)

<http://texasprojectfirst.org>

### **REGIONAL INFORMATION**

#### **IEP Development**

Education Service Center Region 20

Step-by-step directions to free online course

<http://portal.esc20.net/portal/page/portal/doclibraryroot/publicpages/SpecialEducation/AGC/PDFs/SBIEP-RegProcess.pdf>

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#### **Students with Autism Information & Services**

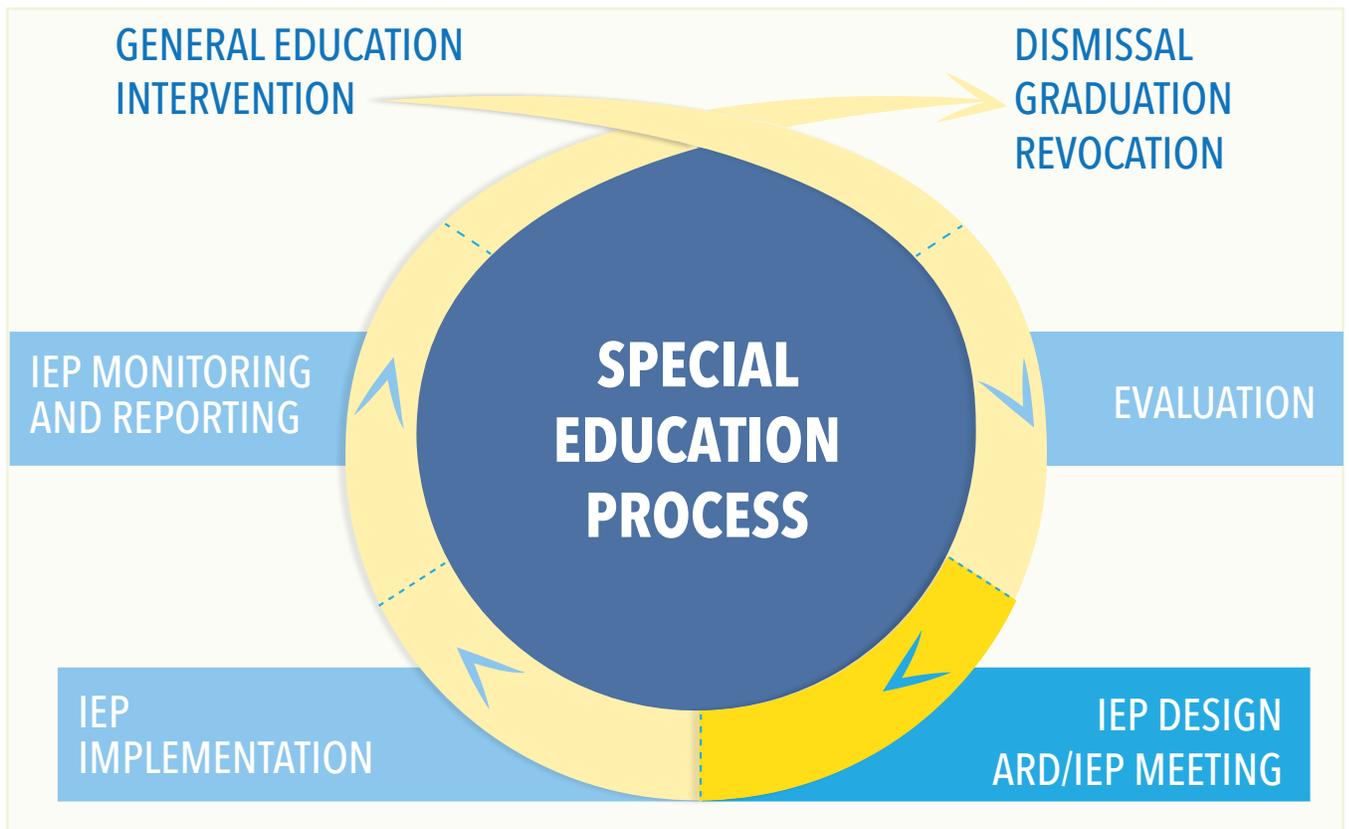
Education Service Center Region 13

<http://www4.esc13.net/autism/workshops/online-workshops/>

# 4.

## **Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD)/ IEP Meeting:**

*Development and adoption  
of the plan*



## 123 BASICS

### What Is an ARD/IEP Meeting, and How Is It Different from Other Meetings?

Special education services cannot begin until the ARD/IEP committee formally adopts the plan—this happens in an ARD/IEP meeting. In Texas, this meeting is often referred to as “the ARD” (all ARD/IEP meetings are run for purposes of admission, review, or dismissal). The ARD/IEP document is the written summary of the plan that you and the team have developed for your child’s special education services for the next 12 months. The IEP contains all the work done to prepare for your child’s special education support, plus the goals that your child and his or her team will be working on all year. It is the foundation of your child’s special education services and has the formality of—and functions like—a contract.

Because of its formality and legal force (you can hold the school accountable for commitments made in the IEP), the meeting where the IEP is formally adopted has some features that are not usually characteristic of a meeting you would have with teachers and other staff at your child’s school. If you can imagine a meeting where formal documents are being signed to put an agreement in place (such as a house closing), then the ARD/IEP meeting might seem similar.

The law creates some requirements for the meeting, such as minimum required attendees and topics to be covered. The meeting also has some built-in features to ensure your rights as a parent are protected and you are able to participate meaningfully in developing the plan for your child. The ARD/IEP meeting marks an important shift in the process as the bridge between the planning period and the beginning of implementation. It adopts a legally binding set of information and agreements about your child’s intrinsic and instructional needs. As such, this meeting has a formal feel and a procedure-driven agenda.

#### **Q: What happens before the meeting?**

**A:** A lot of good planning happens prior to the ARD/IEP meeting during the pre-ARD process. You might have a less formal, more typical meeting with your teacher or related service providers for planning. Often, this informal planning meeting is called a “**Pre-ARD.**” It can also take the form of phone calls, e-mail exchange, or a combination of both. At this stage, it is a good idea for your team to provide you with a list of draft goals and ideas for proposed services and supports. This is also a good time for you to provide your input on past progress and the development of the next plan.

**Q: Why can't we just implement the plan as soon as we have our ideas together?**

**A:** No matter how rich and thorough the pre-ARD process, the plan is not final until the ARD/IEP committee has formally met. In the formal ARD meeting, the team goes over the plan's key features, continues working on unresolved issues, considers new or different information, and makes changes or creates new items. Importantly, the team has to agree that all members have reached a consensus and are ready to move to implementation. Often, you will hear IEP implementation described as “putting the plan in place.”

**Q: How often do we have to do this?**

**A:** The ARD/IEP committee meets at least once per year to develop, review, and revise your child's IEP. If needs or circumstances change, any member of the team, including the parent or adult student, may call an ARD/IEP team meeting sooner.

## During the Meeting

**Who will be there?**

The law requires certain members on your child's team. Parents; special education teacher; general education teacher; a professional who can interpret assessments; an administrator; the student, when appropriate; and others, depending on needs (e.g., a teacher for the visually impaired, an assistive technology specialist). If your child receives related services (such as OT, PT, counseling), those providers are also part of the team. You have the right to invite others who have knowledge or special expertise regarding your child to attend the meeting. Under some circumstances, you may excuse certain required team members from attending. At least one general education teacher, one special education teacher, an administrator, and a person who can interpret assessments are required in all ARD meetings.

Students usually have more than one teacher, especially once they reach the secondary level. Schools often use the **case management model** in this situation. This is when your child is assigned a case manager, or “point person,” who coordinates different classes and supports, and who oversees the implementation of special education services. This person is your “go-to” for planning, questions, and concerns. Because, in most cases, all of your child's teachers cannot be available to attend an ARD meeting at the same time, the student's case manager will gather input or reports to consider during the pre-ARD process and to present at the ARD/IEP meeting. Generally, your child's main special education teacher or case manager and one of his or her general education teachers will attend.

**Q: Should my student attend?**

**A:** Whenever appropriate, yes. Your child's age, level of development, and individual needs dictate the answer to this question. Ideally, as students grow older, parents and school encourage them increasingly to become participants, and eventually decision makers in their own planning. One important way to accomplish this is to think about ways for your child to be involved in the ARD/IEP process. This can include helping him or her to learn to describe his or her own strengths and needs, strategies that work, and goals and interests and to practice self-advocating. For students aged 14 and older, Texas law requires the team to incorporate the student's input into goal setting and planning. Many students attend or even run their own ARD/IEP meetings, sometimes as early as in elementary school.

**Q: What if I can't be there?**

**A:** The school is required to attempt to find a way for you to participate. Your team will work with you on scheduling the meeting at a time that works for each member. This could also mean arranging for you to participate by phone or video conference. If the school has made a good faith effort to try to make the meeting time work for you, the law allows the school to move forward and hold the ARD/IEP meeting in your absence. In this event, you still will be asked to go over the meeting report and to indicate whether you join in consensus with the planned IEP.

**What the Meeting Covers**

The committee has to cover a number of items in the ARD/IEP meeting. Generally, there is a set agenda; all ARD/IEP meetings contain the same mandatory components. Individual schools or districts might do some things their own way, in other words, the order in which the topics are addressed, which person/role leads the meeting, and whether the team skips around on the agenda or adheres strictly to it may all be different from school to school. However, the contents of the agenda should be the same in all ARD/IEP meetings.

**BASIC AGENDA**

Introductions / Team Members Roles

Purpose / Meeting Outcomes

Present Level of Performance / Eligibility

Annual Goals / Objectives If Required

Supports / Services / Accommodations / Assessment

Placement / LRE Consideration

Consensus

## Concluding the Meeting

### Reaching Consensus: How Can I Check “Agree” If I’m Not 100% Sure?

The last step in the meeting is where team members are asked to indicate that they have reached agreement by consensus. This is documented by signing the ARD/IEP paperwork and indicating agreement or disagreement with the decisions and plans made (most ARD/IEP paperwork includes check boxes marked “agree” and “disagree”).

Coming to an agreement based on your and the child’s team’s comfort level with most of, *or enough of*, the plan to move forward is described as **agreement by consensus**. This is not the same as achieving 100% agreement, and it is not voting. Instead, agreement by consensus is reached when the team as a whole can support the plan, understanding that team members may have different levels of enthusiasm for different parts.

If a parent formally indicates disagreement, this triggers a number of procedures designed to allow for new information to be gathered and another ARD/IEP meeting to be scheduled. This occurs so the team can come back together to work again toward a consensus. Your child’s old plan remains in place in the meantime.

This formal disagreement is not the same as merely expressing reservations about part of the plan or aspects of the IEP. As an equal player on your child’s ARD/IEP team, it is in your child’s best interest for you to be candid about your perspective, whether positive or negative. However, having the expectation that all team members must have complete agreement with all aspects of the plan before allowing it to begin can sometimes prevent your child from benefiting from the parts of the plan that all team members support.

Agreeing with reservations does not eliminate your right to continue raising concerns or the team’s ability to work further on an issue. Importantly, the team can implement the supports about which you feel confident, while simultaneously working on unresolved items. You or any team member can call a new ARD/IEP meeting to address the part of the plan that you still question. Just because you allow a less desirable part of the plan to be approved does not mean that you must wait a year to revisit the issue. At times, IEP team members agree to move forward on partial plans, trials, and parent-generated proposals, despite having some reservations.

**Q: Do I have to sign the IEP on the spot?**

**A:** Sometimes parents need time to consider the proposed IEP. Before the meeting, ask your team what happens if a parent needs more time to consider recommendations. Schools usually have guidelines about how this type of request will be handled. Also, you may agree with the IEP and use the five-day wait period before the services start to think about the recommendations. Or, in most cases, you may agree and waive the wait period so services may begin as soon as possible. In most situations, parents agree with the proposed IEP, sign right away, and waive the five-day waiting period so the child may begin receiving the new services as soon as possible.

**Q: Can the ARD/IEP report be changed after the meeting?**

**A:** No. It can be changed only through either an agreed-upon ARD/IEP amendment or by the committee holding another ARD/IEP committee meeting.

