



How to Prepare for Your Child's IEP Meeting

This guide was created to help you navigate this process efficiently and with confidence. Having your important records, evaluations, reports, medical documents, insurance information, identification, and supporting paperwork digitally scanned, organized, and readily accessible can save valuable time and reduce stress throughout this process.

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A Parent Advocacy Checklist for IEP Creation

Preparing for your child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting can feel overwhelming, but it does not need to be complicated. This guide is designed to help you feel organized, confident, and ready to participate as an important member of your child's IEP team.

You do not need to be an expert in special education. The goal is simply to gather key information about your child, review their strengths and needs, and think about the questions or concerns you would like to discuss during the meeting.

The guide walks you through a simple IEP roadmap:

Evaluations and reports + Parent concerns → Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance Levels (PLAAFL) → Goals → Services and supports → Placement

Understanding this sequence of the IEP can make the process easier to follow and help you see how your input connects to the decisions being made for your child.

You do not need to complete every item on the checklist. Use the sections that apply to your child and focus on what feels most important. Even a small amount of preparation can help ensure that your child's strengths, challenges, and needs are clearly understood and considered by the team.

Remember: The most effective advocates are not always the loudest voices at the table. They are the families who come prepared with information, questions, and a clear understanding of their child's needs.

Purpose: This checklist helps you organize records, review your child's needs, and prepare clear parent concerns before the CSE/IEP meeting. The goal is to make sure the Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP) Section of the IEP accurately describes your child, because the PLAAFP drives goals, services, accommodations, supports, and placement recommendations.

The Simple IEP Roadmap

An IEP contains many different sections and they differ by state. However, all IEPs include these key sections that drive services and ultimately the education that your child receives. The information addressed on the IEP is developed in the order shown below and understanding this is key to advocating for your child's needs. To become familiar with the layout of your state's IEP, search for a blank or sample IEP form from your state's Department of Education. This will help you see where each section appears.

Evaluations and reports + Parent concerns → Present Levels/PLAAFP → Annual goals → Services and supports → Placement

When parents understand this sequence, the IEP meeting becomes easier to follow. Parent concerns should be documented and considered early. When a concern describes an academic, developmental, functional, behavioral, communication, social-emotional, or independence need, it should be reflected in the appropriate Present Levels/PLAAFP section of IEP so the team can consider goals, services, supports, accommodations, evaluations, or placement decisions that match that need.

Most parents understand that the IEP includes goals and services. What they may not realize is that those sections are based on the student's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, often called the PLAAFPs.

The PLAAFPs are created from available information, including evaluations, report cards, progress reports, teacher input, behavior data, and written parent concerns. Before the IEP meeting, parents should review the available reports and write down any concerns that are missing or not fully explained.

This matters because goals are developed from the needs listed in the PLAAFPs, and services are then designed to help the student make progress toward those goals.

Step 1: Gather Your Child's Documents

Collect the most recent documents you have (*if applicable to your child*). If possible, gather records from the last 1-3 years so you can see progress, patterns, and missing areas. **Here is a list of documents that may apply to your child's educational plan:**

- Current IEP
- Previous IEPs
- Educational evaluations
- Psychological or neuropsychological evaluations

- Speech-language evaluations
- Occupational therapy evaluations
- Physical therapy evaluations
- Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)
- Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)
- IEP goal progress reports
- Report cards
- State or district assessment results
- Teacher reports or emails
- Attendance records
- Behavior data
- Related service provider reports
- Independent evaluations
- Medical reports that impact school needs

Step 2: Review Current Present Levels

The Present Levels section of IEP should explain what your child can currently do, where your child needs help, and how the disability impacts learning and participation in school. This section should be built from evaluations, progress data, teacher/provider input, and parent concerns. Parent concerns may also be listed in a separate Parent Concerns section, but they should not stop there if they describe a real educational need.

Academic Skills

- Reading
- Writing
- Math
- Study skills
- Executive functioning

Communication

- Expressive language
- Receptive language

- Social/pragmatic communication
- Speech clarity

Social-Emotional Skills

- Peer relationships
- Emotional regulation
- Coping skills
- Anxiety or school avoidance

Functional Skills

- Organization
- Following routines
- Independence
- Self-advocacy
- Daily living skills

Behavior

- Attention
- Task completion
- Refusal or avoidance
- Aggression
- Self-injury
- Elopement
- Other interfering behaviors

Write down: Strengths, challenges, current performance levels, and skills that still need improvement.

Step 3: Use Technology to Help Review and Summarize Reports

Parents can use secure technology tools with analytic features to help read, summarize, and compare reports. These tools can help organize information so that key data from evaluations, progress reports, teacher notes, and related service reports is not missed.

