

The Basics of an IEP: How to NOT leave the IEP table in tears



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FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

Who Am I?

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- Certified Master IEP Coach®
- Certified Oklahoma Teacher
- Mom of three children, two of whom have learning differences



What is an IEP?



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IEP vs. 504 Plan: What's the Difference?

Key Differences	<u>IEP</u>	<u>504</u>
Which Law?	IDEA	Section 504 of the Rehab Plan
Eligibility	13 eligibility categories	Access to Education
Age Limits	Until 22nd Birthday	No Limit
What It Does?	Meets Unique Needs + Prep for Future	Designs Equal Access
What's In It?	Goals + Placement + Services	Accommodations + Supports
How Often?	Review Annually	Review Annually

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What is an IEP?

- Foundation for what needs to be focused on to ensure a child is prepared for further education, employment, and independent living
- Lays out the special education instruction, supports, and services that a student needs to thrive in public school, which includes charter schools.
- Acts as a way to document progress towards goals
- Legal written document that **MUST** be implemented and followed by the public school district
- **NOT** limited to solely academic goals, can also be focused on other goals that will prepare the student for further education



Anatomy of an IEP

- **Present levels of performance** → give a full picture of where the student is currently at and help build the rest of the IEP.
- **MEASURABLE** annual SMART goals that correlate to student's present levels of performance and are relevant to real-life. Short-term benchmarks (objectives) should also be included.
- **Related Services** - you can ask for services the way that YOU prefer & that the student needs (direct instruction, push in, pull out, collaboration, monitoring).
- **Accommodation & Modifications** - changes to the general education curriculum and/or environment so that the student can fully access their education.
 - Changes to what the student learns
 - Adding in supports (adaptive furniture, low-tech & hi-tech Assistive Technology)
- **Implementation** - make sure you review the IEP with the people who will be implementing the plan! Having a well-written IEP is important, but HOW it's implemented should be the focus!
- You DO NOT have to check agree or sign the IEP at the meeting!



IEP Goals for the Real World



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The Parent Input Statement

Driver of the student's IEP goals and services I recommend sending it as a letter to be included with the child's file and entered into EdPlan in the parent input statement part (yes, this can & should be done)!

- It can include:
 - Foundation goals;
 - Communication goals;
 - Academic goals;
 - Sensory & self-regulation goals;
 - Executive functioning goals
- Include desired outcomes: where do you see your child 5 years from now?
- Student-focused with the intent to create GAME changing solutions!
- Have an equal voice in a productive way! This is NOT a dumping ground for complaints. :)
- Define what success looks like for your student.



How Do I Get Started?

Find it + Start Over

- ❑ Grab your student's IEP and find the parent input statement.
- ❑ Is there anything in the current statement that is true *right now*?
- ❑ Does it show where you see your student in 5 years (or even a year) from now?
- ❑ Where does your student see themselves in 5 years (or even a year) from now?

Communication

- ❑ What is the child/student's communication preferences?
- ❑ What tools & supports will help your child/student communicate more in the real world?

Foundation Goals

- ❑ Where do we see academic goals supporting your child/student long term?
- ❑ Where do we see functional goals supporting your child/student long term?
- ❑ The goals should be a roadmap to get your vision in 5 years!
- ❑ Do the goals make sense for the real world?

Sensory & Self-Regulation

- ❑ What tough situations does the student need to conquer to be successful in school?
- ❑ What tough situations does the student need to conquer to be successful in the community?

Old School vs. New School Thinking

1

Ability

Deficit Based
Vs.
Skills Based

4

Therapy

Isolated Therapy
Vs.
Integrated Therapy



2

Skills

Curriculum Based
Vs.
Usability Based

5

Goals

Direct Instruction First
Vs.
Natural Routines



3

Milestones

Chronological Age Based
Vs.
Developmental Age Based

6

Leadership

Staff
Vs.
Parents



Common Sense IEP Goals

Just because you can write an IEP goal, how do you know it's the right IEP goal for that student for this school year? Goals should be relevant to what the student is going to do next. Some pieces of the goal are in your control and some aren't.

Goals drive placement! Do NOT change goals to meet placement. Placement refers to the range or continuum of educational settings available in the district to implement the student's IEP and the overall amount of time the student will spend in the general education setting.

Can you think of TWO reason that you, as an adult, need that skill in your student's IEP goal?

- If not, then it might be time to set that goal aside.
- Foundation of what's needed for functional skills.

Has this student been trying this skill for TWO years and is failing?

- Put it to the side & prioritize something else!
- Rethink the method. Do we need to approach it drastically different?