**TIPS**

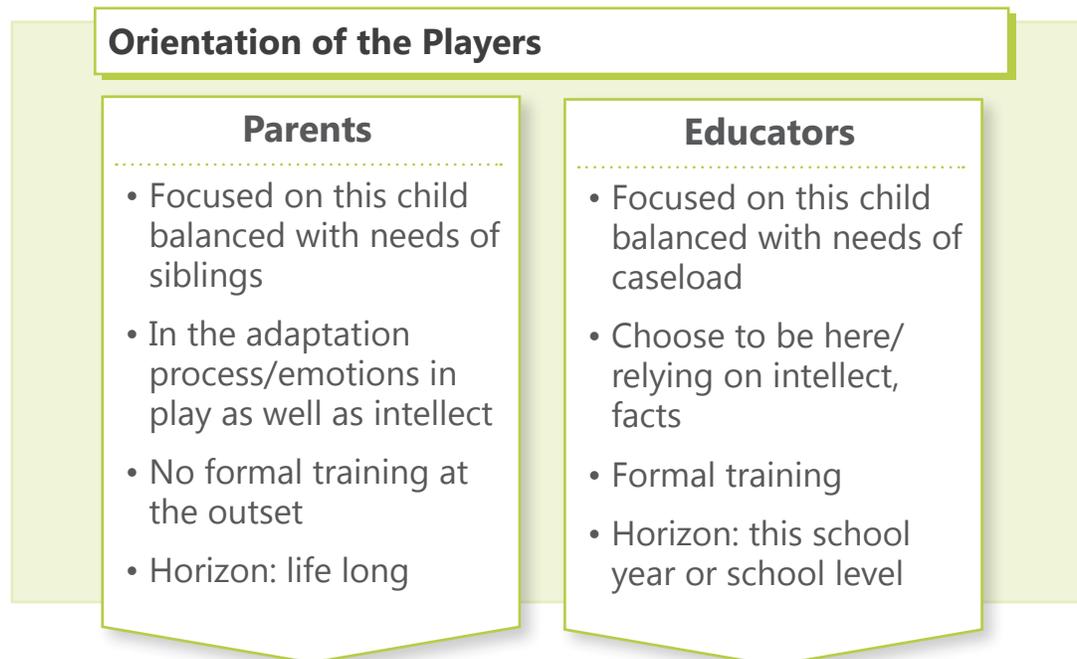
1. Request an agenda in advance and make notes on it to remind yourself of comments/information you wish to provide. If you're not sure where your topic fits on the agenda, your child's school team will help.
2. Share what you are seeing your child do at home or when completing homework.
3. Help the team to identify your child's strengths.
4. Expect what you share about your child to be considered in decision making and be open to listening to other ideas you may not have thought of. The best decisions come when all ideas and information are on the table.
5. If someone on the team is skeptical about a proposal (whether a parent or a professional), try proposing a trial period with a set check-in date.
6. Don't surprise your team with unexpected guests or brand-new issues. The school wants to act on information you contribute, and in some instances may not be able to complete an ARD/IEP meeting or implement new plans for your child, without time to prepare.
7. If you want to record an ARD/IEP meeting, notify the school of your plans in advance as a courtesy. Schools usually record the meeting as well when the parent is recording.
8. Sometimes professionals serve more than one role (e.g., a special education teacher who can also interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results).
9. Request that the team use a "future conversations" chart (or something similar). This is a way to collect and plan how to address non-IEP concerns or topics that come up during the meeting discussion.



## COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES

### 1. Understand the conflict that may be below the surface, even when things are going well.

Sometimes merely changing our expectations about conflict can influence whether a difference of opinion brings rigor and quality to decision making or becomes a fight. While all members of the team have your child's best interest at heart, parents and educators naturally come from different contexts. This natural mismatch in perspective, even when everybody has the same high-level goal, lays the groundwork for **latent conflict**. Understanding the latent, or dormant, conflict in ARD/IEP team dynamics can reduce tension concerning differences of opinion or approach. It can allow team members to stay engaged and work through conflict rather than retreating, "caving," or fighting with each other.



The presence of latent conflict means that disputes can flare up easily, even when things seem to be going well. Parents and teachers who understand that latent conflict is inherent in the special education process are more likely to handle differences in perspective as bumps in the road rather than as roadblocks.

### 2. Inquire about IEP facilitation.

Effective facilitation improves all types of meetings and, more recently, is being used in ARD/IEP meetings. Facilitation means to "make easier"-to make the process easier for professionals and parents.

## IEP Facilitation

### Facilitation Can Improve Meeting Processes

Meeting Management	Communication	Discussion
Problem Identification	Problem Solving	Decision-Making
Conflict Prevention	Conflict Resolution	Consensus-Building

### Types of IEP Facilitation

- Campus Level-All IEP Meetings

Facilitation skills and techniques may be used in any ARD/IEP meeting by any team member. Schools may adopt facilitation as a routine way of conducting meetings. If so, the school would use procedures before, during, and after the meeting that support good planning and follow through on commitments. Also, you would notice good communication skills such as listening and questioning. You might see an increased use of visuals in the meeting and efforts to summarize ideas. At this campus level, facilitation can promote understanding and collaboration.

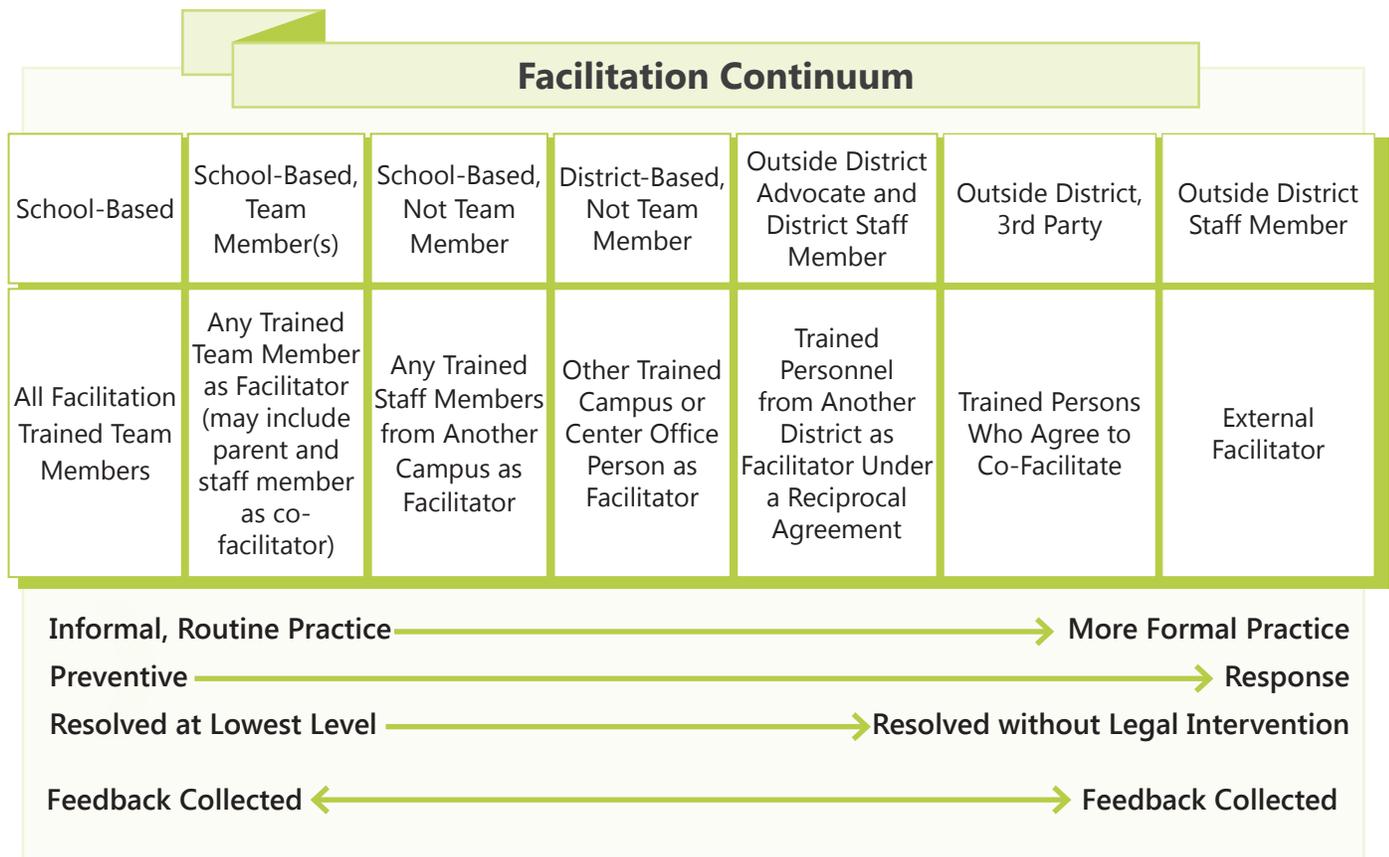
- District Level-Optional Dispute Resolution

Districts may also choose to offer a facilitated ARD/IEP meeting as a dispute resolution option. In this case, a district person or an independent facilitator would be assigned to facilitate a meeting and help the team resolve its differences. This level of facilitation is encouraged, but not mandated in Texas. If a district chooses to offer this service, parents would be notified of the option and how to access this type of assistance.

- State Level-Required Dispute Resolution Process

Beginning with 2014-2015, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) is required to offer facilitation as a dispute resolution option. The TEA will assign qualified independent facilitators to assist ARD/IEP meetings. Parents request this facilitated ARD/IEP assistance from the Texas Education Agency.

**Bottom Line:** ARD/IEP facilitation is available in varying levels—from a campus-based routine practice to a district-level program (if district chooses to offer) and finally, to a facilitated ARD/IEP process for dispute resolution (required at the state level).



**3. Focus on clear communication.**

Make sure you are clear on what others are presenting. Ask questions to gain the information you need or to clarify school information. Repeat and restate discussions, and ask team members whether they have the same understanding.

If a team member doesn't seem to be "getting it" or resists something you are trying to say, try clarifying your intention (specifically, by contrasting your true intention with what you do NOT intend).

Examples:

"It's not my intention to take up more than my child's share of your e-mail time; it is my intention to try to find a way to get a meaningful update on his behavior before dinner time so I can support you by following through at home."

"It's not my intention to create busy work for you or my child; it is my intention to maintain the family after-school, no-TV-before-homework routine by having my child do some homework."

"It's not my intention to remove my child's responsibility to do homework; it is my intention for her to have some realistic down time in the evenings."

#### 4. Take opportunities for relationship building.

Nurture relationships with your team members by genuinely acknowledging their efforts and professionalism. When teachers feel valued as professionals, their creativity and energy overtake the complexity and fatigue associated with rigorous specialized teaching, planning, and administrative demands. The more trusting your special education relationships, the more likely your team will be to tackle a difficult stage, conversation, or topic.

##### Trusting Relationships:

- Trust is making AND keeping commitments.
- Trust is built over time.
- We can decide to trust.

##### How:

- Assume good intentions.
- Build a track record of acknowledging effort.
- Use kind, respectful, and truthful communication.
- Listen with an open mind.
- Maintain flexibility and willingness to consider all ideas.



## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH EDUCATORS

1. Scheduling a meeting with multiple professionals is usually challenging for the school. Administrators may be limited in meeting space or finding times that overlap with teachers' conference periods. Sometimes relevant service professionals work on more than one campus. Each member of your child's professional team serves multiple students (sometimes dozens), so their instructional or student service demands might also create some inflexibility in the school's ability to schedule a meeting entirely based on a parent's needs or preferences.
2. Because of the ARD/IEP meeting's unique features, this is not the meeting for a lot of extraneous information. Bear in mind (1) the ARD/IEP meeting has to accomplish a set agenda, (2) finding common time for your instructional team to be away from students is challenging, and (3) the ARD/IEP documentation has to satisfy many technical requirements.

3. Because of these constraints, straying too far off topic is usually discouraged. Redirection to the agenda or the use of Discussion Guidelines or Future Conversations chart is not meant to convey a non-child-centered attitude or lack of caring for your child. Warm stories and a more relaxed timetable certainly have a place before or after the meeting and throughout the ARD/IEP process.

### Ground Rules

- Start on time; end on time
- Turn cell phone to silent
- Come prepared
- Participate fully

### Discussion Guidelines

- Listen and then be heard
- Ask questions to clarify
- Work to resolve differences
- Value others' ideas

### Future Conversations or Parking Lot

- Non-ARD/IEP concerns
- Teacher conference topics (e.g., homework routines)
- Administrator conference topic (e.g., teacher request)

## WANT MORE INFO?

### NATIONAL INFORMATION

#### CADRE:

The National Center on Dispute Resolution in Special Education  
[www.directionservice.org/cadre/](http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/)

### STATE INFORMATION

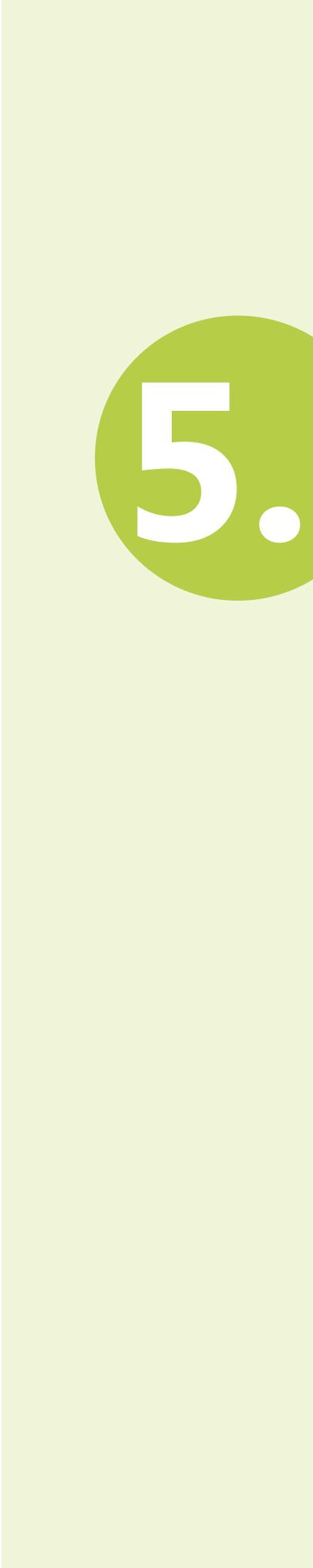
#### Texas Education Agency

Dispute Resolution Processes  
[www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147497560](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147497560)

