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What Can I Expect at My Child's IEP Meeting?

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The process to have a child evaluated for special education services at school can be a lengthy one and unfamiliar to some parents. If you, as a parent, have a child who recently went through special education testing at school, you may have some questions about what the next steps will be. A member of the Special Education team may have already contacted you (if not, someone will contact you) to schedule a meeting to review the testing results and discuss appropriate options for your child. If this is the first time you've been in this situation, you may be wondering what exactly to expect at this meeting.

The evaluation/eligibility meeting can vary slightly from state to state, or even between school districts, but the general framework will always be the same. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss your child's specific needs and the most appropriate ways for him/her to succeed in school. Keep in mind that YOU, as a parent, have a crucial role in this meeting! If you have questions or concerns, this is the perfect opportunity to discuss them. The following will give you an idea of what to expect at your child's eligibility meeting:

First, your Parent Rights will be read to or reviewed with you at the beginning of the meeting, and you will be offered a copy if you would like to keep one for your records. Technically called Procedural Safeguards, these rights are designed to protect you and your child and give families and schools ways to resolve disputes if they arise.



Next, the evaluation results will be reviewed. The actual paperwork will be formatted differently depending on the state in which you live, but this portion of the meeting will follow these three general steps:



1. The members of the Special Education team will each review their portions of the testing and discuss strengths and weaknesses that your child exhibited during the assessment. The numbers and scores may seem confusing or overwhelming, but the team members will try to explain the results in a way that is easy to understand. Areas of assessment may include health, vision and hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communication, and/or motor abilities.



2. If the testing results show that your child has a disability that adversely affects his/her performance at school, this means that your child will qualify for special education services (see below).



3. If everyone at the meeting agrees to the evaluation results summary, this document will be signed by all members.



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If your child qualifies for special education services, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) will be put into place. This is a detailed plan that explains how your child's needs will be addressed at school. The general contents of the IEP are as follows:



- **Student Information & Dates** – The IEP paperwork begins with your child's information, including name, student ID number, birthday, grade, and eligibility category (i.e. Autism or Speech/Language Impairment). There will also be multiple dates, including the current meeting date, the due date of the next IEP meeting (annually), and the due date of the next evaluation meeting (at most every three years).



- **Present Levels** – This is a statement that explains how your child is currently doing in school and how his/her disability is affecting academic performance.



- **Annual Goals** – The IEP team will work together to develop appropriate goals for your child. The annual goals will each target one area, such as speech, reading, or math, and are written to be achieved within a 12-month period.



- **Progress** – Your child's progress on each goal will be reported to you throughout the year. The team will discuss with you how and when this progress will be reported.



- **Services** – You will be informed of all special education services your child will receive, when they will begin, and how often they will occur. Some of these services might include academic support, speech/language therapy, accommodations (i.e., shortened assignments or breaks during state testing), or modifications to the curriculum.



- **Signatures** – If everyone at the meeting agrees on what is written in the IEP, it will be signed by all members. Once it is signed, all of its contents will be implemented for your child.



- **Notes** – Someone on the IEP team will take notes during the meeting. These notes are meant to document any discussions held or comments made beyond what is written in the IEP document.

Now that you know what to expect at your child's eligibility/IEP meeting, it is a good idea to write down any questions you may have for the Special Education team. As previously mentioned, you are a vital role to the IEP team and should voice your concerns, if any arise. Remember that everyone on the team has your child's best interest in mind and wants him/her to succeed in school!

Resources:

"Contents of the IEP," Center for Parent Information and Resources, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/iepcontents/>.

"Components of an IEP: REQUIRED Sections and Content," Learning Abled Kids, accessed January 10, 2017, http://learningabledkids.com/iep_training/iep_required_sections.html.

"Individualized Education Program (IEP)," education.com, accessed <http://www.education.com/reference/article/individualized-education-program-iep1/>

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