Strength-Based IEP

Build on current mastered skills

- ❑ Have a baseline for success & build upon it.
- ❑ Work where they're at and build up to where they need to be. This helps the student to feel & be successful.
- ❑ Data needs to be communicated to show benchmarks (objectives).
- ❑ Simplify and clarify the present levels of performance with examples of supports and types of curriculum being used (NOT just percentages everywhere).

Build on preferred topics & activities

- ❑ Get preferences documented in their IEP & integrate preferred activities into their day, everyday, not just for rewards.
- ❑ Preferred activities can help a student build momentum towards milestones.
- ❑ Empirical observation data is also very valuable.
- ❑ Define who's taking data in the IEP.
- ❑ There may need to be staff training to know how the IEP is implemented in each classroom specific to IEP goals (i.e., special strategies).

What does Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) mean?

The word *environment* makes it sound like a place. But where a child learns is only part of the equation. LRE applies to a student's **entire** education program, including services.

- Least restrictive environment (LRE) means students who get special education should be in the same classrooms as other students *as much as possible*.
- LRE isn't a place — it's a principle that guides a child's education program.
- The LRE for each student will look different because students are unique.

The goal is to make sure that kids who receive special education are included in the general education classroom *as often as possible*. But agreeing on how that happens isn't always easy.

Here are some common LRE scenarios:

- **General education classroom with support.** A child spends the entire day in a general education class and gets supports and services like a tutor or aide, assistive technology, related services, or accommodations.
- **Partial mainstream/inclusion classroom.** A child spends part of the day in a general education class. The child gets some individual or small-group instruction in a special education class, or is pulled out of class for some services.
- **Special education class.** This is a program with specialized instruction for kids with similar learning needs.
- **Specialized program outside of the school district.** This includes private schools, residential programs, and hospital programs.

What to expect when you're at the IEP table



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The Three P's

Preparation

Thinking ahead is the name of the game. Sometimes there are solutions to our IEP struggles that simply take some preparation and forethought.

“Send me everything ahead of time so I can be fully prepared.”

Participation

We want to create collaborative IEPs that truly work in the real world. That starts with full-team participation!

Parents are an EQUAL member of the team!

“More discussion and less presentation.”

Possibility

An "us vs them" meeting is intimidating and leaves team members feeling at a disadvantage.

We can create change for EVERYONE at the IEP table! See what's possible and CHANGE the trajectory.

“Building positive relationships through tough situations.”



Preparation Checkpoints

- ❑ Has an IEP meeting been scheduled for a date and time that everyone is available, including a support person for the parent, if needed?
- ❑ Have updates, draft goals, data, and reports been shared between ALL team members so nobody is shocked or surprised at the meeting?
- ❑ Does any further testing or data collection need to happen before the IEP meeting to make sure we can make smart decisions?
- ❑ Is everybody ready to report on the child's present levels of performance, in their area of expertise, including the parent?
- ❑ Have all possible placements that will be considered BEFORE the meeting been viewed?
- ❑ Have you submitted a Parent Input Statement BEFORE the meeting?



Preparation is KEY!

- IEP should include the student's voice, including where the student sees themselves in five years (or one) from now. Show a short video or bring a photo of your student to help everyone remember why they're at the IEP table. A student's voice in their education is KEY to seeing maximum progress.
- IEP meetings need to be based on data. Try to stay as factual and non-emotional as possible (easier said than done). You can ask to pause the meeting at any time if you need to. You can walk around, clear your head, whatever you need!
- IEP meetings should NOT have surprises. You can submit an agenda before the meeting to show the top three areas you'd like to focus on. When the meeting gets "off track," you can respond with, "While I hear what you're saying, we're here today to focus on XYZ."
- Small changes lead to big results! NO IEP will be perfect, however, we can make it go from bad to good and from good to great!



IEP Checklist:

YOU are the information gatherer!

Are present levels of performance clear?	Is there a CLEAR parent input statement?
Do the IEP goals make sense for the real world?	How are accommodations & modifications implemented? What is everyone's role to ensure it happens?
How are service minutes being met?	Do we need to look at further options for inclusion?
What curriculum, tools and strategies are being used?	Do we need to look at further options for technology?
How is data being taken & by whom?	Do you need any additional data to make the best decisions?
What are the full continuum of placement options?	What further training is needed to make the IEP happen?



Participation Checkpoints

- ❑ Has everyone, including the parent, participated in creating meaningful IEP goals for long term success?
- ❑ Have all areas of the education experience been addressed, including environments both inside and outside of the classroom?
- ❑ Have you fully discussed the supports needed in each environment to support the child for success?
- ❑ Have all service minutes been reviewed and clearly defined on how they will be used by each provider?
- ❑ Have you full discussed accommodations and included who is responsible for implementing them?