### REGIONAL INFORMATION

#### Texas Education Service Centers

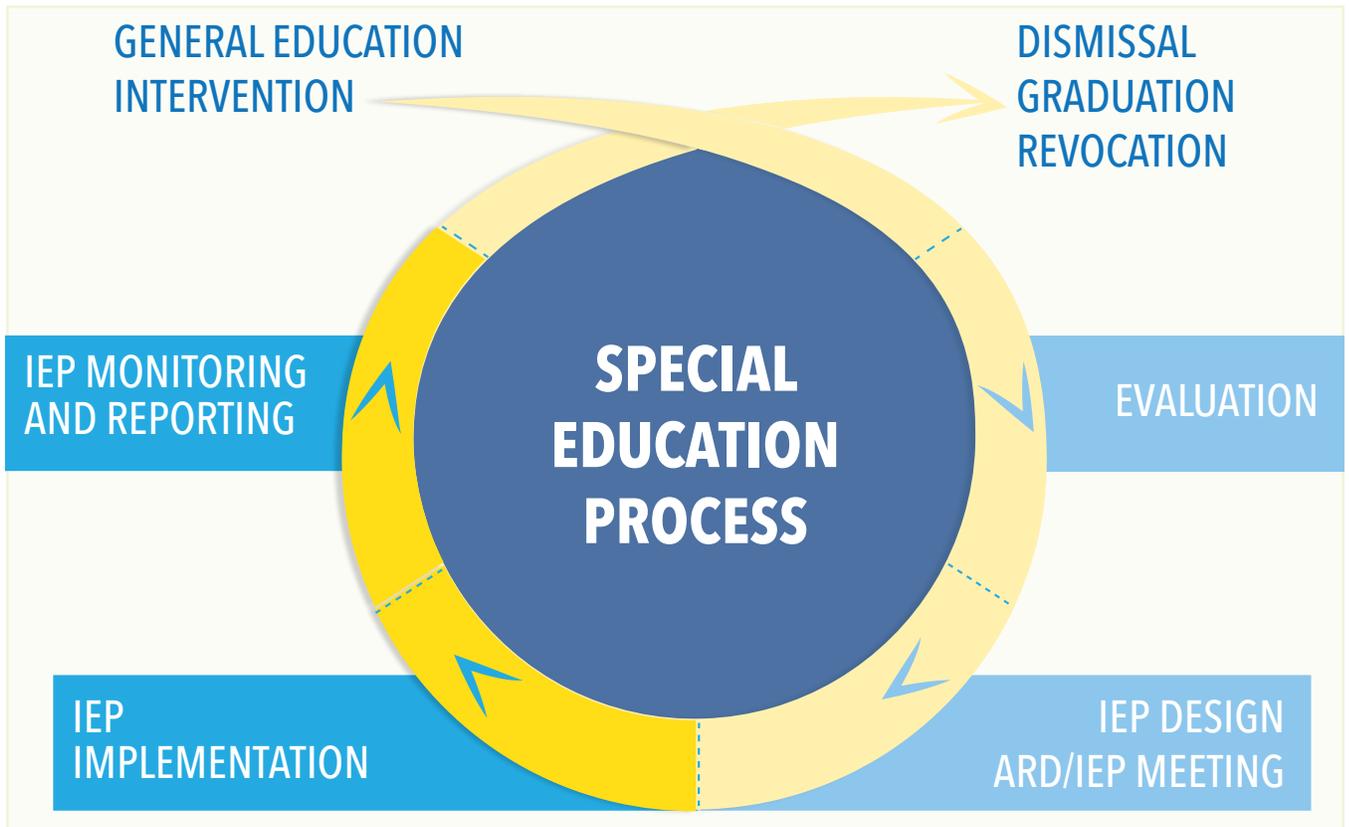
Region 13, Facilitating IEPs (FIEP)  
[www4.esc13.net/fiep](http://www4.esc13.net/fiep)  
Online course, Facilitated Meeting Video, Communication Series Videos, and Other Resources



**5.**

**IEP  
Implementation,  
Monitoring,  
and Reporting:**

*The plan in action, tweaks,  
and adjustments*



## **123** BASICS

The implementation phase of the ARD/IEP process is when your child's actual daily school routine occurs. For the time being, the planning is complete and has been adopted by the team. The specifics of the IEP are playing out: your child is learning skills and curriculum with the supports needed in the environments conducive to his or her success. These were all ARD/IEP committee decisions, and now the hope is that the team has the right "fit" and your child will make the anticipated progress.

### **Monitoring Your Child's Progress**

Tracking your child's progress along the way is an essential part of the IEP process. His or her IEP goals are designed as a target for mastery that will come after a year's worth of work. However, no matter how well thought out the IEP, the time and support a student needs to reach a given goal is usually an educated guess. In reality, all students experience plateaus and growth spurts, and run into roadblocks. Sometimes, something just clicks into place. Some stages or school years are better than others. The ARD/IEP process takes all of this into account and accommodates the natural unpredictability of student growth by building in a monitoring system connected specifically to your child's IEP goals.

Along with regular report cards all students receive, you will receive an additional IEP progress report showing how your child is performing on each goal. Unlike grades, which could remain stable all year and not indicate a problem, you should see steady improvement in IEP progress reports. This is because, if the services and supports are actually working, your child should be approaching mastery of the target skill over the course of the year. The ARD/IEP team decides how often you receive a special education progress report. Usually, this interval coincides with the time at which general education report cards come out.

#### **Q: How can I know how my child is doing between report cards and progress reports?**

**A:** There are many less formal ways to monitor progress. You can get a feel for what your child is doing in school by attending parent-teacher events, looking at assignments and work that comes home, and checking teacher websites. You can get a feel for how your child is doing in school by paying attention to grades on assignments or tests, listening to what your child talks about in his or her day or classes, and by observing his or her demeanor.

**Q: I’m surprised the teacher is suggesting a change in placement. What should I do?**

**A:** The professionals working with your child should be monitoring the same indicators as you are. Special educators collect data to measure how a child is progressing on IEP goals. While it’s not practical for most educators to share daily or highly detailed data, they should let you know—even between progress reports—if your child is making unexpected progress or seems to be stuck. If you find yourself surprised by news from school about your child’s performance, ask the teacher to help you understand what is being measured, the data collected, and what strategies the team is using.

**What If Progress Isn’t What We Expect?**

Student progress on IEP goals may go faster or slower than anticipated. Unexpected progress in either direction usually warrants a team conversation to determine next steps.

Clear progress on IEP goals probably means the supports in place are working. As soon as your child masters goals, the team should discuss where to go next. This can be to increase the complexity or rigor, to move on to next steps in a sequence, or to advance to a next set of priorities. This can happen as soon as your child is ready, regardless of how recent your child’s last ARD/IEP meeting.

If your child’s progress isn’t proceeding as expected, the team should discuss whether different or additional strategies and supports might be appropriate. Sometimes your child has an undiscovered intrinsic (internal) need, or circumstances have changed in a way that impacts his or her profile as a learner. Or, sometimes he or she needs a different accommodation or approach. The team can look for different strategies to meet instructional needs, or it can consider additional evaluations that might reveal or rule out additional intrinsic needs.

**If progress isn’t as you expect...**

**Find Out What the IEP Implementation Looks Like:**

- Ask to see how teachers document the provision of IEP services (e.g., in-class support).
- Ask to see examples of modified tests, graphic organizers, and other accommodations.
- Ask to see service logs, such as for speech therapy, to make sure your child is receiving the amount of services outlined in the IEP.

**Check on Accommodations, Modifications, and Goals:**

- Ask whether accommodations are working and whether some need to be deleted or added at the next meeting.
- Talk with teachers about how they are modifying a course.
- Talk with teachers about how IEP goals addressing skill deficits are provided. Who is working on the goal? When?

**Consider Evaluation (Formal or Informal)**

- Consider any new behaviors. Inform teachers of changes at home impacting performance or behavior.
- Ask whether a Functional Behavior Analysis or Behavior Intervention Plan might help.
- Consider testing. Talk with teachers or evaluation specialist about whether new evaluation data might be informative.

Changes and adjustments to a student’s program can take different forms, such as (1) informal/parent–teacher, communication-based changes (such as changing a child’s seat or setting a consistent home-school response to a behavior) or (2) general education schedule changes (e.g., dropping physical education in favor of art).

It is also possible to change your child’s IEP. To make changes to the IEP, the team engages in another cycle of the ARD/IEP process, first revisiting the child’s intrinsic (internal) needs and looking at what instructional needs may need to be addressed differently. Next, the planned change is formally adopted into the revised IEP. Some changes to the IEP can be made without having a full ARD/IEP meeting (amending the ARD/IEP), and other changes require a formal review ARD/IEP meeting. Changes to the IEP can range from adding an accommodation to revamping goals and changing placement, depending on the student’s evolving needs.

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### TIPS

1. Progress must be reported in the same manner as the goal is measured. For example, if the goal is for the student to accomplish a task with only one prompt, then the progress report should indicate how many prompts the student currently requires. Saying progress is “being made” or “continuing” is not enough.
2. If you believe your child has mastered or is approaching mastery of his or her goals, ask your team for a conversation about a next round of planning. If you see mastery at home but your team does not see mastery at school, ask questions about what it’s measuring. It may be that the teacher is waiting for a higher frequency of success, or that he or she is measuring success by completion of more steps than you observed at home. The reverse can happen as well, where your school team reports that your child is ready to move on, but you don’t see the same level of mastery at home. Either way, a clarifying discussion to be sure that you and the teachers are using the same standards is important.
3. If you’d like to try something new or feel skeptical about something your team proposes, suggest a trial period with a set check-in point. For example, the team may want to try removing an accommodation for a period of six weeks. During that time, staff will track your child’s performance, and at the six-week mark, the group can reconvene to discuss how things went. The data coming from a trial period might give an unsure committee member the additional information he or she needs to feel comfortable putting a more formal change in place.

4. Homework can serve a number of purposes for adults during progress monitoring, in addition to providing practice opportunities for your student. Homework can function as a communication tool (you know what your child is working on in school). You can also observe how your child interacts with his or her homework. Is it too easy or difficult? Does there always seem to be a struggle with one particular type of task? Is he or she able to complete it in the expected amount of time? Is homework time a battle? The answers to all of these questions can reveal a lot about your child's instructional level, organizational skills, and emotional maturity. Giving feedback to teachers if homework issues seem unusual could provide them with important clues about ways to fine-tune your child's program. Likewise, don't be afraid to try the same interventions at home with your child with a disability as you would with a child without one. Sometimes, traditional, home-based strategies, such as setting up a dedicated homework spot or arranging for tutoring, are all that the child needs.



## **COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES**

- 1. Ask your teacher open-ended questions to get a feel for how things are going or to see whether your child is having similar experiences at home as at school.**

Open-ended questions can include things such as:

- “What do you see when you observe my child on the playground?”
- “How would you describe my child in his math class?”
- “What does it look like when my child gets frustrated?”

- 2. Use the chain of command.**

If you or the team needs additional information or support, or you are uncomfortable bringing an issue to your child's team, consider reaching out to the next level of administration. Students receiving special education services have access to two different chains of command: as a parent, you can call a campus administrator (such as a principal/assistant principal) or a special education administrator (such as a coordinator). It is usually advisable to start with administrators closest to your child or campus. They are more likely to have easy access to the details of the situation than someone who may be higher-ranking but farther away.

## About Home-School Communication

At this stage in the ARD/IEP process, there is no formal planning or program design. You and the team are not preparing for a new IEP, a formal meeting, or something that occurs only periodically, such as an assessment. At this stage, between ARD/IEP meetings or planning sessions, the focus for your child is on teaching, daily learning, and navigating the back-and-forth between home and school. Your child's program is running, and the goal for the adults is to settle into a communication system that works to keep parents and teachers updated on progress and alert to issues that might come up along the way.

### **1. Why teacher communication sometimes seems short**

There are some natural constraints in teachers' abilities to initiate or respond to parent communications. Both the quantity and level of detail in parent-teacher communication vary significantly, depending on the student's age, needs, and ability to participate in (or take over) communication with professionals. Many teachers are willing to experiment with different communication systems, ranging from a daily notebook to an occasional e-mail or phone call.

Most teachers balance three communication priorities: (1) helping important information get home so parents are informed, (2) encouraging students to learn to manage their own communication needs as growing self-advocates, and (3) attending to the communication needs of all students and families. Teachers generally recognize the value of home-school communication, and it is important for parents to remember that most teacher communication happens outside of the teaching day.

### **2. Ways to make keeping you informed easier for your teacher**

Find out your child's teachers' preferred mode of communication and conference time. Most teachers do not have the ability to check e-mail during the day when working with students. Likewise, their ability to make phone calls or meet for a conference is usually limited to a conference period or before or after school. Dropping in unannounced may meet with mixed results; teachers rarely have unallocated time (especially without students), and they will be more effective in a meeting with you if they can prepare and set aside appropriate time without worrying about competing priorities.