- Summarize long evaluations into plain language

- Pull out test scores, recommendations, and areas of need
- Compare current reports to older reports
- Identify repeated concerns across multiple documents
- Create a short list of questions for the IEP meeting
- Check whether important data is represented in the PLAAFP

Important privacy reminder: Families should use care when choosing technology tools. Review privacy settings, remove information that does not need to be shared, and avoid placing sensitive records into tools or websites that you do not trust.

Step 4: Put Parent Concerns Into the Right IEP Sequence

Sometimes current evaluations, report cards, progress reports, or teacher data do not fully describe what the parent is seeing at home or in the community. Parent concerns should be documented first, then considered by the team. If a concern reflects a need that affects school performance or participation, the team should consider adding it to the Present Levels/PLAAFP section of IEP so it can connect to goals, services, accommodations, supports, or further evaluations.

- Concerns observed at home
- Skills your child is struggling with outside of school
- Regression or loss of skills
- Behavior, anxiety, refusal, or emotional concerns
- Independence, daily living, or self-advocacy needs
- Communication concerns not captured in school reports
- Medical, sensory, or fatigue-related issues that affect school participation
- New concerns since the last evaluation

Parent action step: If you feel the parent concerns section is missing relevant information, you can Send a Parent Concern Letter to the district IEP team before the meeting. Ask the district to review your concerns and include them in the Parent Concerns section of the IEP and, when they describe actual educational needs, in the appropriate PLAAFP areas. This helps make sure concerns are not simply listed and left behind. The goal is not to create a long complaint letter. The goal is to help the IEP team see what may be missing. A strong parent concerns letter is usually short, specific, and focused on concerns that are not already fully explained in the records.

Simple rule: Parent concern → team discussion → PLAAFP (Present Levels) need, if appropriate → goal/service/support/evaluation, if needed.

Step 5: Look for Missing Information or Needed Evaluations

Ask whether the current documents provide enough information to create accurate present levels and meaningful goals.

- Are any evaluations outdated?
- Are there areas of concern that have never been evaluated?
- Are there services my child needs but has never received?
- Are there concerns at home that are not reflected in school records?
- Do I need to request additional evaluations before the next IEP?

Possible evaluation requests may include reading, assistive technology, speech-language, occupational therapy, physical therapy, behavior/FBA, transition, executive functioning, or adaptive functioning evaluations.

Step 6: Review Progress on Current Goals

- Was progress measured?
- Is my child making meaningful progress?
- Was the goal mastered?
- Does the goal need to continue?
- Does the goal need to be revised?
- Is additional support or instruction needed?

Remember: Limited progress may mean the team needs to review the instruction, service level, methodology, accommodations, behavior supports, or whether the goal is written appropriately.

Step 7: Turn Needs Into Goals

Goals should come from identified needs in the PLAAFP section. If a parent concern is important enough to require instruction, support, or measurement, ask whether that need is clearly stated in the PLAAFP section and whether a goal should be created or revised. Parents do not need to write goals in advance of the meeting as the IEP team can address this. However, it is useful to point out the areas in which you would like to see a goal (summarizing, cutting, upper body strength, organization, following directions.)

- What skill does my child need to learn?
- How will progress be measured?
- What would success look like in one year?

Does the goal match a real area of need?

Does the goal support access to school, independence, communication, behavior, or academic progress?

Step 8: Match Goals to Services and Supports

Every goal should be supported by appropriate instruction, services, accommodations, or supports. Ask who will teach the skill, how often, in what setting, and whether the service list actually matches the needs and goals in the IEP.

Who will teach this skill?

How often will the service or instruction occur?

What type of provider is needed?

What accommodations are necessary?

What behavior, communication, sensory, or technology supports are needed?

Does the service list match the child's goals and needs?

Examples of supports may include special education instruction, reading instruction, speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, counseling, behavior specialist/BCBA support, assistive technology, parent training, 1:1 support, or program modifications. (Parents do not need to plan for this before an IEP meeting, this should be a team discussion.)

Step 9: Bring a One-Page Parent Summary

Before the meeting, create a simple summary to keep yourself focused.

My child's strengths	
My child's greatest needs	
My top 3 concerns	1. 2. 3.
Evaluations I am requesting	
Goals I want considered	
Services/supports I want discussed	

Final Reminder

The most effective advocates are the families who arrive prepared with organized records, clear concerns, and a strong understanding of the IEP sequence: document the concern, connect the concern to the PLAAFP section when it reflects a need, then make sure the goals, services, supports, accommodations, and placement follow from those needs.