Positive Phrases = Trust Building

Getting Started

- You don't have to know everything!
- You DO need to know when & what questions to ask!
- You can't get to a yes if you don't know why they're saying no.
- Stay positively persistent!
- You are building positive relationships through tough situations.
- Believe in the power of YES and HOW!
- Ask to observe before agreeing to placement. You can't be an equal team member without observing the environment.



Positive Phrases = Trust Building

It's not WHAT you say, it's HOW you phrase it!

- **“We don’t do that here.”** Can you please show me the policy that is stopping us from moving forward? I need you to put in writing why you’re unwilling to do this.
- **“The student can’t handle XYZ.”** I understand what you’re saying. Let’s look at what skill deficit needs to be addressed to support the student and what additional training the teacher might need.
- **“Student is making limited progress on this goal.”** Let’s determine together if it’s an ideal goal or if we need to shift focus to a different core skill.
- **IEP isn’t being following.** ABC happened. It’s incorrect (service minutes not being met, IEP not implemented correctly). How do we course correct? I think we should do XYZ.
- **Ask “What do you know about XYZ?”** Asking this question will show where the staff may need training based on their response.



Staff Shortages & Conflict Resolution

- **Build trust before offering solutions.** Kindness & respect is key. I see you statements and validation.
- **Paras are not responsible for IEPS.** Clarify what their responsibilities are and what they are suppose to be doing for the student. There should be scripted plans for the para.
- **Are there any medical or safety needs?** Those needs rise to the top. No wait & see flexibility (elopement, seizures, etc). You absolutely need to see the full continuum of placements.
- **“I know how limited your time is. Does this idea feel feasible?”** This is a way to present an idea and see how the staff responds. Another approach is to ask “How do we make XYZ happen?”
- **“This can’t be done due to staff shortages.”** How do we find something that CAN be done! Let’s think through this creatively and make an educated decision together.
- **Hiring outside services.** What is reasonable to ask the school to pay for? About 50% of the service minutes in the IEP (with consult minutes as well). For example, 30 minutes of outside speech paid for by the school in lieu of 60 minutes in school.



Possibility Checkpoints: Parent & Student

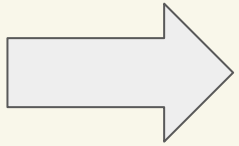
- Has the team discussed the full continuum of placements to ensure this is the right class / program for the student?
- Has data collection been discussed and how it will be shared with the entire team, including the parent?
- Has a school to home communication plan been put into place?
- Has assistive technology or standard technology been put into place?
Never give up on building a student's communication skills.
- Has the child's schedule for a typical school day been created as simple as possible with minimal transitions?
- Has the child participated in the IEP process to the best of their ability, including choosing their rewards/motivators?



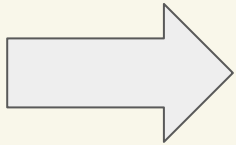
Possibility: Teacher & Staff Training

- Training in prompting level
 - What prompts is the student to get?
 - Frequency / duration
- Training on motivators and rewards.
 - Not using food as a motivator
 - Student involvement in choosing
- Training on communication needs for the student.
- Training on inclusion
 - What does that look like for the student?

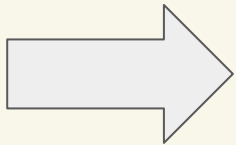
Possibility: Expect the UNEXPECTED



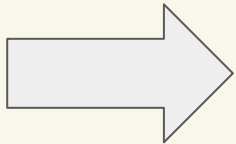
You are an IDEA BRINGER!



You are a SOLUTION FINDER!



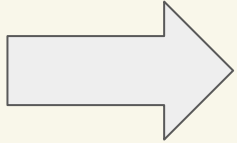
You are your student's BEST advocate!
CELEBRATE their journey & how far they've come!



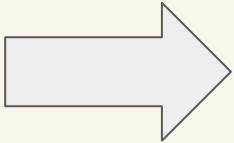
You are an EQUAL member of the team!



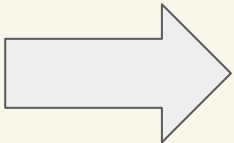
Possibility: Inclusion



Inclusion is an experience, not a place. The student should be a part of the activities & school community.



Ensure the student is having an inclusive experience by being able to access their education at their ability level and growing their ability level to the next level of learning.



Multi-dimensional activity can be done in a variety of ways! Be solution-focused and creative!