You can make it easier for your teacher to respond by (1) trying to accommodate her or his conference time for meetings or phone calls (2) when possible (sometimes it's not), try to e-mail ahead so as to not require a response within the school day, and (3) call ahead if you are planning on coming to campus other than for regular scheduled pickups, drop-offs, or events.

### **3. E-mail pitfalls**

E-mail may be the most common method of parent-teacher communication, and it has clear advantages. However, it is helpful to be mindful of some e-mail pitfalls that apply in any work environment. There are two extremes that can create delays in e-mail communications: (1) Professionals sometimes skip over a lengthy e-mail with the intention of reading it when they have more time. If you can fit your message into a size that your teacher might be able to digest in a first reading, you may avoid a delay in response (2) "Peppering" a person with many or repeat e-mails, or not allowing time for response may also encourage him or her to set your communications aside in favor of a time when he or she can look at everything together.



## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH EDUCATORS

1. Barring unusual circumstances, once your child's program is in place, it is important to allow it to play out long enough for observable data to emerge. How long to let something play out varies greatly with the situation. Questioning a technique designed to help with test taking after three weeks might be premature because there may have been time for only one test during that period of time. Questioning an intervention for a behavior that occurs many times a day may be very appropriate after three weeks. If you have a concern that something isn't working, ask and think about whether enough time has elapsed to be able to reach a conclusion. By the same token, allowing time for parent teacher communication systems or home-school data collection systems to work follows the same principle: ask (yourself and others) whether enough time has passed to conclude it isn't working.
2. Managing the boundaries between partnering with professionals and overstepping can be tricky. It is almost always valuable for teachers (and the student) when parents share connections to outside providers, past successes, and samples of things that work at home or in other environments. It is also important to recognize that schools have the responsibility and need to protect the instructional day as well as the rights of all students. While volunteering and other offers of help are certainly appropriate and encouraged, consider proceeding with caution if you are picking up on signals that outside involvement may be pressuring your professional relationships in a way that is not actually benefiting your child in the way you intend. In particular:
  - Pause before requesting lengthy or frequent observation time for yourself or your child's outside professionals.
  - Refrain from providing materials to substitute for instruction in school.
  - Resist the temptation to drop in just to "hang out" for extended periods of time.

### WANT MORE INFO?

#### NATIONAL INFORMATION

**National Center on Student Progress Monitoring**

[www.studentprogress.org](http://www.studentprogress.org)

#### REGIONAL INFORMATION

**Education Service Center, Region 13**

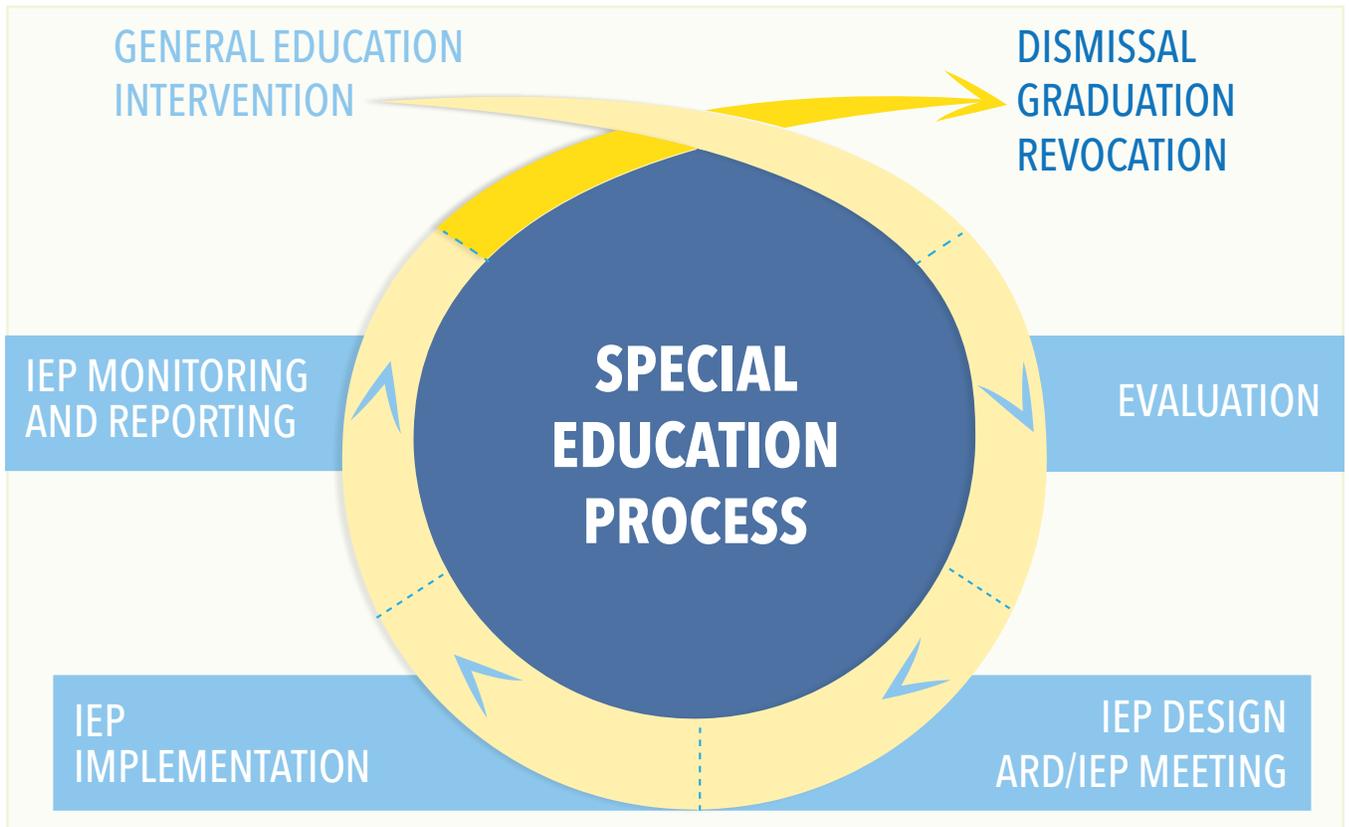
LiveBinder: Accommodations Central

<http://tinyurl.com/accomcentral>

# 6.

## **Dismissal, Graduation, and Revocation:**

*Exit from special education and  
related services*



## 123 BASICS

Because special education is designed individually for the student, the length of time your student receives services is also based on his or her unique needs. As long as your child has a qualifying disability that creates enough impact on his or her education, your child will continue to be eligible for services. At each annual ARD/IEP meeting, the team reconsiders this question and determines whether eligibility is still present. This is why most ARD/IEP meetings begin with a restatement of, or update on, evaluation data and eligibility for services.

This means, over time, your child may qualify for services through high school graduation. It could also mean that after intervention, support and growth, your child no longer has the same need for special education and does not qualify for services. The ongoing presence of a disability alone may not be enough for a child to continue qualifying for services. The presence of a disability must be accompanied by a need for special education and/or related services due to the disability.

Special education “ends” in one of three ways:

1. Your child may be **dismissed** from special education if the need for specially designed instruction is no longer present. Dismissal from special education or a related service, such as counseling, must be based on current evaluation data.
2. Your child meets the requirements for **graduation**.
3. You or your adult child **revokes consent** for the school to provide special education.

### Dismissal

Each year, the ARD/IEP team evaluates (1) your child’s mastery of grade-level curriculum and (2) readiness for age and developmentally appropriate social, emotional, and behavioral experiences. Over time, some children gain the skills and competencies they need to close the gaps between themselves and their grade-level peers.

Parents are usually aware of this as they monitor their child’s progress over time. If your child is successfully accessing curriculum and other school experiences with less and less special education support, he or she may be making the kind of progress that will eventually allow him or her to access education without specially designed instruction. If your child reaches this milestone, your team will convene an ARD/IEP meeting with the purpose of considering dismissal from special education.

Because your child may still have a disability, even if he or she no longer needs specially designed instruction, he or she may be eligible for other general education interventions or supports available to all students, such as Response to Intervention (RTI) or 504 supports and accommodations.

**Q: What if we dismiss my student from special education and he or she falls apart?**

**A:** Dismissal from special education does not rule out the opportunity to receive special education services again if your child needs them. If your child is struggling and general education supports are not enough, parents or staff can refer your child back to special education. Depending on how soon after dismissal the readmission conversation occurs, your child's original eligibility or evaluation information may be used, thus avoiding the need to start from scratch and go through the entire RTI, referral, and evaluation process.

**Graduation**

All students are eligible to graduate after completion of the high school credits required by the state and your district, and after passing and/or participating in required state assessments. Texas sets out a number of different pathways to graduation, depending on student goals and interests and needs, but the basic requirements of credit/course completion and state assessments apply to all. Your child's ARD/IEP committee has the latitude to make decisions about specialized curriculum, course modifications, specially designed instruction, and navigating state assessment options, as appropriate.

In addition, if your child receives modified high school curriculum through special education, he or she may be eligible for continued special education services after he or she completes required high school credits. Services for this population of adult students (often referred to as "18+" services) are geared toward the student's transition from high school to adult life. Instead of focusing on grade-level curriculum (as in the K-12 grades), 18+/adult student services focus on the four domains of adult life: employment, lifelong learning, recreation, and independent living. The ARD/IEP process is the same for students receiving 18+/adult student services as it is during the K-12 years, with yearly goal setting, data collection, progress monitoring, and progress reporting. Student needs and eligibility are reconsidered annually. A student may be eligible for these services through the school year in which she or he turns 22.

When a student formally graduates, special education services end along with enrollment.

**Q: If my child goes on to receive special education services after completing the 12th grade, will he or she still get to graduate with his or her class?**

**A:** Yes, students who go on to receive special education adult student services may still “walk the stage,” participate in graduation ceremonies, and be considered a part of their graduating class after satisfying the graduation requirements at the end of 12th grade. At this time, your child receives a certificate of attendance because your child has not yet formally graduated. She or he can enjoy graduating with her or his classmates and then remain enrolled to receive additional services.

**Q: What is transition planning?**

**A:** Transition planning refers to formal planning for the student’s next steps after high school as part of the ARD/IEP process. Taking into account the student’s strengths, interests, preferences, and needs, the transition planning process helps the student and parents develop postsecondary goals for continuing or higher education, employment, and independent living. Your child’s postsecondary transition goals shape current IEP goals and services to help your child attain after-high-school goals. In Texas, transition planning is a mandatory component of annual ARD/IEP planning beginning in the school year in which your child turns 14 (nationally, 16). It is a best practice to consider transition planning and issues even earlier.

**What Should Transition Services Look Like in the IEP?**

List the services/activities needed for postschool success in each domain:

- |                          |                                       |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Instruction           | 5. Other Postschool Adult Living      |
| 2. Related Services      | 6. Acquisition of Daily Living Skills |
| 3. Community Experiences | 7. Functional Vocational Evaluation   |
| 4. Employment            |                                       |

Correspond to (and support attainment of) postsecondary goals

Reflect the strengths, preferences, interests, and needs identified in transition assessments.

Designate who is responsible and by when each activity will be completed.

**Should Every Child’s IEP Have Activities for Each of the Seven Domains?**

Each domain should be considered by the ARD committee, but activities should be developed only where a student has need based on disability and the results of transition assessments.

Note: At least one annual IEP goal that links to a postsecondary goal is required, but activities will be based on need.

## Revocation of Consent

Parents have the right to revoke consent for special education services at any point. In this way, you have the power to unilaterally “end” special education for your child. Before taking this route, be sure to have a good understanding of all possible consequences of this action.

Eligibility for special education and an IEP provide supports for instructional and behavioral needs, protection in disciplinary situations, flexibility for passing standards, attendance, statewide assessment, graduation and more. Be aware that your revocation of consent for services will remove any special program design and will hold your child accountable for all things required of the general student population.



## TIPS

### Dismissal

If you don't think your child should be dismissed from special education or a related service, such as occupational therapy:

1. Ask what has led the team to consider dismissal.
2. Ask questions to understand the data behind the team's confidence that your child is ready to navigate school without special education instruction, modifications, or related services.
3. Compare your observations of how your child is doing with those of your school team.
4. Share your perceptions or data, or private provider data that suggests your child still needs support.
5. Ask your team (and your child) about the extent to which your child is actually relying on the supports in place.
6. Ask your child what he or she needs to make progress in school.
7. Ask to review current evaluation data supporting dismissal.
8. Ask what general education supports might be available, such as accommodations under a 504 Plan once special education supports are removed.

### Key Question

Prior to Dismissal

Is your child successful (academics, behavior, functional skills) without support or is your child successful because of the supports in place?

## **Graduation**

1. Participate in transition service discussions with your team(s) long before high school. ARD meetings in eighth grade usually begin the formal documentation of such discussions. But, you may need to plan your child's education, with his or her interests and abilities in mind, beginning much earlier. You may need to get your child placed on wait lists for adult agency services at a very early age to receive services as an adult.
2. Ask how decisions made in early grades impact graduation and adult life options.
3. If your child is not performing well on statewide assessments, ask what accelerated instruction (AI) and intensive program of instruction (IPI) are being provided.
4. Use your aspirations for your child and your child's vocational assessments and interest inventories to help develop an IEP with quality transition goals and activities.
5. Be familiar with your child's personal graduation plan (PGP) when talking with your team about IEP development, course selection, and other high school curriculum options.

## **Revocation of Consent for Special Education**

If you are thinking about removing your child from special education:

1. Request a conference to discuss the consequences of your decision.
2. Discuss the idea with your child; talk about what school would look like without an IEP.
3. Expect to receive a written explanation of the consequences of a revocation of consent for special education.



## **BEHIND THE SCENES WITH EDUCATORS**

### **Dismissal**

Parents sometimes worry about ulterior motives for dismissal on the school's part. Some parents express concerns about higher-needs students taking up special education resources, internal quotas or caps for the number of special education students, or staffing concerns as a reason to thin student numbers. However, like all considerations within special education, dismissal is based solely on the individual needs of the student and not on anything external in the school environment, such as finances or staffing. The more complex needs of other children do not "trump" the needs of a child who may be closer to functioning with his peers.

## Graduation

Graduation and planning for postschool outcomes are exciting, and possibly anxious, times for both parents and school teams. Educators work diligently to involve adult agencies, if appropriate, in the planning process. Many schools use a personal centered planning (PCP) process to ensure you, your child, and the school are working together to prepare for graduation and life after high school.

## Revocation

Your child's team may be concerned about how your child will handle the rigors of the general education curriculum and other school expectations without special education services. The school team may suggest a short trial period without supports to monitor the impact on your child's performance. The team will also be weighing the pros and cons of such a change and will be open to honest conversations with you about this possible action.

### WANT MORE INFO?

#### NATIONAL INFORMATION

##### **National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC)**

[www.nsttac.org](http://www.nsttac.org)

##### **NSTTAC Guidance for meeting the requirements in SPP Indicator 13**

<http://nsttac.org/content/web-based-examples-and-nonexamples-sppapr-indicator-13-checklist-overview>

#### STATE INFORMATION

##### **Legal Framework (Region 18)**

Outline of legal requirements for special education in Texas

<http://framework.esc18.net>

##### **Transition Assessments webmix (Symbaloo)**

Links to transition assessments available for free or at cost

<http://www.symbaloo.com/mix/transitionassessments>

##### **Graduation Guidance LiveBinder**

[www.bit.ly/gradguide](http://www.bit.ly/gradguide)

##### **Transition in Texas website (Region XI)**

Region XI in Fort Worth is the State Lead for Transition and Postschool Outcomes

[www.transitionintexas.org](http://www.transitionintexas.org)

##### **Transition Faveswebmix (Symbaloo)**

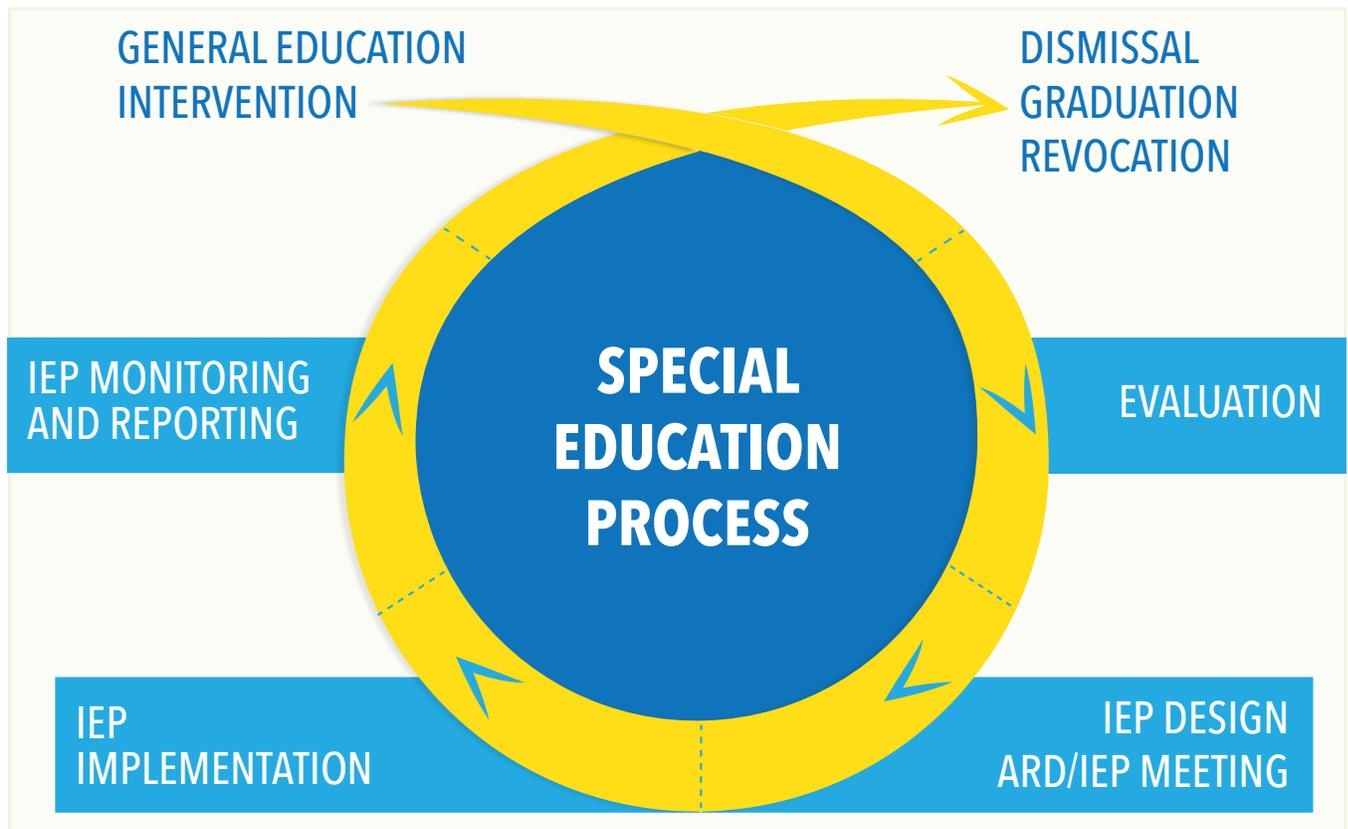
Links to various websites related to transition

<http://www.symbaloo.com/mix/transitionassessments>



# **Facilitation:**

*Improved Discussions and Decisions*



## 123 BASICS

### Special Education's Legal Model

Special education was created originally by federal legislation in the 1970s. Since then, it has continued to develop as our understanding of disability, the increasing priority on equal opportunity, and best practices in education have evolved. Today, special education is governed by the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA), as well as by the many federal regulations, state laws, and court cases that expand on the details in the federal statute.

Because special education has its origins in the legal system, the traditional pathways to resolving disagreements tend to be legalistic in nature. IDEA provides for many parent and student rights, including the right to lodge complaints and to file lawsuits with state education agencies and in federal court. Sometimes the dispute resolution mechanisms found in IDEA, including litigation, provide the only way to resolve special education disagreements.

However, many special education disputes could be resolved in the student's best interest and with fewer negative consequences using other, less legal, less formal, approaches. Parents and educators can work collaboratively through differences to better serve children.

### Pitfalls of Special Education's Legal Model

Our legal system arose centuries ago as a system to handle disputes about property. That system sets up two equally prepared sides, each with a representative advocating purely in the interest of one side, with final decisions made according to set rules by a neutral judge. In this type of traditional litigation, there is a winner and a loser, and the final decision is binding on all parties and enforceable by law.

While this model works well in property disputes, special education is different. In education, the subject of conflict is an actual child. Unlike a piece of property, a child continues to grow and change, and he or she still needs educating, even when the adults are trying to resolve a dispute about what the services should look like. Litigation (or threatened litigation) is expensive and time intensive. It may bring in noncampus administrators, attorneys, and advocates, who are not involved in the day-to-day activities of the school, to speak for the family or school. Decisions are made by education agency staff members, hearing officers, and judges who are even farther removed from the school and the child.

Litigation may also be hard on relationships. When the dispute is over a business issue, the parties can win, lose, and walk away. But when educational disputes are over, the child and family usually come back to the same school and work again with the same team.

Regardless of who “wins” in a special education lawsuit, litigation may cause heavy losses for all in the form of:

- Uneasy or broken relationships
- Mistrust among team members
- Hampered professional creativity and willingness to take risks
- Conflict fatigue
- Increased anxiety about how to move forward together

Perhaps the most profound mismatch between an adversarial dispute resolution system and special education is that a legally driven process forces the family and the school to take opposite “sides,” pitting them against each other in a competition to make the best argument about who wins and who loses. We know in practice, however, that quality specialized programming for a child is all about the collaboration among the members on the team.

Even a top-notch team of educators will remain at a disadvantage without the collaboration of parents. Similarly, the most invested parents cannot provide alone what public education has to offer. A child is best served when his or her parents and teachers work together as teammates rather than as adversaries. The odds of achieving the best outcomes are highest when adults representing diverse roles function together on the same side: the child’s.

## Understanding Conflict

Conflict is the natural tension that arises from differences.

What does this mean?

It means conflict is normal—when different perspectives are present, we experience a “tension,” which we call conflict.

Tension or conflict can be eased when certain needs are met in three areas:

1. Procedural or process needs (the how)
2. Psychological or people-related needs (the who)
3. Content or substantive needs (the what)



## When Needs Are Not Satisfied

When our needs are not met in one or more of these areas, and especially when we perceive someone is blocking access to solutions that meet our needs, conflict develops and may escalate.

When **Procedural** or Process Needs Not Met (how the dialogue or process works: the how)

Conflict may arise in response to how the meeting is led, at what point information is shared, how organized members are, how discussions are handled, or how decisions are made. Lack of preparation and poor meeting management can decrease satisfaction with the meeting.

When **Psychological** or People-Related Needs Not Met (individual, personal needs: the who)

Conflict may arise when team members do not feel respected, listened to, or valued. Conflict is more likely when team members blame each other, make negative assumptions, or behave in a way to worsen the initial differences. Inadequate communication skills and ineffective interactions may escalate tension.

When **Content** Needs Not Met (actual decisions or plans: the what)

Conflict may arise when team members do not believe the IEP is well written or when members believe positive outcomes will not be achieved. Satisfaction with the content of the IEP can be improved when satisfaction is high in the other two areas (procedural and psychological).

## Conflict Reduction and Prevention

There are many options for “soft” dispute resolution (nonlitigation approaches).

These soft options include:

- the routine use of IEP facilitation and skills before, during, and after the ARD/IEP meeting at the campus level;
- facilitated meetings with a more neutral facilitator if offered at the district/charter; and
- facilitated IEP meetings with an independent facilitator and mediation as offered by the TEA.

**What is facilitation?**

Facilitation means to make things easier. Facilitation skills and techniques help teams work better together. Sometimes all members of the team are trained in meeting management, communication, problem solving, and decision making. Any team member can use these strategies to move the group toward collaboration. And, other times, a facilitator outside the team joins the meeting to help increase the team's effectiveness.

### Procedural and Process

- Preparation, preplanning, input for team members, proposals, and drafts
- Agendas, ground rules or discussion guidelines, future conversation chart, visuals, charting
- Decision making and consensus language

### Psychological or People Related

- Listening
- Questioning to understand, clarify, obtain facts
- Summarizing with neutral language
- Acknowledging and affirming
- Separating interests from positions
- Identifying problems based on interests

### Content or Substantive

- Compliant IEP
- Quality outcomes
- Improved follow-through due to procedural and psychological needs being met

If you are concerned about conflict brewing on your ARD/IEP committee, talk with your principal or special education staff members about an IEP facilitation. Ask how you and your school can receive training in IEP facilitation and whether a facilitated ARD/IEP process is offered by your district or charter school.

Parents and school staff may also seek out facilitation training offered by your regional Education Service Center. Using facilitation techniques in group meetings and conversations enriches the dialogue around differences, solutions, and implementation and can serve as a powerful preventive against conflict.


**TIPS**

Know whether you're advocating for something that is a legal right, a best practice, or something else.

***If you are advocating for something compliance oriented***

Different problems call for different types of parent advocacy. If you have concerns about a compliance-oriented issue, advocating from a rights-based perspective may be appropriate (e.g., holding your team to a time line, maintaining that decisions be based on data, questioning changes of placement without full ARD/IEP committee discussion, etc.). In many of these situations, collaborative approaches will work and are worth exploring first. At other times, parents may want to explore their more formal, procedural rights to resolve a dispute.

***If you are advocating for something that is not required by law***

If your child's special education program is already legally compliant, and you are advocating for something different, additional, or more individualized, coming at your team from a rights-based approach may not be the best strategy. Consider using an interest-based approach instead. Help the team understand the "why" (or interest) behind your request (the "what" or position)—why you are advocating for a particular thing or service or placement. Ask questions to try to understand the "why" behind the ideas presented by other team members. Brainstorm ways to meet the interests of the group. This type of problem solving opens up options and solutions that possibly neither you nor the other team members had previously considered. The team can be more creative when the problem is defined by interests rather than by positions or demands.