Possibility: Realistic Expectations

1

You will never fit everything a student learns in their school day inside of an IEP document.
That's ok!

2

The IEP meeting should always end with action steps for each person at the table.

3

Communication throughout the school year about the IEP issues need to happen to avoid unproductive meetings.

Possibility: Moving Forward

1

An IEP is a living, breathing document that can be adjusted at ANYTIME!

2

Think about what the services on the IEP look like in my child's day. Does it make sense?

3

Create reinforcement plans that work. Celebrate the journey and remind the team of how far your child has come!

What are my rights?



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Parents' Rights: IDEA guarantees FAPE for your student.

YOU are responsible for protecting those rights!

Special Education

- ❑ Free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for your child
- ❑ To be informed and told about ALL special education services
- ❑ Question and appeal the placement of your child in a special education (SPED) class or service
- ❑ Other educational setting at public expense if a local school is not appropriate

Evaluation

- ❑ Full, free, and individual testing of your student's educational needs for purposes of evaluation & placement
- ❑ Refuse permission for evaluation to determine if the student is eligible for SPED services.
- ❑ Obtain an outside, independent evaluation if you disagree with school's evaluation.
- ❑ Student re-eval *at least* every 3 years, if needed.

IEP Process

- ❑ Treated as an EQUAL member of the team
- ❑ State your opinions & recommendations for SPED services
- ❑ Review your student's IEP & progress towards goals *at least* once a year
- ❑ Request changes in your student's IEP
- ❑ Request an IEP meeting at ANY time

Written Notice

- ❑ Informed, with enough time to respond, to the school's plan for your child: to evaluate, place in SPED, hold an IEP meeting, change the IEP, or stop SPED services
- ❑ Must be in your native language



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Records

- ❑ Know what kinds of records exist and where they are located
- ❑ See your student's school records at any time and to have copies made
- ❑ Request that a record be explained, changed, or destroyed

Due Process

- ❑ BEFORE due process, you can request mediation through the Special Education Resolution Center (SERC)
- ❑ Ask for "stay put" (child's IEP stays as written with no changes) until a resolution is reached
- ❑ Ask the school to discuss any disagreements about your student's evaluation, identification, IEP, or placement
- ❑ Request an impartial hearing (through SERC) if you disagree with the school about your student's evaluation, identification, IEP, or placement

Complaints

- ❑ File a complaint with the State Department of Education
- ❑ File a complaint with the Office of Civil Rights

**INFORMED AND INVOLVED
PARENTS ARE A STUDENT'S FIRST
AND BEST ADVOCATE!**



Top Tips

- Follow up any in-person discussion or phone call with an email to memorialize the conversation. Let it sit before hitting send. State at the end, “This is my recollection of our conversation. Please let me know if you disagree or have any additional information to add.”
- Having a timeline / log of your conversations, emails, meetings, etc. is helpful. This can assist you later on if you need to address concerns to show where you’ve reached out, what’s been tried, etc.
- You CAN change an IEP without a full meeting. The SPED teacher can take care of the “paperwork shuffle.”
- Be authentic & transparent!
- Give EVERY person who works with your student a “snapshot” of who they are, likes/dislikes, and what’s on their IEP (paper copies & via email).
- Kindness goes a long way. A handwritten note of gratitude or copying the teacher’s/aide’s boss on an email complimenting them.



How to Connect



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EKCO is here for YOU!



parents@okpsaedu.org



(833) 270-7766



OPESA Parent Resources webpage

- Help drafting parent input statements.
- Help drafting parent concern letters.
- Coaching you through the IEP process.
- Attending meetings, if requested.
- Continual support.
- NO cost to any family!



Additional Resources

[Special Education Inner Circle Podcast](#), hosted by Master IEP Coach® Founder, Catherine Whitcher. Get your notebook ready as Catherine brings you real-world strategies for everyone at the IEP table.

[Oklahoma ABLETech](#) A FREE resource where you can trial Assistive Technology (AT) devices. Assistive Technology (AT) can be used in a variety of ways, and for a variety of purposes. It can support people in carrying out everyday tasks and activities, enhance their safety, support their social participation, monitor their health, and more. AT is any piece of equipment or device used to improve the capabilities of people with disabilities. It's NOT at all just an iPad or AAC device (although those are examples of AT).

[Understood.org](#) A FREE online resource that provides a wealth of information on a variety of topics related to people with disabilities (accommodations, supports, etc).

[WrightsLaw](#) A FREE online resource for parents, advocates, teachers, and attorneys to access for reliable, up-to-date information about special education law and advocacy for children with disabilities.



You've Got This!



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