**Problem Solving: Rights-Based Approach vs. Interest-Based Approach**

**Rights-Based Approach to Problem Solving**

- Expressing disagreement with ARD/IEP meeting recommendations in writing
- Accepting the offer of an IEP disagreement meeting
- Requesting mediation from TEA
- Filing a complaint with TEA
- Requesting a due process hearing with TEA

**Interest-Based Approach to Problem Solving**

- Listening with intent to understand
- Asking questions to open up the discussion or solicit facts, feelings, thoughts, wants, and needs
- Identifying the reason(s) behind a request
- Combining the interests into a problem statement
- Brainstorming possible solutions
- Comparing possible solutions against a criteria
- Accepting that consensus allows a range of agreement, from being fully, totally in agreement to "can live with the idea; can support with reservations"

### Q. How do I know whether what I'm asking for is required by law or is something more?

A. You can get a good understanding of legal requirements in special education by consulting resources mentioned throughout this handbook. Don't forget to ask what is required by talking with special education staff members at your district or charter. Parents may also contact the Texas Education Agency, Toll Free Parent Information Line at 1.800.252.9668.



## COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES

1. If you sense dissatisfaction (your own or someone else's) in a conversation or a meeting, try to identify where it is coming from. Is it dissatisfaction with the process? Are you or a teammate feeling unheard? Is someone not contributing? Does the team seem to be talking about the wrong issue or only part of the problem? Pinpointing where your uneasiness in the conversation comes from allows you to address it. At the same time, pay attention when you sense another committee member is unsatisfied—professionals are just as likely as parents to have needs within the process, the interactions, and the actual content.
2. To improve the process: Talk openly with your team about things that will help the process be more effective for you. Listen for clues to what will help improve other team member's satisfaction with how the meeting is going. For example, starting and ending on time, staying on topic, providing information for review prior to meetings, presenting information in a different format, understanding the roles people play, and more can all be ideas the team can use to increase procedural satisfaction.
3. If team members are at odds about a substantive problem, try creating a **combined problem statement**. First, identify the **interests** (why they want what they want) behind the specifics of what individual team members are advocating for (their **positions** or what they want). Then, combine the interests to form a statement of the problem that addresses the interests together.

## Combined Problem Statement

Example	Position (what they want)	Interests (why they want it)
Parent	Wants the student placed in the general education class	To have opportunities to maintain friendships, feel connected to the class, benefit from typical peer modeling of social skills
Teacher	Wants the student placed in a special education class	To engage in meaningful learning of the curriculum, to benefit from smaller class size, to benefit from specialized teaching strategies
Parent and Teacher	Combined Problem Statement Based on Interests	How can Junior learn the curriculum effectively while remaining connected socially to his classmates?

### Ways to Define a Problem Based on Interests

"How can we work together in a way that:"

- 
- 
- 

"How can we provide emotional support to your child while maximizing instruction time?"

"How can we \_\_\_\_\_ while at the same time \_\_\_\_\_?"

Defining the problem based on interests is powerful for two reasons:

- a) Even when there is disagreement about positions, it is highly likely that parents and professionals will be on the same page about interests. In the example above, the parent also values Junior's access to meaningful curriculum, just as the school staff also values Junior's needs to stay connected to his friends.
- b) All team members are likely to agree that if they could solve the combined interest-based problem statement, Junior would really benefit. Framing the problem this way shifts the dynamic from two sides (parent versus teacher) to one (combined parent and teacher or team). The change in dynamics feels better to the decision makers, who might now be able to come up with some different options to meet both sets of needs.



## BEHIND THE SCENES WITH EDUCATORS

While special educators certainly accept sticking to technical requirements as part of their job, this is generally not the aspect of their profession that excites them the most. Most educators prefer working with your child, planning lessons, and taking advantage of teachable moments. When a school team senses a legal dispute brewing, often the response is to begin to pay extra attention to technical compliance and to take fewer opportunities to think outside the box, take risks, or approach a situation creatively or without layers of approval. Or, depending on the personalities involved, professionals sometimes “cave” in the face of an adversarial parent—even if it is against their better professional judgment.

School teams are committed to not allowing conflict with parents to impact how they serve students. Parent and other team members should be mindful of when their team seems to shift focus—if the shift is primarily to avoid conflict or escalating conflict, the team is no longer making decisions based on the student’s needs.

### WANT MORE INFO?

#### NATIONAL LEVEL

##### **National Center on Dispute Resolution in Social Education-Direction Service**

“Encouraging the use of mediation and other collaborative strategies to resolve disagreement about special education and early intervention programs.”

<http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/fieptrainingvideos.cfm>

#### STATE LEVEL

##### **Texas Education Agency (TEA)**

- Toll Free Parent Information Line: 800.252.9668  
This toll free message line is reserved for parents and other family members who have questions about student rights and regulatory requirements as they relate to special education complaint investigations. Calls are returned by trained professionals during normal business hours. Contact the TEA Division of Legal Services at 512.263.9720 for questions related to mediation or due process hearings.
- For individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing:  
TTY number: 512.475.3540  
Relay Texas 7-1-1

#### REGIONAL LEVEL

Contact your Education Service Center and request information about IEP facilitation.



# **Additional Resources:**

*Tools and Acronyms*

## RECORD KEEPING

### Q: Why is record keeping important?

**A:** Record keeping is not required for parents of children with special needs, but good records may prove helpful. You will receive many documents throughout the special education process. A system to organize those documents is a good idea. A notebook or binder is one way to achieve this. The key is to find a system that works for you!

### Items You May Want to Keep Handy

Below are tabs you could create in a notebook:

#### Table of Contents

##### 1. School Records

- a. ARD/IEP Reports including Invitations to the Meeting and Written Notices
- b. IEP Progress Reports, Report Cards, and Statewide/District Assessment Scores
- c. Full Individual Evaluation Reports, Vocational Assessment, Functional Behavior Assessments, Related Service Evaluations
- d. Consents and Notices (e.g., for evaluation, to release confidential records)

##### 2. Communication with School and from School

- a. Communication Log
- b. Notes/Talking Points for ARD/IEP Meetings
- c. E-mails or Letters

##### 3. Medical Information

- a. Doctor's Reports
- b. Private Provider Therapy Evaluations and Reports
- c. Developmental History

##### 4. Outside Agency Reports and Information

##### 5. School Work-Dated Examples

##### 6. Resources

- a. Your Child's School Team Members and Contact Information
- b. Procedural Safeguards
- c. Guide to the ARD Process
- d. Disability-Related Information

# COMMUNICATION LOG

Date/Time	Person Contacted	Topic(s)	Results/Promises/Outcomes/Notes

# CONTACTS

Position	Name	Phone	E-Mail
Teacher			
Teacher			
Teacher			
SPED Teacher			
SPED Teacher			
Speech Therapist			
Occupational Therapist			
Physical Therapist			
Aide			
Aide			
Nurse			
Counselor			
Evaluation Specialist			
Assistant Principal			
Behavior Specialist			
SPED Coordinator			
SPED Director			

# GETTING TO KNOW MY CHILD

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date Shared with School \_\_\_\_\_

## **Likes/Favorite Foods, Things, Places, Activities**

## **Strengths/Functional Skills/Vocational Interests**

## **Instructional/Functional/Vocational Needs**

## **Successful Instructional Strategies/Accommodations/Modifications**

**Behavioral/Social/Emotional Needs**

**Dislikes/Behavior Triggers**

**Motivators**

**Successful Behavior Interventions**

# CONFERENCE/MEETING NOTES

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Participants \_\_\_\_\_

Current Needs/Concerns	Interventions Tried	Interventions: Continue, Modify, Add	Follow-Up Responsibilities

## BEFORE THE MEETING CHECKLIST

Review Current IEP	
	Identify successful and useful accommodations. Note any that should be added or deleted.
	Compare present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFPs) with previous IEPs. Check for PLAAFPs to align with strengths and needs. Look for the main parts: time frame, conditions, targeted skill or performance, and criteria. Look for change in PLAAFPs over time, indicating progress.
	Identify goals/objectives to be added or deleted or written more specifically.
	Look at special education supports being provided. Jot down questions or suggestions.
	Think about related services duration and frequency. Jot down suggestions for change.
	Is the IEP specific enough/crafted to address limited progress?
	Look for evidence grade level TEKS/curriculum is addressed in IEP.
	Identify any changes or supports needed to help your child move closer to grade-level expectations.
	Use your marked up copy for discussions before or during the meeting.

Check Report Cards and Progress Reports	
	Look for specific information about progress. If information is not measurable or related to criteria in the goal, ask for the supporting data used to mark the goal as "mastered" or "continue."
	Gather the year's Progress Reports. Make sure you have received a report for each reporting period and from all related service providers. Request copies if not received.
	Look to see whether report shows whether the school anticipates reaching the expected progress by end of year. If not, request a meeting to review IEP.
	Look for any disconnect between what you see on report cards and the IEP.

Review the Current Year	
	Review communication log and other communication for compliments/concerns.
	Review Commitment/Promise Lists/Action Plans for completion.
	Review schoolwork for indications of continued failure, success, or needed accommodations.
	Ask for copies of any information not already received (e.g., new evaluation reports).

Review Meeting Invitation	
	Review the notice for purpose of the meeting: who will attend, what information will be reviewed and when, and where meeting will be held.
	If necessary, request meeting be rescheduled when you can attend.
	Consider whether more time will be needed for the agenda or whether preplanning, activities would help.
	Inform the school if you are bringing participants to the meeting.
	Notify the school if you have additional agenda items.

Prepare for the Meeting	
	List what you want child to learn this year; what is most important to you. Think about where your child is headed in the short term, in the long term.
	Write down important points you want to make or questions you want to ask in the meeting.
	Develop written statements/suggestions that can easily be shared before the meeting or added to the ARD documents at the meeting.
	Ask for the written agenda your school uses. Make a note where you want to give information at particular points on the agenda.
	Jot down your child's strengths, talents, interests, needs. Complete the "Getting to Know My Child."
	List goals, accommodations, or modifications you want considered.
	List any actions you want the school to consider (e.g., equipment, counseling evaluation).
	Make extra copies of any written information for the team members.

Other Actions	
	Get advance information. Request copies of draft IEP/ARD documents.
	Request teacher or administrator planning conferences before the meeting.
	Obtain copies of any new evaluation reports; request explanations from staff before the meeting.
	Request blank copy of ARD documents if unfamiliar to you.
	Decide whether you will record the meeting; gather equipment and inform school.
	Talk with your child to see what ideas he or she has for what's working, what's not.

# DURING THE MEETING CHECKLIST

Logistics	
	Select a seat at the table where you can see everyone and participate fully.
	Be sure the school provides you a copy of the information being shared at the meeting.
	Bring enough copies of any information you want to share with the team.
	Be on time and expect the meeting to begin on time.
	Ask for introductions and role of team members if not offered.
	Ask whether the school uses a Future Conversation chart to list any discussion items not on the agenda that need to be addressed outside the meeting.
	Ask whether the school uses a Promise or Commitment form (or other system) to track actions that need to occur after the meeting.

Communication and Integration Strategies	
	Assume good intention and motives on the part of team members before jumping to negative assumptions. Collaborate from a positive, future-focused viewpoint.
	Listen with the intent to understand others' viewpoints.
	Ask questions with purpose: to understand; to clarify; to gather facts, feelings, thoughts, or beliefs.
	Be willing to look for the underlying reasons you are making a request so that multiple solutions may be considered.
	Suggest discussion guidelines such as: Work to resolve differences. Disagree openly. Explain reasons behind own statements. Keep the discussion focused.
	Participate in decision making through consensus. Acknowledge that consensus does not mean a yes or no vote. Consider that consensus seeks a level of agreement ranging from full, whole-hearted agreement to agreement with reservations. Team members can discuss the pros and cons of recommendations and openly express reservations.

# AFTER THE MEETING CHECKLIST

Outcomes	
	Receive ARD/IEP documents in a timely manner. Review meeting documents.
	IEP implementers not at the meeting receive copy of IEP in a timely manner.
	Designated staff member monitors and follows through on commitments and keeps you updated.
	Use school communication systems to stay in touch (e.g., daily planners, teacher websites).
	Review Progress Reports and Report Cards. Compare with IEP. Confirm progress is measured and reported in the way IEP is written.

# ARD AGENDA

Agenda	My Notes/Talking Points	
Introductions: Names and Roles	My Child's Team	
Purpose/Meeting Goal		
Evaluation and Other Information		
Eligibility	My Child's Disability	
Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAPF)	How My Child Is Doing Today	
IEP Development	My Child's Goals	
Behavior Plan, If Needed		
Transition Planning/ Graduation	My Child's Life after High School	
Additional Considerations	My Child's Needs	
Accommodations/ Modifications	My Child's Supports	
Statewide Assessment	Testing	
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)		
Schedule of Services/ Placement		

# ARD AGENDA-STUDENT INFORMATION

Agenda	My Notes/Talking Points	
Introductions: Names and Roles	My Team	
Purpose/Meeting Goal	My Meeting	
Evaluation and Other Information	My Disability	
Eligibility	My Strengths My Needs My Interests	
Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP)	How My Child Is Doing Today	
IEP Development	My Goals	
Behavior Plan, If Needed	My Plan	
Transition Planning/ Graduation	My Life	
Additional Considerations	My Needs	
Accommodations/ Modifications	My Supports	
Statewide Assessment	My Testing	
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)		
Schedule of Services/ Placement	My Classes and Supports	

# COMMITMENTS

Use this to keep commitments made at the ARD/IEP meeting all in one place; include first steps in the “actions needed” column.

<b>Student:</b>	<b>ARD/IEP Meeting Date:</b>	<b>Action(s) Needed:</b>	<b>Person(s) Responsible:</b>	<b>Time-Frame:</b>

# PLANNING AND TRACKING TOOL

Meeting Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Participants: \_\_\_\_\_

My Concerns/Issues My Suggestions/ Possible Solutions	Team's Response	Resolution	Next Steps

Write down your issues and possible solutions in the first column.

Write down the team's response in the middle column.

If possible, write down how the issue was resolved, what still needs to be done, who will do it and by when.

# TRANSITION PLANNING AND SERVICES

## Transition Planning and Services-Beginning at age 14 and updated each year

### Planning Steps

	Parent and Student Checklist
<p><b>1. Age Appropriate Transition Assessments</b> Tools to help your child discover her or his strengths, preferences, interests, and needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ask how statewide testing decisions at the elementary and middle school level will affect graduation.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Get on waiting lists for services from other agencies as soon as your child's disability has been identified.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Give school information about your child's strengths, needs, interests, and preferences, possibly by completing a survey.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Talk with your child about attending and/or leading the ARD meeting.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Review a draft of the transition section of the ARD/IEP to make sure your ideas are included.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Review information in the middle and high schools Student Handbook about:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Courses offered at the middle school</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Courses offered at the high school</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Graduation programs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Measurable postsecondary goals</b> in the areas of education/training, employment, and (where appropriate) independent living. Postsecondary goals reflect your child's hopes for adulthood and are based on the results of transition assessments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Request a copy of a Four-Year Plan or Course of Study from the school counselor and see whether it meets your child's goals and interests.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Complete the Four-Year Plan with your child and take to ARD meetings.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Understand how course choices at the middle school will affect graduation.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ask how different graduation programs affect educational choices after high school.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Talk with attorney about guardianship if needed before age 18.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Understand how modifying course content affects graduation program choices/options.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Assist school in identifying other agencies to participate in transition planning. Give consent for their participation.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Check that all agreed upon services are being conducted as planned. If not, ask for an ARD meeting to consider whether alternate strategies are needed to achieve your child's goals.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Complete the activities listed in the Coordinated Set of Activities and share results with school team.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Course of Study</b> Courses, subjects, and electives your child will take each year that are aligned to her or his postsecondary goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Gives clear picture of how the school will provide the instruction, services, and supports your child needs to meet graduation plan.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identifies what needs to be done both in and outside of school to make the postsecondary goals a reality.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Involves agencies that may assist with or pay for services after high school.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provides future employers, agencies, or schools information about your child's disability, needs, and skills.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Coordinated Set of Activities</b> Special education and related services your child will need each year to reach goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Involves agencies that may assist with or pay for services after high school.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provides future employers, agencies, or schools information about your child's disability, needs, and skills.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Agency Linkage</b> School, with your consent, will invite other agencies to your ARD meeting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provides future employers, agencies, or schools information about your child's disability, needs, and skills.</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Summary of Performance (SOP)</b> Document that lists your child's academic achievement and functional performance, including recommendations for how to meet postsecondary goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provides future employers, agencies, or schools information about your child's disability, needs, and skills.</li> </ul>

# PUBLIC SCHOOL VS. ADULTHOOD

	IDEA 2004 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)	ADA 1990 (Americans with Disabilities Act)
Legislation Overview	Provides funding to states to ensure provision of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for children with disabilities ~ ENTITLEMENT ~	Civil Rights statute protecting persons with disabilities from discrimination ~ ELIGIBILITY ~
\$	Federal special education funds are distributed through three state grant programs and several discretionary grant programs.	No specific funding is available Some tax credits are available to businesses
Definition of Disability	Child with a disability means a child <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluated as having one of 13 categories of disability and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services</li> </ul>	Any individual with a disability who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities,</li> <li>• Has a record of such an impairment, or</li> <li>• Is regarded as having such an impairment</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Success in the general curriculum</li> <li>• ARD committee identifies the supports needed and ensures the IEP is shared with student's teachers</li> <li>• Accommodations, modifications, and related services provided according to IEP</li> <li>• Annual goals related to student's disability are developed and monitored</li> <li>• Progress reports provided by the school at each grading period</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to the curriculum</li> <li>• Student may choose to access the OSD (Office for Students with Disabilities) and communicate needed supports to faculty</li> <li>• Reasonable accommodations provided according to plan developed by student and OSD; no fundamental alterations to the curriculum are required</li> <li>• No annual goals are required</li> <li>• Tracking progress is up to the student</li> </ul>
Employment	Schools must <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider student's employment goals in the development of the IEP</li> <li>• Provide access to general education vocational instruction such as CTE (Career and Technical Education) courses</li> <li>• Provide structured vocational experiences for students with disabilities as specified by the IEP (Vocational Adjustment Class, Community-Based Vocational Instruction)</li> <li>• Provide job coaching as needed</li> </ul>	An employer is required to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make a reasonable accommodation to the known disability of a qualified applicant or employee</li> </ul> An employer does not have to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a reasonable accommodation if it imposes an "undue hardship"</li> <li>• Provide a reasonable accommodation unless an individual with a disability has asked for one</li> <li>• Lower quality or production standards to make an accommodation</li> <li>• Provide personal use items, such as glasses or hearing aids</li> </ul> (Source: The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission)
Responsibilities and Oversight	School is responsible for initiating request for services and maintaining contact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child Find and Evaluation time lines require investigation into suspected disability</li> <li>• Structured and protective processes and environments</li> <li>• Parental involvement is required (schools must make efforts to include parents in the ARD process)</li> </ul>	Adult is responsible for initiating request for services and maintaining contact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disclosure of disability is at the discretion of the individual</li> <li>• Individual must provide documentation to prove eligibility for services</li> <li>• Parental involvement is at the discretion of the individual</li> </ul>
For More Information	Provision of FAPE is monitored by USDE through required activities for schools. Due process is structured and protected.  U.S. Department of Education website: <a href="http://idea.ed.gov/">http://idea.ed.gov/</a>	Individuals may file complaints through U.S. Department of Justice (Civil Rights Division).  U.S. Department of Justice website: <a href="http://www.ada.gov/">http://www.ada.gov/</a>

## **WHAT CAN MY FAMILY DO TO PREPARE FOR THE CHANGE?**

### **Gather information about...**

- Agency waiting lists and services
- Supported living and supported employment options
- Types of job accommodations
- Office for Students with Disabilities at preferred colleges and universities
- Non-degree-seeking programs available for students with intellectual disabilities
- Transition planning in the IEP
- Accommodations or modifications successfully used for instruction and assessment
- Types of assistive technology successfully used in school

### **Support your child in...**

- Practicing self-determination skills, planning and leading ARD meetings
- Explaining her or his disability and needed supports
- Describing strengths and interests
- Articulating goals
- Maintaining important documents and paperwork
- Arranging doctor appointments
- Managing medication/healthcare
- Setting and following a schedule
- Organizing and planning meals
- Planning social activities or leisure time
- Using public transportation or arranging her or his own transportation

## TRANSITION ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

Transition assessments are tools to identify the strengths, preferences, interests, and needs for students with disabilities. This information is necessary to identify postschool goals and options, develop the annual goals needed to meet postsecondary goals, and identify appropriate transition services. There are many options available for educators to get the information needed to develop a transition plan for each student's IEP. Secondary educators should be able to list the transition assessments that are available in their district/campus for the areas of:

- Employment
- Education
- Independent Living

### Types of Transition Assessment

#### Formal

- Standardized, valid and reliable, may be normed
- EXAMPLES:  
Casey Life Skills, Transition Planning Inventory (TPI), Enderle-Severson Transition Rating (ESTR) Scale, Transition Behavior Scale, Brigance Transition Skills Inventory
- Use when you need:  
Aptitude, specific skills, cognitive performance, strengths

#### Informal

- Nonstandardized, not normed
- EXAMPLES:  
Person-Centered Plan, Decision-Making Matrix, interviews, surveys, observations, checklists, rating scales, curriculum-based assessment, functional vocational evaluation
- Use when you need:  
Preferences, interests, personal history, behavior or environmental analysis

Guiding questions for transition assessment:

- Do we understand this student's preferences and interests?
- In what ways can the school prepare students for the future?
- Is the student making progress toward specific instructional goals?
- What information do I need to know about this individual to determine postschool goals?
- What methods/sources will provide this information?
- How will the assessment data be collected and used in the IEP process?

“All educators, not just transition specialists, must collect ongoing assessment data throughout the student's academic career. This must be more than just a snapshot. Transition assessment must be developed and implemented with the student and his or her family, updated regularly, and integrated into an overall assessment plan.” (Sitlington & Clark, 2001)

## Frequently Asked Questions about Transition Assessment

### **Q: What are the legal requirements for completing transition assessments?**

**A:** IDEA §300.43 states that “Transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that . . . is based on the individual child’s needs, taking into account the child’s strengths, preferences, and interests.” In Texas, TEC §29.011 states that “the commissioner shall by rule adopt procedures for compliance with federal requirements relating to transition services . . .” There are no further requirements for transition assessments under Texas law. Note that neither federal nor state laws indicate specific requirements for how many or what type of transition assessments are required.

### **Q: How are transition assessments monitored?**

**A:** To meet compliance for SPP (State Performance Plan) Indicator 13, each IEP reviewed must include the results of any transition assessments completed for that student. There are three items on the checklist that address transition assessments:

- Age-appropriate transition assessments are completed
- Student strengths and needs are identified
- Student preferences and interests are taken into consideration in the development of the IEP

### **Q: Can the FIE be used as a transition assessment?**

**A:** Some of the information in the FIE (Full Individual Evaluation) can be helpful for transition planning. Information about the student’s disability, behavior, communication, health, academic performance, and recommended accommodations and modifications can help the ARD committee members as they consider postsecondary goals and transition services. However, the FIE should not be the sole assessment used for transition planning. The school team would need to use other tools in addition to the FIE to discover the student’s strengths, preferences, and interests in the areas of employment, education, and independent living.

### **Q: Should results from transition assessments be included in the FIE?**

**A:** It is recommended that the FIE include information about transition. As the evaluation specialist gathers data about the student from teachers, family members, and the student, she or he should also collect the results of any transition assessments that were completed. This information can be included in a separate section of the FIE or throughout the existing sections.

**Q: What is a functional vocational evaluation? When is it appropriate to provide one?**

**A:** “Functional vocational evaluation is defined as documentation of general work behaviors (e.g. attention to task, work rate, work organization, attendance, punctuality, & physical stamina); dexterity, following directions, working independently, or with job supports or accommodations; job interests and preferences; abilities (aptitude); and other special needs, such as job specific work skills, interpersonal relationships & socialization, and work related skills (e.g. independent transportation, appropriate use of break time, appropriate dress for work). Functional assessments are considered most valid when provided in a specific work environment" (ODE definition, retrieved from <http://education.ohio.gov>). TEC §29.011 requires that ARD committees “consider, and if appropriate, address . . . a functional vocational evaluation.” This means that school teams should review the results from transition assessments to determine whether they provide the information needed to plan for employment goals and services. If not, then a plan to gather the missing information through functional vocational evaluation should be addressed to get a more accurate picture of the student’s strengths and needs.

Functional vocational evaluation is typically needed when communication or behavior limits a student’s ability to demonstrate skills through standardized assessments.

**Q: Does an assessment need to be completed every year for each life domain for every student?**

**A:** Decisions about which assessments to complete will be based on what information is needed about the student to effectively plan for transition. While it may be appropriate to complete a formal assessment as a student begins her or his transition planning, a checklist or interview later in her or his school years might be all that is needed to ensure that she or he is still on track toward meeting her or his postsecondary goals. For another student it might be appropriate to complete more formal assessments as she or he gets closer to graduation to identify options for higher education or employment options.

Short answer: It depends!

**Q: Once I have administered a transition assessment, where do I put the information?**

**A:** To meet requirements for State Performance Plan (SPP) Indicator 13, the results of the transition assessments must be included in the IEP from the annual ARD (or any ARD where transition is discussed). Below are examples of processes that some districts have used to ensure transition information is available as needed.

- **FIE:** As noted in the question above, information from transition assessments can be included in the Full Individual Evaluation (FIE) or Review of Existing Evaluation Data (REED). Since evaluation is required to be considered only once every three years, this would not meet annual transition assessment requirements.
- **IEP:** Results from transition assessments can go into any section of the IEP, including evaluation, transition, PLAAFP, or deliberations.
- **Transition folder:** A separate section kept in the eligibility folder that contains all of the documentation from transition assessments, services, and progress. This extra information is not needed to meet SPP 13, but can be a helpful way to gather ALL of the information to maintain accessibility for the school team.
- **Summary of Performance portfolio:** This is a portfolio that can be kept with teacher records. The information will be used to develop the Summary of Performance with the student upon graduation/exit.

Sources

Noonan, P., Morningstar, M., and Clark, G. (2009). Transition Assessment: The Big Picture. Retrieved 1/3/13 from the University of Kansas, Department of Special Education, Transition Coalition Website: <http://www.transitioncoalition.org>

Sitlington, P. L., Clark, G. M. (2001). Career/vocational assessment: A critical component of transition planning. Assessment for Effective Intervention.

Legal Framework (ESC Region 18): <http://framework.esc18.net/>

TEA State Performance Plan: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147499500>

ODE: <http://education.ohio.gov/>

NSTTAC (SPP Indicator 13 Guidance): <http://www.nsttac.org/>

# SIX TRANSITION QUESTIONS EVERY STUDENT SHOULD ANSWER

**1. What are my goals for after high school?**

- Where do I want to work?
- What type of education do I plan to pursue?
- Where do I plan to live? Will I need support?
- What will I do for fun?
- Who will my friends be?
- How will I get around town?

**2. What is my graduation plan?**

**3. What classes will I take during high school to help me meet my goals after graduation?**

**4. What agencies will I need to access after I graduate from high school?**

**5. What assistive technology will I need after I graduate?**

**6. What is the plan to increase independence as I get close to graduation?**

# FACILITATION QUICK REFERENCE

## Increasing Psychological Satisfaction

### Acknowledge feelings and emotions

Speakers may be unwilling to discuss a problem or make a decision until they believe others understand the depth of their feelings.

*It seems like this student has really hurt your feelings and you doubt your effectiveness as a teacher.*

*You sound hurt.*

*You seem frustrated.*

### Acknowledge and validate actions

*John, it was really helpful when you asked us to think about where we wanted to see Billy in two years.*

*It appears that being a good parent is very important to you.*

*It appears that your daughter's becoming a productive adult is very important to you and you are working hard to make that happen.*

### Clarify or test generalizations, assumptions, and judgments. Bring out into the open and clarify.

*You said no one cares what you think. What do you mean when you say no one cares?*

*What did you see that led you to believe the school people weren't listening?*

*On what basis are you making the comment that the therapist is not meeting your child's needs?*

### Use Neutral Language. Reduce or alleviate defensiveness and increase understanding.

**Original statement:** I am absolutely furious with this school. No one ever returns phone calls, and the teachers are very rude and obnoxious.

**Neutral statement:** It sounds like you are upset about the response you think you are getting from the school.

### Summarize Using Neutral Language

- 1) Acknowledge emotion with less intense language.
- 2) Summarize from their perspective.
- 3) Use descriptive terms.

**Hold up a "mirror"** by reflecting what the facilitator sees happening in the meeting. Specific, observable actions. No accusations or generalizations or attributions of motives.

*Three of you have grown quiet and not said anything. You have rolled your eyes twice during this part of the discussion.*

### Ask Questions

#### Gain additional information

*What kind of progress has Billy made in math?*

#### Solicit facts

*When did you observe?*

#### Solicit opinions and judgments

*What did you think led to his actions?*

#### Solicit feelings

*How did you feel when that happened?*

*What do you need to say or do (or hear) to move forward?*

#### Confirm your understanding of information

*You said he turned in 50% of his homework. Is that correct?*

#### Invite elaboration

*You mentioned you have worked with Susie at school on her behavior. Talk about what you have done.*

#### Reality Check Question

*If we aren't able to work this out, what impact do you think that will have on Maria?*

#### Scaling Question

*On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "not interested" and 10 being "more interested about this than anything," where would you say you fall in terms of your motivation to work with the team on this issue?*

#### Miracle Question ("Magic Wand" or "Crystal Ball")

*If time and money were no obstacle, what type of reading interventions would you design for Marie?*

### Summarize. Redirect the discussion. Refocus the conversation.

Move to the next stage of the discussion. Let the speaker know what was heard. Confirm accuracy of what was said. Start "reframing" the group's take or understanding of the issue or situation. Clarify areas of agreement and disagreement.

*So far I have heard the following concerns. . .*

*So far we have discussed. . .*

*Let me summarize the agreement so far.*

*Let me summarize areas where we haven't reached agreement.*

### Reframe a complaint or negative as a neutral or positive.

*You said you are really tired of being ignored and not getting information. It sounds like you want school staff to listen to you and give you information.*

*You have clearly stated what you don't want. What is it you want?*

## Increasing Psychological Satisfaction

### Invite discussion, including different opinions.

What are positive aspects?

What are negative aspects?

Let's open this up for discussion.

Write down ideas individually and post on chart.

### Ask Questions

#### Gain additional information

*What kind of progress has Billy made in math?*

**Enforce the ground rules** to establish a safe environment for all.

*I'd like to remind everyone that we agreed to speak one at a time.*

*It's really hard for all to hear when there are side conversations.*

*Each person's opinion is valued here. We need to allow each to speak without interruption. Is everyone willing to not interrupt?*

### Use humor - careful, careful, and careful!

Humor can backfire in a major way if used inappropriately. The most effective humor might be something that is directed at the facilitator or the situation.

**Use metaphors.** Can be a powerful intervention. Develop a core list for your tool kit. Examples: sports, garden, nature, machines.

*At times the group is running toward the goal line - but in the wrong direction.*

*If this group were a garden, how would you describe your work?*

*We seem to have a missing piece to this puzzle we are assembling.*

## Increasing Procedural Satisfaction

Clarify roles at the beginning of the IEP meeting. Remind group members, as needed, of the roles/functions of members.

State and stick to the agenda; refocus the group to the agenda, as needed.

*The agenda for today is. . . Is that agreeable to everyone?*

*As discussion gets diverted: Let me review where we are on our agenda.*

**Honor important off-topic or off-agenda topics by creating a "future conversations" page.**

*I can see that is an important thing to discuss in the future. Right now our agenda is pretty full for the amount of time we have allotted. I'd like to add the topic to our future conversations list. Is that agreeable to everyone?*

**Break down a broad discussion into smaller, possibly more manageable parts.**

*Talking about Bobby's social relationships is a pretty broad area to tackle. Why don't we start by talking about how he relates to students during lunch? Will that work for everyone?*

**Invite options. Sometimes it is helpful to use a technique that will generate ideas from everyone.**

*What alternatives can you think of that will address this issue?*

*You have discussed a lot of different ideas. I'd like to ask everyone to write down your ideas on the sticky notes on the table. One idea on each sticky note, like this (demonstrate a nonsensical idea such as "go to Hawaii").*

*Then we will group these ideas and see whether we can come up with three to four.*

**Seek resources to ensure all the necessary information has been presented and understood by all before asking the group to generate and discuss solutions.**

*It seems like we might need more information about Joanie's performance in reading before we can make any final decisions about what she needs for next year. How do you want to get this information?*

**Step out of the content and talk about the process.**

**Factually describe the predicament:**

*The group is having trouble staying on topic. Three people have asked us to stay focused on Johnny's progress, but someone keeps changing the subject.*

**Get agreement from the group to proceed:**

*It might be helpful to step back from the discussion for a moment and explore what's getting in the way. I'd like to open up a discussion of how we are working together. Is that agreeable with the group?*

**Invite a discussion on the process (midpoint check):**

*Does anyone have any thoughts about the way we are working together? What might be blocking us from working more effectively?*

**Prepare the group to return to the content discussion: Summarize any decisions about working together. Then state, At this point let's return to talking about Johnny's progress in math.**

**Increasing Substantive Satisfaction**

**Clarify what information** is needed to make informed decisions and who can provide that information. This is best done prior to the beginning of **the IEP team meeting** so meetings will go smoothly and efficiently.

**Invite participants to share information related to the content (substance).** The agenda should be structured in a way that enables all of the substantive information to be presented.

**Invite someone** from outside of the meeting to join the team and provide information. At times it might be helpful to invite someone into the IEP meeting for the purpose of sharing specific additional information. She or he may or may not be present for the entire meeting.

**Take a break or reschedule the meeting** to obtain additional information needed before decisions can be made. One of the underlying values of facilitation is that group members make informed decisions. It is not helpful to participatory processes to ask individuals to make a decision without all the necessary information.

**Interventions for Resistance and Conflict**

**Acknowledge the team seems to be stuck.**

Ask for suggestions for moving forward.

*At this point the group seems stuck. **What needs to happen at this time?***

*What does the group **think is happening right now?***

Acknowledge areas of agreement so as not to focus just on areas of disagreement.

**Provide face-saving support.**

People will have a hard time changing their position or stance on an issue if they aren't allowed to save face (public identify). Does one person need additional support to save face in backing down from a position? What needs to happen for one to "let go" of the conflict? Offer to facilitate a separate, private discussion (caucus) between two (or more) team members.

**Explore the possible purpose (payoffs) of the impasse.**

Who is getting what by not resolving the issue? What might each want to gain? This exploration is best done in private or through individual meetings with team members. **Individual meetings provide** an opportunity to ask some tough questions, including the "reality check" question.

*What will it mean for you if this isn't resolved?*

*What is the cost for you of not resolving this?*

*This is also an opportunity to use the scaling question.*

*On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "not at all interested" and 10 being "I'm so interested I'll stay all night," rate how motivated you are to resolve this issue.*

**Acknowledge strong feelings and redirect if bullying or attacking others occurs.**

*I understand you have very strong feelings about this issue. It will help our decision-making process if we can refrain from talking about personalities or motivations (attribution) and instead look at the problem and possible solutions.*

*We agreed to talk about issues and not people. How can we avoid this type of miscommunication in the future?*

**Acknowledge that something seems to be missing or unstated.**

*I sense there is something present here that has not been said.*

**What is it?**

*There is something going on under the surface. **Can someone say what it is?***

*What hasn't been said is louder right now than what has been said.*

**Acknowledge the one who dominates, monopolizes, or tries to control the discussion and then redirect.**

Acknowledge the one who has spoken. Follow with *We haven't heard much from the rest of you. What is your thinking about this?*

*\_\_\_\_\_, we'd like to give others a chance to talk. Give us a one-sentence summary of your point. Then we can hear from other members of the group.*

**Help the team define** what it needs by developing criteria for an acceptable outcome rather than focusing on the outcome itself.

**Help people focus** on what they have accomplished so far in the conversation, summarizing areas of agreement and reminding them that they have the power to change the situation.

**Try a role reversal,** asking each person to assume the other's role and then react to the impasse.

**Use structured approach and technologies** to interject needed objectivity. Examples: force-field analysis, systematic problem solving, cause and effect.

## ACRONYMS

504	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
AAR	Academic Achievement Record
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
AEIS	Academic Excellence Indicator System (State)
AEP	Alternative Education Program
AGC	Access to the General Curriculum
AI	Auditory Impairment
APE	Adapted Physical Education
ARD	Admission, Review, and Dismissal
ARDC	Admission, Review, and Dismissal Committee
AI	Auditory Impairment
AU	Autism
AYP	Annual Yearly Progress (Federal)
BIL	Bilingual Education
BIP	Behavior Intervention Plan
CBA	Curriculum-Based Assessment
CBI	Community-Based Instruction
CBVI	Community-Based Vocational Instruction
CTE	Career and Technology Education
DADS	Department of Aging and Disability Services
DAEP	Discipline Alternative Education Program
DAP	Distinguished Achievement Program (Graduation option for students entering grade 9 prior to 2014-2015)
DARS	Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services
DB	Deaf Blindness
DPH	Due Process Hearing
ECI	Early Childhood Intervention
ECO	Early Childhood Outcomes
ED	Emotional Disturbance

ESC	Education Service Centers
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESY	Extended School Year
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education
FBA	Functional Behavioral Assessment
FERPA	Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act
FIE	Full Individual Evaluation
FIEP	Facilitated IEP Meeting
GPC	Grade Placement Committee
ID	Intellectual Disability
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEE	Independent Educational Evaluation
IEP	Individualized Education Program
ISS	In-School Suspension
JJAEP	Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program
LD	Learning Disability
LEA	Local Education Agency (Districts and Charters)
LEP	Limited English Proficiency
LF	Legal Frameworks
LPAC	Language Proficiency Assessment Committee
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
MD	Multiple Disabilities
MDR	Manifestation Determination Review
MHSP	Minimum High School Program (Graduation option for students entering grade 9 prior to 2014-2015)
NCEC	Noncategorical Early Childhood
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
OCR	Office of Civil Rights
OHI	Other Health Impairment
OI	Orthopedic Impairment

OSEP	Office of Special Programs
OSS	Out-of-School Suspension
PBMAS	Performance-Based Monitoring Analysis System (State)
PGP	Personal Graduation Plan
PIA	Public Information Act
PLAAFP	Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance
PWN	Prior Written Notice
RDSPD	Regional Day School Program for the Deaf
REED	Review of Existing Evaluation Data
RHSP	Recommended High School Program (Graduation option for students entering grade 9 prior to 2014-2015)
RTI	Response to Intervention
SBOE	State Board of Education Rules
SHARS	School Health and Related Services
SI	Speech Impairment
SOP	Summary of Performance
SPP	State Performance Plan (Federal)
SSI	Student Services Initiatives
STAAR	State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (formerly TAKS)
TAC	Texas Administrative Code (State Board of Education and Commissioner's Rules)
TAKS	Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills
TBI	Traumatic Brain Injury
TEA	Texas Education Agency
TEC	Texas Education Code (State Laws)
TEKS	Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills
TSBVI	Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired
TSD	Texas School for the Deaf
TYC	Texas Youth Commission
USDE	United States Department of Education
VAC	Vocational Adjustment Class
VI	Visual Impairment